

# STRONGER Together

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND PARENTS DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING POSITIVE AND MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO HELP CHILDREN MAXIMISE THEIR POTENTIAL.**



**P**arents and preschools have a shared goal and responsibility — they want children to learn important life skills, to succeed at what they do, and to be safe and

happy. Educators cannot achieve these on their own. They need families to be actively involved and work together to achieve these outcomes for children.

Trust between parents and teachers is key to building and strengthening home-preschool relationships. Open and respectful communication increases trust, and this makes all the difference in shaping children's learning and development.

How can we forge strong partnerships among home, preschool and the community? What can we do to improve our communication skills? *Beanstalk* sounds out educators and parents on their views as well as strategies for forming and shaping these vital relationships.

“Children do best when they are nurtured within a tightly woven web of love. It does take a whole community to raise a child.”

**MS HADIJAH ABU BAKAR, 48**  
Centre Leader, Kampung Siglap Mosque Kindergarten



**MAIN PHOTO** On Brian: Shirt and jeans Marks & Spencer, Sneakers Model's own. On Melody: Blouse set Gingersnaps, Sneakers KidStyle, Hat Stylist's own. On Amir: Safari shirt & hat Stylist's own. On Yusaf: T-shirt, cardigan & pants H&M, Backpack & sneakers KidSport Hat Stylist's own. On Muhd Reyhan: Windbreaker UNIQLO Shorts Gingersnaps Hat, Backpack & shoes KidSport On Sally: Blouse H&M, Pants Esprit Shoes Marks & Spencer.



**WHY ARE PARTNERSHIPS AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND PARENTS SO IMPORTANT?**

**Hadijah Abu Bakar:** We believe children do best when they are nurtured within a tightly woven web of love. It does take a whole community to raise a child. Both home and the preschool are very significant parts of that community, if not more.

**Sally Ho:** It is important for these relationships to start on the right foot, where both parties are respectful and amicable. When children observe the positive interaction between their parents and teachers, it strengthens their sense of security and self-confidence.

**Haseenah Ismail:** The role of parents must complement the teachers' role. The more we work together, the better we can strengthen the home-preschool links. Exchanging information and suggestions can help both parents and teachers learn from each other to better understand the children's needs, interests and even weaknesses. We can then discuss strategies that parents and teachers can use at home and at preschool.

**Brian Yeo:** I find that a good relationship with the teachers allows my wife and I to better communicate our child's needs and allows teachers to freely talk to us about our child. It is a two-way open communication.



**MS SALLY HO, 50+**  
Teacher/Infant Educator, Genius Hive Pre-School

“A good relationship with the teachers allows my wife and I to better communicate our child's needs.”



**MR BRIAN YEO, 37**  
Engineer, Father of Melody Yeo, 15 months



**A TOAST TO TEAMWORK**

Studies show that collaboration drives workplace performance:

**64%**

of research participants are engaged at their task longer

**5x**

the performance rate among companies that promote collaboration compared to those that do not

First reported by Forbes in June 2017

**EDUCATORS, HOW DO YOU PERSONALLY BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS?**

**Sally:** We have been nurturing a culture of open and constructive communication at the centre over the years. Parents can easily talk to teachers or the management, either in-person or via WhatsApp. We also make it a practice to update parents regularly on the well-being of their children. It assures parents that their children are thriving in the centre.

**Hadijah:** It is really important to listen to parents and let them know their concerns are heard and will be acted on. This builds trust. Ultimately, in any situation that has to do with the child, parents want to be involved in the process and be a part of the solution. Other ways to involve parents include inviting them to be part of our centre's charity drives or projects. When parents work alongside teachers, they are able to bond and build trust. More importantly, we want parents to feel empowered and that they can make a difference in their children's lives.

PAGE 4 On Sally: Knit top Marks & Spencer. On Brian: Shirt & T-shirt Marks & Spencer, Pants Model's own. On Melody: Romper Gingersnaps, Shoes KidStyle.  
PAGE 5 On Yusuf: Denim Jacket KidStyle, T-shirt & pants H&M. On Amir: Shirt & T-shirt Marks & Spencer.

**Keen to engage parents more effectively?**

**SIGN UP FOR THESE CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES AT ONE@ECDA.**

- Empowering Preschool Educators with Effective Communication Skills
- Family Teacher Communication and Collaboration



**PARENTS, HOW DID YOUR CHILD'S TEACHERS ESTABLISH A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU?**

**Haseenah:** I receive detailed and constructive feedback from the teacher regularly about my child's development. She also shares with me on how he is coping in class. From this, I know that the teacher is as vested in my child as I am. It feels good. It assures me that the teacher is committed and dedicated in caring for my child and providing a conducive learning environment.

**Brian:** Communication is critical. When our child, Melody, started walking, we informed the teachers so they were aware of her desire to explore her new ability. The teachers created opportunities for Melody to practise her new ability, until she was stable enough to walk on her own. Knowing that we are on the same page as Melody's teachers on her development has helped to build trust.

**WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE WHEN ESTABLISHING THE PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP?**

**Hadijah:** Sometimes we have situations where parents may disagree with us about their child's behaviour. They take the teacher's feedback as criticism and the teacher gets affected. I encourage teachers facing such issues to come to me. We will discuss possibilities and come up with ways to communicate with the parents in a tactful and respectful manner. I also advise teachers to listen to the parents' point of

“As a tennis coach, I got my grandchildren into the sport when they were young. Besides building up their motor skills and hand-eye coordination, tennis allows me to be very present in their lives as one of the adults they can look to for support and guidance. The time they spend outdoors being active and having fun, complements what they experience in preschool and what their parents teach them at home.”

**MR AMIR HAMZAH ADI OMAR, 62**  
Tennis Coach, Grandfather of Yusuf Mohd Zulfadhli, 5

**BOTH SIDES NOW**

Ms Christine Soo, ECDA Fellow and Senior Lecturer at the National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC at the SEED Campus), offers insights into how educators can partner parents to support children's holistic development.



“Underpinning effective family engagement are mutual trust, respect and shared responsibility for the care and education of the children,” says Ms Soo. “When educators attest to this, families feel supported and empowered. They are motivated to be more involved and participatory in experiences that matter to their children.”

**How Teachers Can Involve Parents**

- 1 Identify parents' interests to involve them as resource persons.** Draw on their expertise in art, cooking, storytelling, or planning and organising preschool and community events.
- 2 Share fun ideas on curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning.** Create take-home kits or readers for the parents to support children's learning in areas such as numeracy or literacy, or even to work on a project together.
- 3 Develop a preschool-to-home and home-to-preschool communications strategy.** In addition to using letters, e-platforms or face-to-face conversations to share about children's development and progress, find out how parents prefer to communicate. Factor in how parents can be encouraged to share about their children. This will serve as an invaluable guide for educators in their efforts to improve communication.
- 4 Identify community resources and services to strengthen learning experiences.** Look for appropriate events or programmes that children and their families can participate in or tap on.
- 5 Develop parent leaders and representatives.** Identify parents who can be groomed to lead the Parent Support Group or represent parents in the Planning Committee for preschool activities.





view and try to understand where they are coming from. Whatever solution we come up with to tackle the problem, I believe that it is important to involve parents in the process. There will be challenges in any adult relationships but we must have patience, understanding and respect.

**Brian:** As parents, we have to be mindful that even though teachers are doing their best to meet our expectations, the centre has its own operational and professional considerations. We do need to be more flexible and be open to alternative solutions or suggestions. I also find it helpful when teachers take our comments as feedback, rather than 'just another complaint'. I would say the same goes for parents.

**EDUCATORS, BESIDES COLLABORATING CLOSELY WITH PARENTS, HOW DO YOU INVOLVE OTHER COMMUNITY PARTNERS?**

**Hadijah:** Community collaborations are very much part our curriculum. We organise professional learning journeys for our educators so that they can plan a more integrated learning experience for children. As part of the Children's Day celebrations last year, our children sold their crafts to raise funds for those in need. The children also delivered food items to orphanages and homes for the elderly. These experiences help to enrich

their learning experiences, understand issues in the wider community, and instill good values in their foundation years.

**Sally:** Our centre also taps into resources in our neighbourhood. We brought children to nearby hawker centres to build on our discussions on food in class. The teachers also communicated with the stallholders beforehand to ensure the children's experiences were authentic and purposeful. Such meaningful partnerships within our community give our teachers more flexibility and creativity in planning activities that enable children to be fully immersed in their learning.

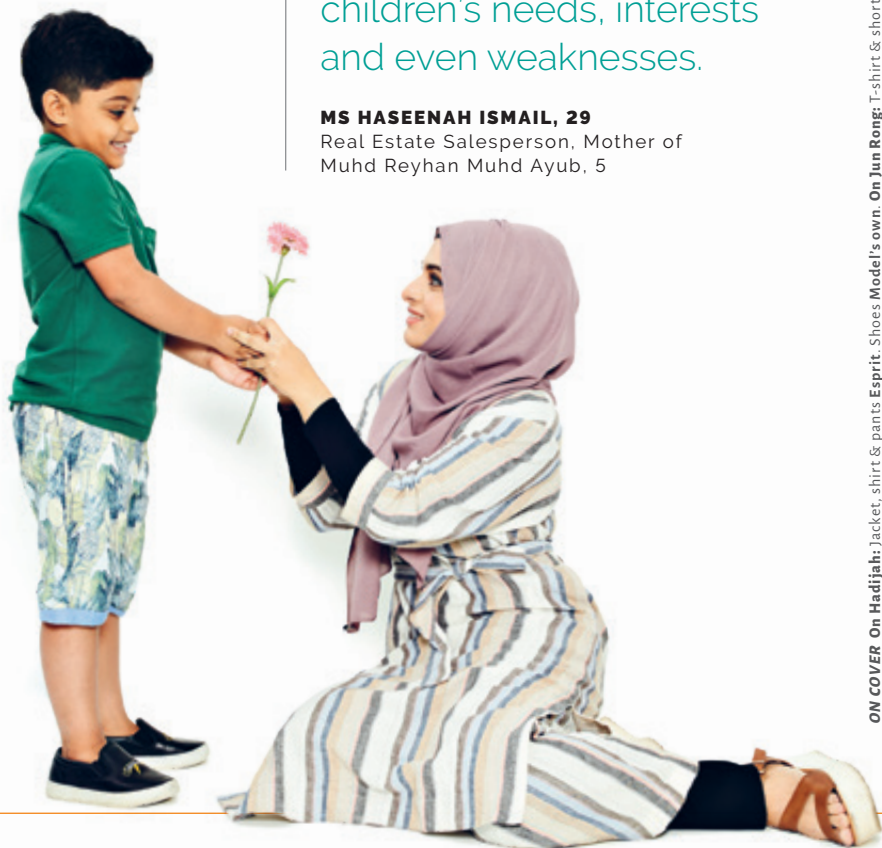
“The more parents and teachers work together, the better we can strengthen the home-preschool links. Exchanging information and suggestions can help both parties better understand the children's needs, interests and even weaknesses.

**MS HASEENAH ISMAIL, 29**  
Real Estate Salesperson, Mother of Muhd Reyhan Muhd Ayub, 5



**LET'S CELEBRATE CHILDREN**

Children's Day is commemorated on various dates in different countries. The United Nations Universal Children's Day was established in 1954 and celebrated annually on 20 November to promote improvement of children's welfare. In Singapore, we celebrate this day on the first Friday in the month of October.



ON COVER: On Hadijah: Jacket, shirt & pants: Esprit; Shoes: Model's own. On Jun Bong: T-shirt & shorts: H&M; Hat & sneakers: KidsSport. On Yusuf: Shirt & shorts: H&M; Sneakers: KidsSport; Hat & socks: Stylist's own. On Amir: Polo shirt & shirt: tied around waist: Marks & Spencer. On Sally: Shirt: Esprit. On Bryan: Safari shirt and hat: Stylist's own. On Muhd Reyhan: Shirt & T-shirt: Gingersnaps. On Haseenah: Blouse: H&M. PAGE 6: On Muhd Reyhan: Polo shirt & shorts: Gingersnaps; Shoes: Model's own. On Haseenah: Dress: Esprit; Shoes: Model's own.



**TECH TALK**

**NIEC LECTURER DR RAUDHAH YAHYA DISCUSSES THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN HOME-PRESCHOOL COMMUNICATION.**

**V**irtual relationships should not replace in-person relationships. However, technology can be used to complement and enhance them.

The quality of the virtual relationship is usually dependent on the face-to-face communication the two parties already have. It is important to build rapport by initiating the relationship in person and subsequently in situations such as parent-teacher conferences.

If used constructively, technology can enhance home-school communication and bridge communication gaps. It can:

- **Minimise accessibility issues.** This is especially important for parents who are not able to take calls during work hours.
- **Enable parents to visualise clearly.** When a child's daily activity is captured in photos and shared with parents, it is more meaningful to the parents. The parents can also use it as a

conversation-starter to talk to their child about his day.

➤ **Reduce language barriers.** This is useful for parents who are not fluent in the English language. They can use Google Translate or have a third-party application interpret the text or voice message for them.

Using text messaging or social media to communicate will depend on the comfort level of parents and educators with the technology. One should be mindful that the lack of intonation and non-verbal cues leaves room for potential misunderstandings. To avoid this, teachers should make an effort to understand the children's cultural backgrounds since cultural nuances among families may differ, hence affecting communication.

While technology can be used as a tool to facilitate communication, nothing will beat interacting in person. ●



**Dr Raudhah Yahya**

Lecturer, National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC)

Dr Yahya's teaching experiences in Singapore, Canada and Oman involve engaging learners with diverse needs and abilities. Her research interests include play pedagogy, home-school discourses, children's thinking, teachers' beliefs and practices, and inclusive practices in school. She has a doctorate in Early Childhood Education from the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

**TIPS FOR OFFLINE AND ONLINE COMMUNICATION**

**FOR TEACHERS:**

1. State clear expectations and communicate the anticipated response time to parents.
2. Communicate sensitive issues in person and present observational evidence, where appropriate.
3. Offer alternatives for parents who are not comfortable with technological modes of communication.
4. Start with empathy and respond only when one is calm. If necessary, seek advice from the centre principal, colleagues or management before responding.

**FOR PARENTS:**

1. Communicate in a respectful manner to teachers. Use polite intonation and phrases such as 'May I ask if ...'. Avoid using exclamation marks in emails and text as this can be easily misunderstood.
2. For matters that require clarification from teachers, make an appointment to meet in person.
3. Remain calm and clarify to understand the centre's or teacher's perspective.
4. Avoid sharing issues and concerns on social media as it may complicate the matter.

