

Sowing Seeds of Character

A parent, a grandparent and three educators talk about raising virtuous children, and why the early years are the perfect time to shape their values.

Irene Tan

54, PRINCIPAL,
MFC KINDERGARTEN
(NEWTON)

Parents/grandparents, how important is it to you that your child's/grandchild's pre-school has a curriculum strong in values and character education?

Liping: There is a Chinese saying (三岁定八十) that describes how traits displayed in a young child are likely to persist into old age. This means that a person's values and character are more or less determined in the early years. As my daughter Yuhan has to spend so much time in pre-school every day, it is important to me that she is exposed to the right values there.

When I was a child, my parents made all the decisions and I was never able to have a say in anything. So I want Yuhan to be able to make her own

decisions and know that she has to be responsible for them.

Chong Yong: It's definitely important. Their early years are the best time to start teaching children the right values. They are the future of our country. Just like how our elders imparted virtues such as filial piety to us, it is now our responsibility to pass on that same wisdom.

Educators, how can this aspect of education be effectively incorporated into young children's learning and development?

Lalitha: Educators must first role-model the values before

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//Irene Tan

they can impart these values to the young. The aim is to create a culture where everyone 'speaks the language of values or virtues'. These do not have to be out of the ordinary. Values can be part of everyday routines by using positive phrases such as 'please walk' instead of 'stop running'. This will help foster socially appropriate behaviours in young children.

We encourage parents to continue this moral education at home so that children are exposed to consistent standards both at home and at the centre.

Irene: Values are caught, not taught. The earlier children start, the more they get to practise and hone their skills. Classes at MFC are mixed-level so older children can show the little ones what they have learnt. Younger children can also pick up good habits from the older ones, for instance, holding the door open for the next person. In fact, being gracious and courteous make up the cornerstone of our curriculum. Positive values are something the children get in touch with every day at MFC and they get to practice these concepts in a natural setting.

PCF started the Virtues Programme in 2013, and it has since been rolled out to more than 20 of its centres. What are some of its benefits as seen in children at these centres?

Alicia: Moral education is important to children's holistic development because it helps them regulate their own behaviour, take responsibility for their actions, and shape their character. The Virtues Programme sets clear boundaries on what is right or wrong, and empowers children to recognise their own challenging behaviours and reflect on them. This is essential for them to progress in life.

We recorded observations of children's behaviours at a selected PCF centre before they were exposed to the Virtues Programme. We did so again after one year and compared the results. The study showed a significant improvement in almost all aspects of behaviour and development in children across all levels.

Lalitha Krishnasamy

52, PRINCIPAL,
PCF SPARKLETOTS
PRESCHOOL @
PUNGGOL CENTRAL
BLK 231

On Irene: Shirt, Cardigan & Pants Gap, Sandals Marks and Spencer
On Ernan: Jacket & Shirt Crayon, Shorts Cotton On Kids On Zakeera;
Top, Skirt, Necklace & Shoes Cotton On Kids On Jai; Hoodie, Shirt, Pants & Shoes Gap Kids, Hat Cotton On Kids On Violet; Headband, Sundress & Necklace Cotton On Kids, Shoes Gap Kids On Lalitha: Dress Marks and Spencer

What's more, the Virtues Programme also benefits adults. Educators said they are happier because they don't have to shout or raise their voices. Parents also remarked on the positive habits displayed by their children. In one instance, the family said they now use 'moderate your voice' as an alternative to 'stop shouting'.

As a SPARK-certified centre, give us an example of how MFC and PCF partner with parents to further enhance value and character education for children.

Irene: Embarking on the SPARK quality improvement journey in 2011 has helped us a lot in areas such as tightening the curriculum, and in our partnership with our parents. With feedback from the SPARK assessors, we worked on improving our curriculum planning and processes, resulting in MFC achieving SPARK (Commendation) in 2014.



Zhou Liping
37, FINANCIAL CONSULTANT AND FATHER TO ZHOU YUHAN, 5 YEARS OLD, ATTENDING PCF SPARKLETOTS PRESCHOOL @ PUNGGOL CENTRAL BLK 231

The candid photos sent to parents every week usually capture children showing kindness, being gracious and courteous to each other — for example, an older boy helping a younger one to button his shirt, or a sibling helping the other tie his shoelaces. These records help children recognise and appreciate positive values, and also inspire parents to reinforce

them at home and be a role model themselves.

Lalitha: Being a SPARK-certified centre helps us to improve the quality of programmes that we implement. SPARK guides us in areas such as children's social and emotional development, and partnerships with parents, for example to select age-appropriate materials to facilitate

On Liping: Shirt & Pullover Marks and Spencer
On Yu Han: Cardigan Marks and Spencer, T-Shirt Gap Kids, Jeans Cotton On Kids
On Alicia: Coat & Dress Cotton On, Necklace Marks and Spencer
On Chong Yong: Shirt, Pullover & Pants Uniqlo
On Irene: Pullover Gap, Shirt & Necklace Marks and Spencer
On Chiara: Pullover, Shirt, Bracelet & Pants Marks and Spencer

PHOTOS BY HONG CHEE YAN, STYLING SHARON TAN ASSISTED BY JESSICA KHOR, GROOMING MANISA TAN & JANE LAU

BEING A SPARK-CERTIFIED CENTRE HELPS US TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF PROGRAMMES THAT WE IMPLEMENT.

//Lalitha Krishnasamy

children's learning and to work with parents to support their children's learning.

Parents/grandparents, what are some of the positive changes you have seen in your child/grandchild, thanks to the centre's efforts?

Liping: A recent incident left a very strong impression on me. I whipped up a meal for my family and was pleasantly surprised when Yuhan thanked me for the food. I thought it was a very sweet gesture. As it turns out, children at PCF are taught to sing a simple song to show gratitude to the cook who makes their lunch.

My wife and I do our best to guide Yuhan and encourage her to practise the values important to our family even when she is outside. It is heartening to know that she also brings back positive values she picked up in the centre and practises them at home.

Chong Yong: Having to gather children who are running about in the schoolyard is no easy feat, but the educators at MFC make it look very easy. I am impressed at how well they work together and how patient they are with the children. My six-year-old grandson has shown improvement in processing instructions and following directions. He now listens and responds well when we call him for dinner or ask him to do his homework. ❤️



Ng Chong Yong
77, RETIRED TEACHER, AND GRANDFATHER TO A PAIR OF SIBLINGS, 6 AND 3 YEARS OLD, ATTENDING MFC KINDERGARTEN (NEWTON)

Kudos to PCF Sparkletots

In late 2015, Ms Lynn Ng, mother to four-year-old Tiffany, wrote a letter to ECDA complimenting PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Seng Kang Central Blk 292B and its educators, especially Senior Teacher Ms Serene Lin.

Finding the right pre-school with the right team of educators had not been easy for Ms Ng, who is a single working mother. Tiffany had an unpleasant experience at her previous centre. "For more than three months, I had to drag my crying daughter to the centre every day," says Ms Ng. "Then she started coming up with excuses like a stomach ache to avoid going to the centre."

Ms Ng subsequently withdrew Tiffany from the centre, and vowed to be extra careful when choosing the next pre-school. "My daughter also has mild eczema and suffers from bouts of asthma, so it is important to me that her teachers are patient, caring and attentive," she says.

It was an immense relief for Ms Ng when Tiffany showed a 180-degree change after enrolling at PCF Sparkletots Preschool @

Tiffany with her mum Lynn (second from left), teacher Serene (second from right), and other educators from PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Seng Kang Central Blk 292B.

Seng Kang Central Blk 292B. "She would come home and talk to me about the centre. And she wakes up earlier than me every morning, asking that I take her to the centre quickly," she says. "It just goes to show how much she loves it there."

In particular, Ms Ng appreciates how patient the principal and educators are with the children. Even when children misbehave, she notes that the educators are understanding and takes a calm approach in talking to the children.

Surprised by the letter, Ms Lin, 35, explains the importance of speaking the language of virtues: "I believe that positive language and words should replace shaming and blaming. It changes your perspective to situations. Children are happier and encouraged to think positively." She describes Tiffany as a positive and bubbly girl who — with support — was able to adjust to the new environment. The letter has motivated Ms Lin to do even better. "As an educator, I need to be a good role model to the children. It is important that I 'walk the talk' with the children, ensuring I do what I say," she says.



SPARKING CHANGE

SPARK supports pre-schools in their quality improvement journey. It uses the Quality Rating Model to determine the quality of pre-schools' programmes, structures and processes in achieving the holistic development of children, their eagerness to learn and well-being. To learn more about the SPARK, visit www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKinfo.

Alicia Lim
50, LEAD EXECUTIVE PRINCIPAL, PCF SPARKLETOTS, AND ECDA FELLOW



Ms Irene Tan (left) with her centre director Ms Chiara De Silva.