**MODULE 2**

**Class Title**: Dangerous Road Blocks – Part 1

**Aim of the lesson:** learning how to overcome certain mental blocks that halt personal development

**Category**: Personal Development

**Lesson Format**: Power point presentation with discussion

(Note to teacher: some slides in the power point presentation are hidden, as they were not used for this session. They have not been deleted as you may want to use them for your class.

(Greeting to students) *Assalamu ‘alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

*(Ta’awwudh) A’oodhu billahi min Ash Shaytaanir Rajeem*

*(Tasmiyah) Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

*(Du’a) Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul ‘uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli* [Surah Ta-Ha 20: Verses 25-28]

Slide 1:

Teacher: So how’s everyone doing? We have this amazing topic today! As it’s a lengthy topic, we’re going to complete it in two classes, inshAllah.

“I just can’t! I just cannot!” Now, does this statement sound familiar? Does it? When was the last time any of you said, “I just can’t do it!”?

Student: Yesterday.

Teacher: Who said yesterday? You said yesterday? Someone just say “today”?

Student: Yesterday.

Teacher: Before we move on, let’s just quickly write down when and why we usually use this negative statement of frustration and defeat. I would prefer for you to give examples from your own experiences, but you can tell us when kids your age usually give up and say, “I just can’t!” Alright, what examples can you share?

Student: My math’s teacher assigns long problems, and I just cannot do them at all!

Teacher: Alright, when you can’t do long math sums. When else?

Student: When there’s too much homework at one time.

Teacher: Ok, so you can’t cope with too much homework. Who else? Come on, come on! What about you at the back?

Student: I was trying to make *samosas* with my mum, and I just couldn’t do it.

Teacher: You were helping your mum to make *samosas* and you were just unable to do it. You probably just gave up! Who else? Yes?

Student: My friend tried to untangle her chain, once. When she couldn’t do it, she just gave up and wanted to throw it away. I took it from her, then.

Teacher: Your friend was trying to untangle her gold chain but in the middle she just gave up and said, “I just can’t!” However, did you give up too, or you carried on?

Student: Well I kept trying and it took me a whole day to finally unravel it.

Teacher: So it took you a whole day. Okay. Yes?

Student: I had a friend whose favourite teddy bear tore. So she kept trying to patch it up. Finally, she just gave up.

Teacher: So because she was fond of teddy bears she kept trying to patch up one that had torn. She was trying to sew it back together but it just wasn’t happening. Okay, anyone else?

Student: Well, I ‘m just afraid of taking any chances and trying anything new or different.

Teacher: That’s very interesting, actually. She’s saying she just can’t take any chances, ever.

Student: I just can’t take medicines.

Teacher: So you just won’t take them? Okay. Anyone else? Let’s apply this statement to more serious issues, now Let’s just grow up a little bit and think more maturely. Let’s become a little mature in our thinking and in the way we view our lives. What is something serious and important that you feel that you just cannot do? Let’s grow out of teddy bears for a bit and think a bit more maturely. Ok?

Slide 2:

Ok, let me just give you an example. You’re going school and you come across a sign that says ‘Road Closed’; so what will you do? What will you do? There are just two options, aren’t there? Either you turn back and go home, or take a detour. How many of you would actually go back home, without trying any other road?

Student: I would want to.

Teacher: I’m sure most of us would want to, but will we actually do so? No, we won’t. What will most of us do? We’ll most probably ask the driver or our parent, or whoever is driving the car, to take an alternate route. This would be the usual and most logical action to take if the usual road is closed, if there’s a road block on it.

Slide 3:

 Likewise, sometimes in our lives we can’t go further on a path we may be on because of some reason, some obstacle. But this should never stop us. There will always be certain road blocks that we’ll encounter in our lives that will make us declare frustratingly, “I can’t go on!” There are two reactions to such a seemingly hopeless situation: either you actually don’t do anything about it, or you think of an alternative way of going about them. Are you all with me? All of you? Good. Sometimes, these road blocks can be very dangerous, extremely dangerous, and can actually stop us from what we really want to do or be.

Slide 4:

In fact, in life there usually are a lot of road blocks, a lot of road blocks; especially for teenagers. There are a lot of things that can stop us all from being what we should be, or want to be. Do you agree? Are you with me, so far? If you feel you’re not, then just raise your hand and I’ll make it simpler for you to understand. Ok? Moving on, there are a lot of things that can stop you, especially at your age, from doing and growing the way you should, or want to, grow. In your pursuit to succeed, there are basically three obstacles can bar your way. These three are the biggest and most detrimental obstacles that, generally speaking, stop a teenager or pre-teen to grow and to progress, and become a good and successful Muslim. Today, we’re going to focus on these three obstacles, *inshaAllah.* I’m going to go into the details of all three.

The first road block is ‘Negative labels’; the second is the ‘It’s all over syndrome’; and the third is ‘Climbing the wrong wall’. I know they’re not clear just yet. Don’t worry; these are just the titles that I’ve given each one. We will talk in detail as to what exactly it means or how does it stop you from being what you should be.

Slide 5:

 Let’s just begin with about ‘negative labels’. How familiar are these to you?

Student: Well I’m kind of familiar with them, especially ‘dork’; my brother always calls me that whenever I don’t understand something.

Teacher: She’s saying that negative labels, especially this word ‘dork’ is very familiar to her, as whenever she asks her brother about something, he says. “You dork, you can’t even get this?!” The thing that we need to understand is that it’s not just this word only. It could be any word. I’ll give you lots of examples, and I will ask you for lots of examples, too.

Now, whenever somebody puts a negative label on another, it could be one’s parents, siblings, friends, neighbors, cousins, any family members, or just about anyone, it’s detrimental to that person.

Slide 6:

What we all need to know and understand well is that there are millions of unique individuals in this world, and all of us cannot ever be categorized the way things in the stores are shelved together. There can be different categories of shoes, books and clothes; they can be shelved in different shapes and sizes. But as far as individuals are concerned, we’re all different and all unique. No one is exactly like another. So if someone puts a negative label on us, we must learn to handle it; we must know how to respond.

Slide 7:

We must understand that putting false labels on others, or calling them what they actually aren’t, can actually force them to become like that. For example, by calling someone ‘proud’ or calling someone ‘very lazy’, even if she isn’t really, she will start believing herself to be like that. So the problem is not other people putting negative labels on you. You see, people are always going to do that. You’re all teenagers or preteens right now, and in a few years you will be in your 20s, then 30s and then 40s. People will keep putting negative labels on you. That’s not the problem, at all. It becomes problematic when you start believing in those negative labels! If a parent repeatedly calls you ‘stupid’ and you start believing that you are, or, if your brother calls you a ‘dork’ and you actually start believing that you’re one and so that’s why you can’t ever get those math sums, then that’s problematic. That’s when negative labels can become very dangerous road blocks. Are you all with me? Good.

Slide 8:

Basically, we are what we believe we are. This is something we have to keep reminding ourselves about, no matter how many negative labels are put on us.

Slide 9:

We must understand that if we actually believe what other people are labeling us, and by that I mean negatively, then we’re going to actually become like that. Negative labels are self-fulfilling labels. So we’ll act out a label only if we believe in it. You don’t become a dork, or a stupid person or a lazy person just because somebody is calling you that. You only become one when you believe in it, when you start believing it to be true, and as a result behave like one. So what do we need to do? How should we handle a negative label?

Student: What if they’re saying something that’s true?

Teacher: You mean, if you know what they are saying is true (and you have to be very honest with yourself) as sometimes what they are saying is true, obviously then you can’t just overlook or ignore that negative label. Some people can be absolutely right in what they’re saying. Parents, for instance, are the only people in the world who are always sincere; and most times, they’re very correct in their judgment about you. I would like to mention that when parents say something negative about you, you must carefully analyze what they’re saying. Most of the time, since they know you very well, what they say is correct. So you’ll need to work on your shortcomings. Just because Sarah Aunty is saying that you should ignore all negative labels, doesn’t mean that if your parents tell you about your shortcomings, you overlook them or ignore them. The negative labels we’re talking about include the damaging labels that we put on each other; they’re not usually sincerely said to help us become better people.

Slide 10:

Let’s just examine some common negative labels people use, especially people of your age. “You’re the laziest person I know”; a very common negative label that people put on each other. “You guys from so and so school always get lousy grades”; this is another commonly heard one. “You can never do math.” Now, how will we deal with these? If your brother says that you can’t do math, how will you deal with it? You have to prove him wrong; put in an extra effort to really try and understand it. Otherwise, if you believe you can’t do math, and just give up without an effort, then yes you will never be able to do math. Thus, one way of dealing with negative labels is to strive to prove them wrong.

Student: But what if you really don’t understand it?

Teacher: If you don’t understand it easily, then you just need to put more time and effort into understanding it. Some people are late bloomers; they just take longer to understand. This doesn’t mean they’re stupid or dorks.

Now, are you all familiar with, “Just look at your sister; why can’t you be more like her?!” Or maybe you’ve been compared to your brother, or friend, or cousin? Don’t we just hate this?! However, what we need to do is to look at this criticism very positively, with an open mind and heart. If there’s something good about the person we’re being compared to, something that we don’t have, then we should sincerely try to learn from them, and to develop their good traits ourselves. When your mum tells you to look at your sister’s behaviour and asks why you can’t be more like her, you can choose to react negatively or positively. You can totally overlook her statement, ignore it, deny what your mother is saying, and refuse to see the good traits that she also wants you to have. Or you can choose to react positively by trying to see what it is that your sister has, and by trying to understand why your mother wants you to behave that way, as well. This would be a positive reaction to negative labels.

Have any of you heard, “You’re unpopular because you’re so religious; you cover your head and look like a *maulani*. So that’s the reason why we don’t want you in our group.” How about, “Why are you always getting into trouble?” Now if you start believing these labels, “Yes, she’s right, I’m always getting into trouble.” Then, you **are** going to get into trouble. Another common label is, “Oh you know, she’s the black sheep of her family; she’s the odd one out. Her mum probably adopted her.” People who casually label others like this, most of the time don’t even realize how destructive their comments can be to the other person. But honestly speaking, such labels can become very destructive when the other person starts believing in them.

Slides 11:

Moving on, the second road block is another very dangerous one: the “It’s all over” Syndrome. Again, this is a very dangerous road block as it stops us from doing what we should be doing. Has it ever happened to you that you’ve made a mistake in your life and you’ve felt that you’ve just blown it, messed things up irreparably? Who cares what happens now? You think everything is over, finished. “I’ve made this awful mistake and this is the end of my life. I don’t need to put in any more effort, at all.” As a result, you enter into a self-destructive mode, where you not only give up, but worst still, undo all your previous efforts! At that point, you say, “I give up! I just can’t do it anymore!”

For example, you have a good relationship with your mother. You’ve worked hard to create this bond. However, you make a mistake; let’s say you have a big argument with her. Now, because of this one episode with her which was extremely negative and unpleasant, you feel it’s all over. You feel you can’t work at your relationship with her, anymore. “I’ve tried so hard for so long, but now I don’t have the strength to do it anymore. She’ll never have the same trust in me ever again; she won’t respect me anymore; she won’t ever love me as she used to, because I was so mean to her.” Sometimes we make a mistake and we don’t forgive ourselves. That’s when we get into this self-destructive mode.

Slide 12:

 So you might lose it, and it does happen. You might do a bunch of things that you might not feel proud of, and later regret. This is a very normal feeling: remorse. But you must always remember that just by making mistakes, it’s never ever over. Rather, it’s normal and natural to make mistakes. We all do. No one, absolutely no one, is perfect. Humans make mistakes, by their very nature. As humans we’ll always make mistakes, no matter how careful we are in our relationships, no matter how good girls we are. We’ll have these slips and that then is the perfect time to look into ourselves and ask, “What shall I do next? How can I make this situation better?” So, if you feel that you’ve made a mistake because of which there’s no turning back, then what do you need to do? What is the first thing that you need to do? Yes?

Student: You need to go on with your life.

Teacher: Yes, exactly! You need to go on with your life.

Slide 13:

Get your head screwed on straight, again. Move on, by making things better. This is the first thing that you’ll need to do, as quickly as you can; and with Allah’s help, *inshaAllah* you’ll be fine. That’s the first thing that you must to do, in fact! You see, *shaitan* works on people who fail; he tries to inculcate this hopelessness in them. He tells them that this is the end of the world, that they‘re good for nothing, that they should just forget about it and give up: “You can’t do it! You can’t do it!” “I can’t do this, I can’t go on!” always comes from *shaitan.*  He basically wants us all to give up on whatever efforts we are making towards doing good things, things that will make us better people, better Muslims.

Slide 14:

What’s the next thing that we need to do when we get into this mode? We need to do *taubah,* especially if we think that we’re unable to succeed because we’ve displeased Allah *(swt*). We could have knowingly and directly displeased him, or unknowingly and indirectly. We could have displeased Him by displeasing our parents, or have displeased Him by displeasing our friend. Or we could have displeased Him by neglecting our duty to Him. So the second essential act that we need to quickly do is *taubah.* Can anyone tell me the correct way of doing *taubah*? When you’ve done something wrong, when you’ve made a mistake, how will you do *taubah,* in order to put things right again? Yes?

Student: We must say, “*Astagfirrullah”.*

Teacher: Say, “*Astagfirrullah*”. Yes.

Student: We just make *du’a*.

Teacher: The way *taubah* works is that if we make a slip, and we know we’re guilty of a particular sin, then we should genuinely and sincerely feel sorry and ashamed about what we’ve done. To really feel bad and ashamed about it, to feel remorse for having done something wrong, is the first step of *taubah*. “Oh I shouldn’t have done that; I’m really sorry for what I’ve done.” This should be a genuinely felt inner feeling; this first step is not a verbal statement. The one doing *taubah* should have this inner feeling of remorse, of regret and shame. This is the first step; what’s the second step? Anybody? In the next step, we have to sincerely resolve never ever to do the same sin again. We have to promise ourselves that though we slipped this time, *inshaAllah*, we won’t ever make the same mistake again. This is step two. Remember, this again is not a verbal statement, but rather a promise to ourselves. The third step is that we seek forgiveness from Allah (*swt*) with all our heart. We should tell Allah, and again it need not be a verbal apology, it can just be in our heart that “Allah I’m really and truly sorry; I will never do it again.”

So the first step is to feel remorseful about the sin we’ve committed; the second step is to sincerely resolve never to do it again; and the third step is to actually ask Allah (*swt*) to forgive us. So, this is doing *taubah* in three specific steps, according to some scholars.

Slide 15:

Let’s now look at the third road block: Climbing the Wrong Wall. You see, what happens sometimes is that we make an effort towards achieving or acquiring something, but the effort is not made in the right direction. We genuinely make an effort but our effort is misdirected. So while climbing whatever wall we choose, we have to be good at two things. Before I tell you what these two things are, let me ask you what you think we should be good at if we were to attempt to climb a wall. Any ideas?

Student: Well, we should be strong enough.

Teacher: Yes, of course; we have to be physically strong and healthy. These are basically two important requirements for climbing a wall efficiently. Firstly, the climber should be prepared for it by definitely being healthy and strong, so as to have a good grip, as well as the stamina and strength to climb successfully. What’s the second requirement? Can anyone tell me what the second requirement is for climbing a wall? Yes?

Student: How about having the right intention?

Teacher: No, not the right intention; intention isn’t important here. The second requirement is that we have to be sure that we’re climbing the right wall. The effort that we’re making should be in the right direction. This is crucial to getting to the top.

Slides 16:

Sometimes what happens is that after we’ve climbed the whole wall, we realize, “Oh my God! This wasn’t the wall I wanted to climb!” This would be a tragedy; a futile effort!! Therefore, we have to make sure that we’re climbing the right wall from the very beginning. This is not only essential, but crucial.

Let me demonstrate with an example. Let’s say you need to improve your grades. So you need to climb a particular wall to improve your grades. You’ll have to climb this wall sincerely efficiently, and this will require hard work. Agree? But how will you know with certainty that you’re climbing the right wall?

To begin with, you need to assess how serious you really are about improving your grades. You have to be sincerely committed to your goal, to be mentally and physically ready to put in your best effort, and be ready to sacrifice personal desires to get what you want. This would be a step up, in the right direction. Often times, all you need to do is focus and concentrate while in class, instead of being distracted or just tuning out. Then when you get home, all you need to do is put in a little bit of time to look over what you did at school that day, to study it carefully, and complete all your homework. This is usually all you need to do to improve and maintain good grades. The wrong wall to climb would be to just tell mum you need to go for tuitions, join one, but not change your work and study habits, in school or at home! Now that would definitely be the wrong wall to climb! You really won’t achieve much, except waste your time, effort and parent’s money! You want to climb the wall that’ll get you good grades, but if you’re not climbing the wall that requires you to change your study and work efforts, but are only making an effort to go for tuitions and little else, then you’re climbing the wrong wall!! You’ll still be failing! At this point, climbing the wrong wall becomes a very real road block. All you need to do is change your attitude, and you’ll be able to change your study and work habits at school and at home, and thereby climb the right wall.

Let me give you another example. Your mum really wants you to be obedient. She’s not happy with you because you’re not only disobedient, but also disrespectful. And now you want to climb a wall that will change your attitude and behavior; you want to make an effort to improve your relationship with your mum. So now what do you need to do? What would be the right wall to attempt?

Student: To try and be more respectful and obedient, of course.

Teacher: Yes, naturally, you need to behave respectfully and obediently. This is exactly what she wants. Now, if you put in time and effort to bake a cake for her, you are making an effort to please her, though you don’t have the ladder on the right wall. You’re making an effort, but in the wrong direction. Your mum may be pleased you did something constructive, but that won’t change any of her ill feelings for you, because it won’t change the fact that you’re a disobedient and disrespectful daughter. You don’t even realize what the basic issue is. When you don’t realize what the actual problem is, you’ll surely end up climbing the wrong wall. Do you understand? In order to make amendments and put things right, you have to first know what the problem is, and then determine how to make things right, and then make efforts to actually do so. In this way, you’ll be able to climb the right wall.

Let’s look at some other examples. Firstly, let’s say your mum isn’t happy with you because you don’t study, and as a result don’t get good grades. To help matters, you then bake a cake to please her. Believe me, you won’t please her! If you really want to please her, then sincerely try and improve your grades instead.

Moving on, you have a close friend who needs you to hear her out. She’s lonely and sad, and wants to be heard. She wants you to hear her out attentively. You, on the other hand, get her a gift in order to please her. She doesn’t want that gift! She wants your time; she wants you to spend time with her, to talk about whatever worries she has in her life. By giving a gift, you’re making an effort to please your friend, but your effort isn’t in the right direction. You’re climbing the wrong wall.

Finally, have you noticed how some people want to be happy in life by spending and spending and spending! They’ll go on expensive vacations, drive expensive cars, and buy very expensive clothes, but this still won’t make them happy. They want to be happy but the effort they’re making isn’t perhaps in the right direction. Spending doesn’t always bring happiness to people, if what they really need is to have inner peace or good relationships. Some other kind of effort is required in their lives, but they exert all their efforts in the wrong direction-- on spending, feeling money will buy them happiness. So, before we set out to achieve any goal, we need to know what direction to take even before we start making any kind of efforts to bring real change in our lives.

Sometimes, what happens is that we work so hard in climbing a particular wall that we don’t realize that our efforts are misdirected, that we’re not climbing the right wall. Then, when we don’t make any progress, we feel utterly hopeless. After making a sincere and committed effort, if that effort was good for nothing, it’s really disappointing and frustrating. Thus, it really doesn’t matter how good of an effort we’re making, if we’re headed in the wrong direction to begin with. Now, how can we judge if we’re struggling in the right direction? What will tell us if we’re moving in the right direction? How would we know that we’re making an effort in the right direction?

Student: If you’re achieving what you set out to do?

Teacher: She’s saying you’ll know that you’re climbing the right wall if the final outcome is good, and is as you want it to be. Yes of course, that would mean you’d been moving in the right direction, after all. But then, you’d only know this in the very end.

Student: If you’re even slightly improving, let’s say your grades?

Teacher: Right, if you start showing improvement or a change for the better, the way you actually want the matter to be. See, the thing is, all you need to do is stop and ask yourself, “ Am I headed in the right direction, for the result that I want? Will this take me to my desired end? Since I want to please my mum, is this what she really wants from me?” Remember, you have to be brutally honest with yourself. Sometimes we make an effort just to show that we’re doing something about whatever our problem may be, but, in our heart we know that this is not what is actually required to make matters better. So we’ll end up making a vain effort. Thus, we really need to listen to our inner voice, and do some reflective thinking. “This is the end result I want: I want to improve my grades. So what is it that I really need to do? Is it the tuitions? Or is it just focusing in class? Or is just giving extra time at home?” Deep down in our heart, we usually know what the actual solution is. So we need to stop; think about it; carefully decide what the right direction might be; and finally, take that direction with sincerity and full commitment. By the way, we have it really easy, don’t we?! There’s an easier way for us Muslims to establish the right direction.

Slides 17-18:

 Can anyone tell me what the best way is for us to establish if we’re headed in the right direction or not?

Student: By following the Qur’an and *Sunnah*.

Teacher: Yes, without a doubt, by following the Quran and *Sunnah* in most matters, in a lot of general things. You would know you’re headed in the right direction if you’re following the Qur’an and *Sunnah*. There may be petty matters where you’ll have to sit and think about the right course of action, like the example I gave you with your grades. But in most matters, when you want to know whether your direction is correct or not, all you have to do is judge your life from the point of the Qur’an and *Sunnah.*

For example, one of you asked if it’s ok to listen to music that’s been filtered, only music that’s good. Well, if you want to know if this direction is right, all you have to so is act in the light of the Qur’an and *Sunnah*. If you know that you’ll be doing something that’ll be displeasing Allah (*swt)*, it really doesn’t matter what your intentions may be, it really doesn’t matter that you’ll be filtering the good stuff, because what you’ll be doing in itself will be displeasing Him. So, all your efforts will be going to utter waste.

With that, we’ll stop here. *InshAllah* next week, we‘ll talk about the solutions to these three road blocks that we’ve discussed today.

Let’s recap before we end: our first road block is Negative Labels; the second is the “It’s all over” Syndrome; and the third road block is Climbing the Wrong Wall. Next week we’ll talk about the solutions for all of these road blocks, *inshaAllah.*

(Du’a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati ‘amma yasifun wa salamun ‘alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil ‘alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

Bibliography:

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