

Ninth Family Research Network (FRN) Forum “Nurturing our Young – Parenting in the 21st Century”

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Parenting is probably one of the hardest jobs around. Wanting the best for their children, juggling work and family responsibilities, and understanding their children are some of the many considerations that parents face.

Attended by more than 160 participants from the government, social service sector and academia, the 9th Family Research Network Forum surfaced the following points.

In Singapore, children tend to heed their parents' advice, unlike their Western counterparts who perceive parents' interference negatively. Singaporean children often view their parents' "interference" as necessary for their well-being and see it to be a form of support.

However, research findings also show that children in Singapore find it difficult to meet their parents' expectations, particularly in their academic performances. One way parents could lessen the stress on children is encourage them to improve rather than compel them to achieve distinctions.

Parents' involvement in their children often depends on how well parents managed their work-family balance as well as the amount of support available at the workplace. A person's behaviour at work could affect his or her behaviour at home, and vice versa. For example, stress and negative experiences at work could influence a parents' behaviour at home and affect the children.

According to the research presented, parents play different but complementary and important roles. Fathers usually influence the cognitive development of children such as problem-solving while mothers influence their psycho-emotional well-being. Fathers are also usually the disciplinarians. However, mothers are increasingly seen as playing the role of disciplinarians while fathers were increasingly playing the supporting role to mothers. Fathers are equally capable as caregivers and in nurturing children, as are mothers. Some participants at the forum felt that fathers ought to be more involved in parenting especially when both parents have to work. There is a need to consider how fathers and mothers could share parenting responsibilities equally.

Apart from the parents, there are other influences on children's development. For example, schools, peers, other relatives and the media could influence a child's development. Children today are more influenced by the media than children in the past.

Appropriate services are available for parents of children with developmental difficulties. One example is the Signposts programme established by the KK Women's and Children's Hospital's Department of Child Development (KKH DCD) in 2011. This is a programme designed by Parenting Research Centre (PRC) in Australia and aims to provide parents and caregivers with timely and easy access to evidence-based and affordable parenting

programmes that will equip them with skills to better care for their children who have developmental delays or intellectual disabilities, aged 3 to 15 years. For services to have maximum reach and effectiveness, there must be collaboration with multiple agencies.

Asian and Western parenting approaches were similar. For example, both Asian and Western parents provide unconditional expressions of love and joy in interactions with children. One difference between the two parenting approaches was that Asian parenting could be influenced by Confucian values. Domineering mothers, popularly called “tiger mums”, in Singapore were also likely to place a greater emphasis on the children’s education.

There is no single parenting approach that will work best for a child’s development. Every individual is different and children at different ages will require different parenting styles. Parents will have to find a suitable parenting style at different development stages of their children’s lives.

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