

## Rearing Children—Part 15



by Jala Garibova  
and Betty Blair

Children are central to Azerbaijani life, and families pay a great deal of attention to their upbringing. Part of this training involves making the children aware of the societal codes and customs that they are expected to follow—not just table manners and hygiene, but also attitudes toward their elders. The following examples show some of the values Azerbaijanis try to instill within their children.

In Azerbaijani families, much of the responsibility for raising children lies on the shoulders of the mother. However, children are also surrounded by members of their extended families—grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, and ever so many cousins—which means that everyone is involved in their upbringing.

Azerbaijani women tend to work up until their first child is born and then take maternity leave—sometimes for quite a long period of time. During the Soviet period, this leave often extended for up to three years. Often, the mother did not return to work again. Since independence (1991), however, maternity leave is shorter. These days, young mothers rely more and more upon their own mothers or babysitters to take care of the children while they're at work.

### FOOD

Azerbaijani parents want their children to be properly nourished so that they will grow up to be healthy and strong. They urge their children to eat well and not waste food.

*Qabında yemək qoysan, çirkin olarsan.*

If you leave food on your plate, you won't be pretty.  
(An expression used with both girls and boys.)

*Nişanın göyçək olmaz...*

Your fiancé won't be good-looking...(if you don't clean your plate).

Young children who are still being spoon-fed sometimes need extra coaxing and encouragement to eat, making mealtime an ordeal that can last more than an hour or so. In order to entice the child to eat, the parents may put on a kind of "show": singing songs, telling folk tales, making funny faces or even dancing. In this way, the child swallows the food and opens up for another spoonful. Sometimes the parents pretend the spoon is a plane, train or other vehicle in order to persuade the child to open his mouth and eat.

Though Westerners often hesitate to serve young children caffeinated drinks, it's quite common for Azerbaijanis to offer tea to young children. Even six-month-old babies are given very weak black tea, which is, indeed, the hospitality drink in Azerbaijan. Typically, the mother uses a larger baby bottle for thin milk porridge, and a smaller bottle for very light tea or fruit juice. Once the baby starts eating solid food, the mother stops using the larger bottle, but still offers tea or juice in the smaller one. As the child becomes older, the tea is often poured out into a flat saucer so that it cools quicker and is easier for the child to handle.

Children learn at an early age that it is impolite to eat in front of others without offering them some food. When mothers pack lunches for their children, they may include more food than the child can eat, knowing that he or she may want to share this food with others.

*Yemək yeyəndə, təklif edərlər.*

When you eat, you should offer [food to others].

*Yeməyin böyük hissəsini dostuna ver, kiçiyini özünə götür.*

Take a smaller portion for yourself, offer the larger portion to your friend.

### TABLE MANNERS

Food is an essential part of Azerbaijani hospitality; in fact, it would be unthinkable to visit someone's home and not be offered something to eat. Accordingly, parents work hard to teach their children appropriate table manners. They warn their children not to be greedy and to show self-restraint at the dinner table.

*Əlini icazəsiz heç nəyə vurma.*

Don't touch anything without asking.

*Qonaq gedəndə əlini sufrəyə tez-tez uzatma.*

Don't reach often at the table (meaning, don't be greedy and eat a lot).

### RESPECT FOR GUESTS

When guests are entertained at home, it is very important for the children to show them proper respect. Children of all ages are always expected to come out of their rooms to greet the guests. If they don't automatically do so, their parents will remind them:

*Adam gəlib qonağa salam verər.*

Come say hello to the guests.



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The guests and relatives usually spend time interacting with the children. They talk to them and gently stroke their head or hair and cheeks. They like to hold them. Often, they'll ask the child if he can tell a story or a riddle or recite a poem. Usually the children respond with pleasure and charm both parents and guests with stories and poems. At the end of the visit, the children are expected to say goodbye to the guests:

**Gəl qonağı yola sal.**  
Come say goodbye to the guests.

## RESPECT FOR ELDERLY

Azerbaijanis hold tremendous respect for the elderly, and children are taught to show them reverence from a very early age. They are instructed:

**Böyüyə cavab qaytarmazlar.**  
Don't talk back to elders.

**Böyüklə höcətləşməzlər.**  
Don't quarrel with elders.

**Böyük danışanda kiçik susar.**  
When an elderly person is speaking, keep silent (meaning, don't interrupt).

**Böyük gələndə ayağa dururlar.**  
When an elderly person enters, stand up.

In fact, even after the children have grown up, many of them still have the habit of standing up when their parents or older relatives enter the room.

Even young toddlers who don't understand very many words are told by their parents:

**Adam özündən böyüyə əl qaldırmaz.**  
Don't raise your hand to grownups. (This warning is given to infants and toddlers, cautioning them not to hit back.)

## DISCIPLINE

When a child seriously misbehaves, the discipline may be left up to the father. As is common in many places in the world, Azerbaijani mothers threaten their children with punishment from their father if they misbehave:

**Gör atan gələndə sənə nə edəcək.**  
Just wait until your father comes home.

Today, however, scolding seems to be the most frequently used form of discipline. Parents criticize their children's misbehavior, and at the same time try to set a good example for them to follow. Grandparents tend to be very protective of their grandchildren, even when the

parents are scolding them. Out of respect, parents tend not to argue with their own parents about how to discipline the children.

## EDUCATION

Most Azerbaijani parents try to instill in their children a sense of the importance of getting a good education.

**Oxu ki, adam olasan.**  
Study so that you can become somebody.

Parents may entice their children to study, promising them a reward if they succeed in getting good grades.

## CLEANLINESS

Dressing well and looking presentable is an important value in Azerbaijani society. Girls in particular are taught to be very neat and clean. Their parents tell them to pay attention to their appearance:

**Sən qızsan, üst-başına fikir ver.**  
You're a girl. Look after your clothes.

**Gözəllik ondur, doqquzu dondur.**  
Beauty is ten, nine of which is clothes.

## HEALTH

Naturally, all parents want their children to be healthy, so they try to safeguard them from illnesses. They are especially concerned about their children catching a cold, as the weather in Azerbaijan can be exceedingly chilly in winter. Children grow up constantly hearing reminders to safeguard their health:

**Əynini qalın geyin / İsti geyin.**  
Put on warm clothes.

**Başını ört.**  
Cover your head.

**Pəncərənin qabağında durma.**  
Don't stand in front of the [open] window.

**Soyuq su ilə oynama.**  
Don't play with cold water.

**Ayağını islatma.**  
Don't get your feet wet.

**Soyuq su içmə, boğazın ağrıyar.**  
Don't drink cold water. You might get a sore throat.

**Tərli-tərli küləkli havaya çıxma.**  
When you're sweaty, don't go out in the wind.



**Başı yaş çölə çıxma.**  
Don't go out with wet hair.

On the other hand, long exposure to the summer heat is also viewed as dangerous:

**İsti havada günün altında çox durma.**  
Don't stay in the sun too long when the weather is hot.

## BEDTIME

In the West, parents often establish a specific bedtime for their children, usually 8 or 9 p.m., depending on the



child's age. But in Azerbaijan, bedtime does not necessarily follow such strict patterns. Parents usually set a specific bedtime for preschool children, but older children may stay up until 11 p.m. or even later. Of course, if the children have to attend school or kindergarten early in the morning, the parents will not allow them to stay up too late. Even so, when guests are present, parents are likely to make exceptions.

At bedtime, mothers usually sing lullabies (lay-lay) to infants and toddlers. As the children grow older, parents read or tell their children stories before tucking them into bed. These stories might include folk tales such as "Jirtan" or "The Story of Malikmammad." These stories are not really so scary, as the hero always prevails in the end. For example, Jirtan is a small boy who cleverly outwits a giant div, or monster. Though he is small, he defeats the beast, which is much bigger than he is. These stories illustrate the struggle between good and evil. In the end, goodness always prevails, often with the help of magical powers.

## MONEY

Azerbaijanis hold that children, in general, should not be involved with financial affairs. Children are generally not given allowances, although they may be given pocket money to buy snacks at school. (Of course, many children do run to the corner store to buy bread and other basic food staples.)

**Sən uşaqsan. Sənin pulla işin olmasın.**

You're a child. Don't get involved with money.

**Pul uşağı korlayır.**

Money spoils the child.

**Uşağa hər istədiyini almazlar.**

You shouldn't buy everything that your child wants.

## PLAYING WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

Children are taught from a very early age to be very careful around children who are younger than they are. They're taught not to play rough or hurt a smaller child.

**O səndən kiçikdir. Onunla elə rəftar etmə.**

He/she is younger than you are. Don't treat him like that.

**Özündən kiçikləri incitmə.**

Don't hurt children who are younger than you.

Boys are taught not to hurt girls but rather to protect and watch out for them:

**Qızlarla elə rəftar etməzlər.**

You shouldn't treat girls like that.

**O qızıdır. Sən onu müdafiə etməlisən.**

She's a girl. You should protect her.

If a boy and girl happen to quarrel or fight, the boy's parents are not likely to come to the defense of their son, even though he may be right.

**Eybi yoxdur. O qızıdır. Ona keçər.**

Never mind. She's a girl. You should forgive her.



ART BY NUSRAT HAJIYEV. VISIT AZGALLERY.ORG

At Novruz, it's a tradition to jump over bonfires the Tuesday before the first day of Spring (March 20 or 21st). Painting by Nusrat Hajiyev. To see more of his works, Search at [AZgallery.org](http://AZgallery.org).

As always, parenting is a dynamic process—not only within individual families but in the nation as a whole. Since independence, some of these transitions are becoming more obvious. For example, parents are teaching their children to become more independent and to solve problems by themselves. They want their children to start being able to give valid independent opinions. But above all, they want them to be respectful and polite.

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