

"Efficacious" parenting and our confidence and control

The world gives lots of attention to efficiency and effectiveness. Performance is the name of the game. How is the term 'efficacy' different? To adapt a definition from Ps Edmund of CEFC, **efficacy is doing the right things at the right time, in the right place in the right manner to get the right results** – not necessarily the best in absolute terms or in the eyes of parents or kids, but appropriate given the circumstances!

This means that sometimes, what is right parenting to a kid in a situation may not apply another time even though it is the same kid and a similar situation since the timing is different. Of course, that also means that the 'right' results should differ with kids. This is in line with the uniqueness of individuals! The variations though, make parenting both frustrating and fulfilling (when we think we got it right).

What has this got to do with parents' confidence and control? **When the kids are younger, we have more control and we are confident. However, as they grow, we would like more control but we don't seem to be getting it and we lose confidence, sometimes losing heart!** The uncertainties of trying to be efficacious and getting the desired results add to the complexity and affects our confidence!

Let's just see how all these play out balancing a kid's academic performance and computer play time – Efficacious parenting from efficacious control and confidence!

In Singapore, we have a tendency to link our parenting with our children's academic performance. If they do well, we sometimes let them get away with murder even though our instinct tells us maybe something is amiss. It is a thin line because the primary responsibility of a kid is after all, their own education! About the only 'measurable' thing in the kids' lives is studying. Not paying attention to academic performance then is quite impossible. So where does efficacy come in?

The general guideline most parents would use is, if academic performance does not suffer, go ahead and do what you want. That may translate to unlimited amount of computer time. It may be alright for some families but not for others. This is efficacy at work: works

alright for this family, this kid but not for another. However, as parents, we may still think that we have lost control and become less confident – perhaps then, we need to review what 'results' we ought to look at.

In some situations, while parents allow more freedom, there would still be a lingering thought that 'something is not right. **The parental 'instinct' may be right.** The right results in this case may be to use the amount of interacting time we have with our kids as a measurement rather than academic performance. It is common with growing kids that we release more control than we would like in response to our fledging confidence. If the computer time in this instance is eating away family time, perhaps the 'right' results may not be achieved though it shows later.

Depending on the kid's character and personality, some may require more direct guidance until they are 16 or 18. Even though they will always welcome 'freedom', they have yet to fully understand the responsibilities that come with the freedom. Very often, they want the freedom without the responsibilities and when they realize they cannot have freedom without the responsibilities, they get disappointed, frustrated and angry.

Perhaps in any requests, a right way is to always work out an 'escape clause'. Let's try this out for x number of weeks/times, x number of hours and review. That allows us parents to retain some control while we observe and protect our confidence. This allows for efficacious parenting – giving time to review to see what is right for the unique child. Of course, when freedom is given and removed, don't expect the child to be all praise and joyful – it rarely happens. However, because an agreement for review is there, even when they are not happy, they are better able to accept the consequences of freedom being retracted.

Of course, if we remember the funnel concept, such processing should come when our kids are in the upper primary or even secondary but we probably will see the ages get younger because the not too nice things of the world are fast penetrating the families. The holidays are here and the Christmas season is near, what better time than to think of what fun things the family can do together and surprise our spouse and kids with 'efficacious' parenting – but we will have to figure out what it means in our own context!