

About giving "Happiness"

We seem to be reading about credit cards debts and divorces rising especially for those in their 20s to 30s. We face a generation that seems to be unwilling to commit to relationships and is impatient and consumeristic. What has this to do with happiness or parenting? Well, these 20 and 30-somethings are also someone's children and perhaps these trends are partially cultivated by certain types of parenting and parent's view on 'happiness'?

As parents, we want our children to be happy. We do all we can to let our children get a better education hoping that they can get a better job and become happier. If we feel guilty about not spending enough time with our children, we may indulge in material things to sooth them, hoping that these things will bring them some happiness. If we do not have the financial means to satisfy all our children's wants, we may give in to other wishes, again hoping to make them happier. We may constantly have a 'fear' of 'offending' our children, or 'discomfort' about their unhappiness. Perhaps by doing so, we could have partially contributed to what we are seeing today in the young adults.

We need to ask what happiness is ourselves. Is it more money? Better education? Secure job? Nest egg? Good health? Children or spouse meets certain key expectations? (maybe all of the above ☺). Does it mean we cannot have happiness without these? We may not know the answer but we know the above may not bring happiness. Yet, even we know they may not bring happiness, we keep helplessly pursuing these elusive things, doing things that our hearts may not want to do. We probably also project them onto our children as if they are reality! Why?

Our view towards "happiness" will affect the way we live our life and how we parent. If we perceive these will bring them happiness (even if our head may say other wise), we will do some of the things mentioned above. **The confusion is not with our children but is with us parents.** We believe this belief is partially responsible for what we are seeing in the 20 to 30-somethings -- a reflection of parenting!

We have fewer children because we think that we need to provide for our children well. A mother said, **"Babies are not expensive, lifestyle is!"** We couldn't agree more. If we truly want our children to learn to adapt well to life, we need to review our mindset on happiness. Maybe have more children so that there is more sharing! Life may be better! Such a paradox:

earlier generations have more children and some are quite happy. This generation, we have fewer children, can provide more for each and yet the quality of 'happiness' is not improving!

Is it over-provision? Such that our children cannot delay wanting something, not sure what commitment is because they have too many choices, do not know what responsibility is because they have never learnt responsibility as we have provided for them too well, only needing to concentrate on studies. They have been taught how to be responsible verbally but never practically.

Rather than focus on whether our children are happy, perhaps we should come back to the basics (some were mentioned in previous newsletters):

- [Having no choice is a choice by itself](#)
- [Accepting no choice is a sign of responsibility / maturity](#)
- [Delayed gratification is a virtue worth cultivating \(By giving "happiness" now, are we compromising happiness tomorrow?\)](#)
- [Children learn about life from parents – thus we need to reflect on our views](#)
- [The most important relationship in a family is the husband and wife's](#)
- [Respecting others is the basic training](#)

This will mean that for those with children below 7, parents are the decision makers: clothes to wear, places to go, things to eat, time to sleep and play, teaching them to accept 'no' or delay their 'wants'. These will lay the foundation for responsibilities later and instructing obedience to authority.

Those with school going children, the same principle applies but this time more explanations and questions have to be given and parents have to withstand 'unhappy' faces and take a stand at times. This helps to build courage to accept differences and difficulties.

For teens, if the foundations are laid right, it will be easier. If not, well, struggles will be tougher but there can still be teachable moments. Our tone of voice will be crucial and the length of time taken for communication will be longer than what we have patience for! (At least there is remedy!)

Perhaps it is not happiness we should seek then but happiness comes as a by-product when we seek the right things. We should instead seek contentment, a contentment that is regardless of circumstances!