

## **Focused and quality family time key to building strong bonds**

### **Shared experiences a way to get closer, says Families for Life Council chairman**

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The chairman of the Families for Life Council has a motto to live by when it comes to spending time with his wife and two daughters - "before anyone else".

It is more commonly referred to as "bae" - a term of endearment for one's romantic partner - but Mr Ishak Ismail believes it can be applied in the context of prioritising family time and fostering a strong bond among family members.

Families for Life champions and promotes resilient families and has always advocated that families should spend time together to build strong bonds.

Mr Ishak, who was appointed chairman of the council on Feb 1, wants to build on that.

"It is important that we spend both quantity and quality time with our children. This is especially important when our children reach their teenage years and start to become independent," he noted. "As parents, what is important is to be present and focused during the time we spend with our children."

Mr Ishak, 57, who is regional director for Asia at global defence and security company BAE Systems Hagglunds AB, has been a council member since August 2015.

Families for Life organises events for immediate and extended families, such as picnics at the Istana and Marina Barrage. These are opportunities for families to bond over shared experiences.

Having a mindset that is set on spending "meaningful time" is important, said Mr Ishak, who is married to a 58-year-old housewife.

"It's not just about setting priorities and checking off boxes that you've spent an hour or two in a day with your children."

Instead, he advises parents to ask themselves if they have forged a connection with their children through the time they have spent or the conversations they have had.

Joining them in their hobbies or trying a new activity is one way parents can spend quality time to bond with their children, said Mr Ishak.

This could include participating in an exercise routine that they like and making it a regular family activity, or watching the same TV show together, he added.

"Having shared experiences provides common topics for communication, especially if both you and your child are trying (the activity) out for the first time. These are great opportunities for parents to spend more time with their children and build closer ties," he noted.

He acknowledged that Singaporean parents face the challenge of juggling work and family. There are always competing demands and by the time parents get home, they are tired and stressed.

But he feels there is no shortcut and parents would need to set aside time for family on weekends, and even after a long day of work.

Emphasising the need for fathers to be more present in their children's lives, Mr Ishak cited a local study conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies last year which suggested that fathers need to invest more time in childcare and be able to contribute significantly towards parenting.

Drawing from his own experiences, Mr Ishak, whose daughters are aged 26 and 28, said: "Building a close relationship with my children took time and effort. I had to be creative when thinking of ideas to feed their energy and curious minds so we could connect well.

"A close relationship does not happen overnight and both my daughters and I must be willing to put in the time and effort to strengthen our relationship."

Over the years, Families for Life has seen an increase in attendance for families who have never been to its events.

Said Mr Ishak: "One event or activity is not the answer to strengthening family bonds but it's the start of a ripple effect in the community. It can become a basis for strong family bonds. The council will continue to promote opportunities for families to come together to spend meaningful time through activities."