

Parental impartation / involvement - continued.

Choices. If our children can accept having no choices, they are ready for more choices. Undemocratic as it may sound, nobody said the family has to be a democracy. Be it fast-food or hawker centres, we tend to give children choices too early (even at 4 years of age) – which fast-food they would like to go to, what type of food they would like. When children begin making all small decisions at a younger age, very naturally when they are older and they are not given the choice to make decisions, they will get irritated. We are not advocating having no choices but children should be allowed choices later and given choices sparingly. The key point is there must be a gradual move from having no choices to choices in the parental-child decision making relationship with the concept that our children can accept 'no choice' as a choice to start with and nearing teens (thirteen), more decision making can be delegated. This struggling process is vital for learning. Self-denial's non-existence these days is regretful, yet it is a virtue that starts from having no choices when young!

Homework. We parents want our children to have a better education and a better learning environment, resulting in an overemphasis on academic performance. This is causing a rift in some parental-child relationship especially when the parents are teaching. Some resort to not teaching and just provide tuitions. May we suggest that education is more than facts and figures from text books – it is life skills we need to be imparting and school work is the vehicle through which we can use to impart some of life's lesson. Some form of teaching has to be done at home. Perhaps it is teaching just one subject or a hobby. Imagine the time involved and the relationship building and bonding process. If both parents are working that is tougher but nonetheless essential and possible. We parents should also adjust our expectations according to the abilities of our children as we journey. Focus also on non-academic development – take the time to develop interest in sports for our children. In Singapore, polytechnics and ITE should never be ruled out as viable education as much as everyone wants our children to be university graduates.

Time together. The best times for talks are around a meal or maybe even on mom and dad's bed for a card game or just lazing around. Once, jokingly a family was sharing about teddy bears at dinner and a suggestion was made by one of the child that if we are upset or angry we can put a teddy bear outside the room door so that parents can attend to the child. The following week, a bear appeared outside the door and the other child spotted it. The parents were then able to attend to the child's emotional need. So, never underestimate the power of small jokes and small talk!

Helpers. We encourage the use of 'helpers' as opposed to maid. This encourages us parents to be more aware of their role and ours and also allows our children to be respectful (children addressed them as 'auntie xxx'). Tired as we are from work, we should try to assume care for our children in the evenings and in the weekends. Our helpers can then complete their other chores and can get their needed rest. This in itself is involvement: caring for the physical needs of younger children (feeding and bathing), playing with them (toddlers) or going through their school work (school going children). Get the children to have the privilege of sharing in simple daily household chores – washing the dishes, sweeping the floor or clearing the table.

School. Parents can be over-involved or protective here. When teachers discipline our children (even when we consider unjustly), there is a tendency for us to fight for our children's rights. When we do that, our child will become a very self-centred person (of course there are exceptions where we need to intervene, more on that some other time.). It is a very good opportunity to teach that life itself can be unfair and we can learn to accept that and move on. This is teaching of forgiveness and acceptance! Teachers in schools have a hard job, as they have to handle 40 students, so let's give them the benefit of doubt as much as we can.