

Welcome to parenting in Singapore - a life-long, adventurous learning journey that is filled with many enriching mountain-top and valley experiences (by the way, no resignations)!

Aim to reduce parenting ambiguity. No matter how many books we have read or how many advices we receive, trial-and-error rules because the family is made up of uniquely designed and created beings. Parents of babies grapple with the best way to make them sleep through the night; parents of toddlers wonder how they can keep the little itchy fingers from touching everything; parents of teenagers struggle with whether to interfere with the company their teenagers hang out with – even when decisions are made, uncertainty continue. Well, it is hoped that through various parents' experiences via this newsletter, some parenting ambiguity can be reduced and we can become more confident parents. We will also reference wise and proper principles for application.

A word on Bible references. We will refer to Bible verses as the Bible is a great source for learning wise parenting principles. They are applicable even if you are not yet a follower of Jesus. Note that well-meaning Christian parents who may not reference the Word of God can still be misguided. Moreover, the influences of the world do penetrate the church, confusing even those of us who try really hard to be good parents on our own (and so it is important to read the Bible!). So journey with us and raise questions as we go so that we can search the Word of God for directions together.

Parents' dreams. To put it simply, we believe most parents' hope is to build **interdependent, self-controlled, morally upright, adaptable, responsible and thankful** (abbreviated as "I SMART" – inspired by the Singapore produced movie "I NOT STUPID") family members ('family members' mean parents are part of the grooming too, so it is a learning for us too!).

I nterdependent – includes being independent when appropriate and asking for help when needed. This requires building good rapport with family members, relatives and friends.

S elf-controlled – includes contentment and good temperaments like patience.

M orally upright – includes honesty and integrity, standing firm on principles even if it means we are the only ones doing it or even when we stand to lose out. Involve ability and wisdom to discern.

A daptable – includes the willingness to accept mistakes, extend and receive forgiveness, openness and humility to listen and discern while learning and growing.

R esponsible – includes being reliable and committed, following through till the end even when nobody else does because of inconvenience or takes too long. This will involve perseverance.

T hankful – includes the right attitudes during tough times and still understands that there are learning purposes for difficult situations. This also involves being faithful and hopeful.

Many of these qualities are mentioned in the Bible from the book of Galatians 5:23:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

'Success' is not mentioned as that term is relative and it should be a by-product of these qualities. Let's journey.

Principle 1: Parenting is a continuous, active impartation, starting with ourselves.

Parenting is active rather than passive. That means as parents, we need to teach and tell in the early years and encourage, guide and coach in the teen years. There is a view that we should 'let children be children' or 'let them discover themselves' - perhaps a result of Montessori teachings. We need to put that into perspective. In the intellectual area, that 'explorative' approach is great. Parents should observe and understand our children's abilities and then encourage them into their strengths. This, however, should not extend to the moral area. This same spirit of exploring we believe contributed to

rising sexual promiscuity as the selfish sentiment becomes 'nothing is right or wrong', we just need to explore and fit things in a way we deem appropriate. So in the moral area, parents ought to be teaching more restraints and steer them away from dangerous and undesirable ways. On a similar note, if we as parents believe something is acceptable when it really isn't, guess where the kids will be headed? The impartation starts then with ourselves – are we right in our beliefs? How can we be sure? That is why we always reference the Bible, a source of much wisdom.

If parents are not active in guiding, the world will be happy to guide and often the influences are not desirable. There will come a time when our children will have to be responsible for their decisions and we hope they will be wise and discerning then. Such wisdom and discernment comes as a result of years of imparting, guidance and training provided as they grow. For instance, sex education is appropriate only at an older age (probably not in primary school) and home being the best setting but when such information is disseminated indiscreetly from the media or elsewhere, the result is less desirable. (We will address these issues in future.) A young girl of 4 asked her mother, "Mum, where do I come from?" Her mother froze and wondered how best to tackle such a sensitive question. After spending quite a while trying to explain the birds and the bees, the little girl got impatient and interrupted, "I just wanted to know which hospital I was born in!" This reflects a few things: communication must be clarified and age appropriate and simple questions demand simple answers!

An example of imparting would be polite interruption. We all experienced the irritation when children interrupt (or pester) at the wrong time. In all fairness, they have never been taught the right way to interrupt. One possible way then is to teach them how to politely interrupt – by putting their hand on the hand or leg of the adult they wish to interrupt (depending on their height) and patiently wait. The adult in turn, uses his hand to hold the little hand to signify that he will attend to him shortly (give a few seconds to a minute depending on the age of the kid, you may have to excuse your conversation). When we explain this to the toddler, he learns a new handle for a polite interruption – it may not work the first time, so keep trying. By the way, it applies to adults as well.

The above illustration shows that we need to teach or instruct and train (repetition and adjustment) and the result of course is expected behaviour and children learn about politeness in the process! If done with patience, it will be teaching, if done with irritation, it will be nagging. Most of the time, however, we parents assume children should pick up politeness somehow without parental involvements and we get easily irritated and impatient, resulting in a vicious cycle of frustrations.

Even in passivity, we are imparting something. By being silent or not acting (that includes just saying 'stop' and letting them get away) when our children throw tantrums and misbehave, we are actually approving it! When we see an accident and someone is bleeding to death and we do nothing, this is as good as allowing the person to die – that is the extent of the harm passivity can cause. So, when children are doing something objectionable and we are silent, we are silently granting our consent. Of course for teenagers, the way we communicate is vital!

"I am not the teaching type." is a common parental excuse. We believe everyone can be a teacher – remember, even in passivity, something is 'taught'. We do recognize however, that some are better teachers than others. That is why we believe there are 2 parents – we are sure at least one is more verbal and expresses better than the other. So, the more verbal one should guide the other parent. It is a skill that can be learnt with a willing heart. Start with relating with your spouse to build better teaching / communication skills – which is another principle to come.

So, what else do we impart? These are to be included in the subsequent newsletters!