

One more issue on parents' active involvement and we will move on to principle 2 in the next issue.

Parents' ability to discern right from wrong is generally stronger than their children's and naturally they are able to teach them. The difficulty usually arises when our children do not have self-control and make mistakes and parents are too soft to correct them or enforce the needed consequence. For example, a parent is not in favour of giving his son a handphone at primary 3 but eventually gave in. A limit of S\$10 is set for monthly spending and if exceeded, the phone will be confiscated. After 3 months, the limit was exceeded by S\$10 for no good reason. A verbal warning was given. The next month, it was exceeded by S\$20. The parent warns and threatens to confiscate the handphone but did not act. This process may let the parent lose respect and the child will take any set rules merely as a 'recommendation', he will not believe any rules will be enforced in future. Familiar? Parents are generally afraid children will be unhappy or rebel if they are too strict. The key perhaps is in the manner in which things are communicated and enforced. If done well, children will grow up confidently, be filled with self-control and can be a joy to be with. Guidelines for a few items that involve family limits are discussed below – discuss with your spouse see how they need to be adjusted in your home.

Computers. If there a computer, avoid putting them in the child's room. What if it is already there? If the parent-child relationship is good, we may still be able to move it to a shared area. Take an interest in their computer 'work', we don't need computer knowledge, just need to be able to communicate with them. If we think that they are spending too much unnecessary time on the computer, think of ways to distract them – like getting them to help with housework or go for walks, reducing the time they have on the computer. Nagging and scolding alone will not help. Rules like number of hours on the computer and the reason for such restrictions need to be established and communicated.

Handphones. Technology advancements have placed the convenience into the hands of even primary school children. Parents may find it very useful to be able to contact their children with SMS. Depending on school activities and financial capabilities, it is better to delay the provision of handphones to lower secondary or later (primary school is generally too early). Once given, if we still want to maintain our children's respect, spending limits and consequences must be tabled and enforced. Singtel's Hi-card or pod-lite is actually enough for most cases, though it will vary according to each family's needs but remember about rules enforcement. The frequency parents change our handphones too will affect our children's perception on the necessity of a handphone and their desire for frequent changes too.

Budget. If pocket money is given, parents can go from giving daily to weekly to monthly. This gives the child gradual control with parental guidance. What if they spend all - then parents should stand firm and not give additional till the next period (they won't die of hunger). They will learn self-control very quickly. For primary school, 80 cents is probably sufficient a day for the break. For secondary school, if the child has a CCA twice a week, S\$15 a week would be sufficient for breaks and lunch. Spend some time visiting the school canteen to get a better idea and adjust according to our children's appetite and our financial situation. Secondary school students can get a 12 months budget – the monthly allowance in the holidays will be his outing allowance. That indirectly limits the amount of time he can go out – provided parents do not become soft and over generous. Parents' own spending patterns must also be watched because a prudent parent will raise a prudent child.

Verbal respect. Parents seem to be correcting children less for their verbal rudeness. Sometimes inappropriate words, phrases or disrespectful tone of voice are not addressed. Parents tend to believe that perhaps they should wait till they are older to address such issues. Left unchecked, young ones with that habit will find it difficult to change when older (Chinese proverb: it takes 3 days to learn bad behaviour and 3 years to learn good behaviour). This process may need to continue even in the teen years, especially tone of voice. Verbal disrespect is the beginning of disrespectful attitudes and will lead to rebellion. Of course, parents need to watch our own verbal tones and words (including towards our children).

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

**Next issue - Principle 2 : The husband and wife relationship is our children's first communication model.**