

# GOOD, BETTER, BEST



**MS AMANDA POH, RECIPIENT OF THE 'OUTSTANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCARER' AWARD, SHARES HOW PARENTS AND TODDLERS CAN MAKE A SMOOTH TRANSITION TO PRE-SCHOOL.**

Being recognised as an 'Outstanding Early Childhood Educarer' has given Ms Amanda Poh more opportunities to share about early childhood practices.

With greater responsibilities that come with the recognition, the Head of Pre-Nursery and Nursery Level at St. James' Church Kindergarten (Harding) is nevertheless grateful for the 'extra work'. "I have to keep myself updated on educational approaches, and sharing and explaining allow me to revisit the reasons for choosing certain practices. These reflections definitely help in my professional development."

It is perhaps this drive to continually improve that won Amanda, 32, recognition at the ECDA Awards 2016 as an exemplary educator who believes in refining her curriculum and practices to make them exceptional.

Amanda recommends focusing on language and sensory play experiences for pre-nursery children. Facilitating such experiences is important as



Ms Amanda Poh with some Nursery students

toddlers are at the stage of "exploring, learning and recreating new things", she explains.

Interactions are playful in nature and the sensory component helps to stimulate children's sense of sight,

smell, touch, hearing and taste. At the same time, educarers must seek to develop language skills so that toddlers are able to expand their vocabulary and express themselves. For example, instead of teaching the concept of size by drawing on a whiteboard, educarers can play a game of asking children to fit their hands into boxes of various sizes.

Of Amanda, parent Madhumaish Nichani says she is affable and gives all the children equal time and attention. "What really stands out about Ms Poh is the fact that she truly enjoys interacting with the toddlers and this has eased my child into the pre-school routine quickly," Mrs Nichani, 43, says. "She has a smile for each and every child who passes her way." Where once Mrs Nichani's child would cling to her, she has now become more confident and excited about pre-school.

"When interacting with toddlers, it is important to have a smile and open body language," says Amanda. "It can be stressful when young children leave a familiar environment for a new place with many strangers who they have yet to learn to trust." It is also the same for parents who face their own set of anxieties as they send their children to pre-school for the first time. ♥

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## TIPS FROM AMANDA

- Read to your child books in which story characters attend and enjoy pre-school.
- Assure your child that you will pick him up after pre-school.
- Send positive vibes. Give an assuring smile instead of frowning when your child cries at the gate.
- Establish and stick to a routine. Don't let him skip pre-school unnecessarily.
- Prepare yourself for separation anxiety. Some children's uneasiness stem from their parents' insecurity.
- Build trust with the educarers. When your child sees you talking to the educarers, he will register that they are not strangers and that makes him feel safe and secure.



Building a model of a primary school using blocks, after going on the virtual tour

# MAKING THE LEAP FORWARD

**K2 CHILDREN AT CARPE DIEM CHILDCARE RESORT ARE ALL SET FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL, THANKS TO THE CENTRE'S P1 TRANSITION PROGRAMME.**

Instead of visiting primary schools like what most pre-schools do, Carpe Diem Childcare Resort 'brings' the school to the centre instead. What's even better — the children get to tour more than one school.

K2 children go on a virtual tour of various primary schools and view places such as the general office, canteen, library and classrooms using computers at the centre at Punggol. Such tours enable them to make direct comparisons with their pre-school environment, while their teachers take the opportunity to introduce and familiarise the children with respective primary school facilities.

Centre Manager Ms Rachel David said that the centre came across the idea of a virtual tour in the Quality Rating Scale (meant to help pre-schools evaluate their education programmes), when it was preparing for the Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework (SPARK) assessment and certification. SPARK (see sidebar) encourages pre-schools to implement good teaching and learning practices, one of which is to support children's transition to formal schooling.

It is crucial to prepare pre-schoolers for primary school as this helps them feel more confident about making the transition. Without



Writing down their feelings about going to primary school

sufficient support and guidance, the move can be stressful and daunting for them.

"We help children acquire important skills for primary school to build their self-esteem, which in turn helps them better adapt to a new environment and get them ready for school, not just academically but also socially and emotionally," said Rachel.

## Prepping Up

Children are taught important practical skills such as telling the time and seeking help from adults through hands-on activities. They also learn how to handle situations that may happen in primary school, such as being bullied, or misplacing an item. These are taught through storybooks and role-play. To familiarise the children with buying food at the canteen, the teachers use 'pretend money' to practise counting with them.



Taking turns to share their orientation experience

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Ms Rachel David

The centre also aims to quell children's fears and boost their enthusiasm for primary school. The teachers have discussions with them on topics ranging from schoolwork to making new friends. Children also jot down their feelings in journals and write notes of encouragement to their peers.

K2 teacher Lim Fang said that besides such activities, parents' support and partnership is essential and the centre shares with them ways to prepare their children. "Parents may need guidance on how to help their child be school-ready and how they can support their children during their final kindergarten year," said Lim Fang.

Parents are encouraged to give their children more information on their new school. Lim Fang said some children in the pre-school centre who will be in the same primary school have also arranged play-dates during recess, and for after school. Some have also exchanged their parents' contact numbers and made plans to meet during the school holidays. ♥



The Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework (SPARK) aims to help pre-schools raise their quality by serving as a guide and providing quality benchmarks. It also provides recognition and support for pre-school leaders in their efforts to improve teaching and learning, administration and management processes.

For more information on SPARK, visit <https://www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKInfo>.