

# VALUES SYSTEM

HOW FOSTERING HEALTHY VALUES FROM AN EARLY AGE SHAPES CHARACTER AND HELPS CHILDREN DEVELOP IN POSITIVE WAYS.



**V**alues guide one's behaviours and choices. They influence our decisions and impact the way we communicate and interact with others. As Mr Arthur Ling, Chief Executive of Fei Yue Community Services, puts it, "Values help us determine what is important and what is worthwhile to us."

With 2022 designated as the Year of Celebrating SG Families, family values revolving around love, care and concern, respect and commitment are in the spotlight. Families built on these core values have strong bonds and support, which contribute to positive attitudes and behaviours in children, and help them grow into valued members of society.

Beanstalk gathered a group of educators and parents, together with Mr Ling, to discuss the importance of

“Children with positive values are able to distinguish good from bad, and learn to manage different situations independently as they grow.”

**MS SHERLA TAN, 35**  
Centre Manager,  
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Babies & Kids



values and why they matter to children's development. All agree that during the early years, both family and preschool play a vital role in imparting and reinforcing healthy values. They also share strategies on how little ones can be encouraged to adopt healthy values.

**EDUCATORS, WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO NURTURE POSITIVE VALUES FROM YOUNG?**

**Siti Haslina Binte Sahadan:** Nurturing positive values in children moulds them into better people with empathy for others.

**Sherla Tan:** Children with positive values are able to distinguish good from bad, and learn to manage different situations independently as they grow.

**WHEN AND HOW DO CHILDREN 'LEARN' VALUES?**

**Arthur Ling:** Young children start learning values by observing and imitating the adults around them. Right from the start, parents should be ready to role-model the values they wish to impart to their child. When the child is able to understand words and meaning, caregivers can then connect the values with the behaviour they are role-modelling.

**Sherla:** Besides role-modelling, we can connect children with values by asking them questions. For example: "Would your friends be happier if you shared toys with them? Why?" This strategy helps children reflect on situations

“Feedback from teachers allows parents to reinforce at home what the child has learnt in preschool.

**MR MOHAMMAD EFFENDI BIN SULEIMAN, 41**  
Warehouse Assistant Manager, father of Nur Iqrima Binte Mohammad Effendi, 2



**MEET BECKY!**

Becky Bunny is Families for Life's (FFL) adorable mascot who goes on fun-filled adventures as she discovers what it means to show **love, care and concern, commitment and respect** to our families. To join Becky Bunny and access printables, stories and other free family resources, visit [go.gov.sg/ffl-five-activities](http://go.gov.sg/ffl-five-activities) or scan the QR code.



and feel empowered in making their own decisions. Educators become the facilitators in giving children other possible solutions and directions. We can also be counsellors in managing their emotions.

**HOW CAN THE CHILD'S FAMILY MEMBERS DEVELOP POSITIVE VALUES IN THEM?**

**Sherla:** Parents are the child's first teacher, so it is important for them to set the right example. Children process their thoughts based on what they see. This eventually develops into the child's own values system. In addition, if family members establish good communication practices, it becomes a channel to help children cope with challenging situations, strengthen their values and improve their self-confidence.

**Arthur:** One way to develop values in children is to discuss the difference between healthy and unhealthy values. You can also start giving your child some responsibilities, such as cleaning a table or cheering up a friend who is ill. This will teach your child the importance of positive values such as caring for others.

**2022 HAS BEEN DEDICATED AS THE YEAR OF CELEBRATING SG FAMILIES, WITH A FOCUS ON FOUR CORE FAMILY VALUES: LOVE, CARE AND CONCERN, COMMITMENT, AND RESPECT. PARENTS, HOW DO YOU INCULCATE THESE AT HOME?**

**Mohammad Effendi Bin Suleiman:** Having respect for others is very important to me. When I come home from work, I address my family members by their names and ask about their day. Addressing everyone appropriately is a form of respect. We should teach our children this good habit and not let them hide behind the excuse of shyness to neglect greeting others.

**Raihanah Bee Bte Abdul Hamid:** Children grow up to be caring and ethical people when they are treated with care and concern themselves. As parents, we can do this by tending to their physical



and emotional needs, showing affection, respecting their individual personalities, taking a genuine interest in their lives, talking about things that matter, and affirming their efforts and achievements. Children who have experienced care are better able to know how to care for others.

**EDUCATORS, HOW DO YOU INTEGRATE SOME OF THESE FAMILY VALUES INTO THE CURRICULUM?**

**Sherla:** We use books with a family theme to talk about familial love, and follow up with an activity where children create a card for someone they love. We teach children as young as 18 months old about the concept of care and concern through the planting of pumpkin seeds. Children learn that, with commitment and continuous care, they will be able to see the plants grow and bear fruit.

**Siti:** To teach children about commitment, we give them responsibilities and tasks to carry out, such as putting away their toys and washing their hands before and after meals. This is built into their routine at our centre. Educators offer words of encouragement so that children will persevere in completing the task. To inculcate care and concern, we encourage children to help comfort another child and make him or her feel better.



**MORAL DILEMMA**

Parents and educators may prioritise different values or even disagree. Dr Yvonne Chan, a Senior Lecturer at the National Institute of Early Childhood Development, offers strategies to resolve these conflicts.

There are times when parents and educators do not hold the same views on what is best for children. Views may differ on what the child should learn in preschool, how to manage conflicts between classmates, or what eating habits are acceptable, among others.

Tensions may arise when both parties hold different values dear, leading to different expectations. If both sides cannot reach a common understanding, the child may be caught in the middle. This may have a negative impact on the child's sense of safety and security.

Here are some ways educators and parents can reach a common understanding.

- **BUILD A STRONG PARENT-EDUCATOR PARTNERSHIP BASED ON TRUST, TRANSPARENCY AND MUTUAL RESPECT.** Recognise that both parties have the child's best interests at heart. Through effective communication, parents and educators can strengthen their relationship to better support the child's development together.
- **THINK WIN-WIN.** Both parties should be open to feedback. Active listening helps parents and educators empathise with one another by verbalising their needs and acknowledging mutual feelings. Understanding both perspectives allows both sides to work together towards a mutually beneficial solution.
- **COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS CLEARLY.** To avoid miscommunication, educators and parents should be ready to clarify and explain the rationale behind their values or teaching approaches.
- **DO NOT ASSIGN BLAME.** This can be counterproductive. It is more helpful to acknowledge how both parties may perceive each other negatively during conflicts, while showing care and respect in your communication.



“Nurturing positive values in children moulds them into better people with empathy for others.

**MDM SITI HASLINA BINTE SAHADAN, 36**  
Pre-Nursery Teacher, Darul Ghufuran Mosque Kindergarten

### HOW CAN FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF NURTURING HEALTHY VALUES IN CHILDREN?

**Sherla:** It is important for families and educators to work together to cultivate positive values in children. We had a mother who shared with us that she was pleasantly surprised when her 20-month-old son said "thank you" when she passed his dinner to him, and then brought his empty bowl to the sink when he was done. She felt these were good values that the preschool had inculcated, and she wanted to reinforce this routine at home.

**Arthur:** When parents give feedback to educators about their child's positive changes at home, this is a great encouragement to educators. Feedback from parents will also help educators know what they can do to support and encourage the child in preschool.

**Effendi:** Feedback from teachers allows parents to reinforce at home what the child has learnt in preschool. I will also discuss with my child's teachers when I observe undesirable or inappropriate behaviour in my child. They recommend activities to be carried out at home or encourage good behaviour in their morning talks in preschool.

**Siti:** For instance, in preschool, we inculcate the idea of sharing toys during playtime. At home, parents can reinforce this by encouraging children to share with family members.

**Raihanah:** I believe building a good relationship and being open to each other's suggestions will help create a strong parent-teacher partnership. We can work together towards our common goal of raising a happy child with healthy values.

**Sherla:** Conflicts can arise when values and expectations between parents and educators differ. It is important for both parties to develop a set of



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[go.gov.sg/sed-insights-bingo-resource](http://go.gov.sg/sed-insights-bingo-resource)

agreed-upon values as this will benefit the child. It is also important to engage parents in open and respectful communication to work through differing expectations.

**Siti:** We had an educator who faced challenges dealing with a child's habit of not being punctual. What we did was to communicate with the parents our concerns on how this could impact the child now and in the future. For example, if the issue is left unattended, the child may get the wrong message that being late is acceptable. As adults, it is important to nurture values such as being responsible and respecting rules.

**Sherla:** Values may differ between families based on culture, traditions, religion or beliefs. But being in a multi-racial country like ours, we need to teach children to respect the uniqueness of each culture and to care for friends and neighbours, regardless of differences. At Bloomberry, children are assigned team tasks. These help them understand the importance of respecting individual views within the group, embrace different working styles and work together cooperatively.

### HAS FOSTERING HEALTHY VALUES BENEFITTED YOUR CHILD IN OTHER WAYS?

**Raihanah:** My son is more self-aware and can express himself better.

**Effendi:** My girls are happy and self-confident. Even if they make bad decisions, they are able to overcome it with positivity.



“Children grow up to be caring and ethical people when they are treated with care and concern themselves.”

**MDM RAIHANAH BEE BTE ABDUL HAMID, 39**  
Religious Teacher, mother of Mohammad Ubaidullah Bin Mohammad Zulfazli, 2

# EMPATHY IN CHILDREN

## ECDA FELLOW ANG-OH CHUI HWA ON WHY IT MATTERS AND HOW TO DEVELOP IT.

We live in a social world, and children need to understand that those around them can have different thoughts and feelings. When children develop empathy towards others, they become more thoughtful, helpful and cooperative. Young children develop empathy in three stages.

**> AGES 0 TO 2: Time for Cuddles**  
Cuddles help soothe away negative emotions and provide a sense of security as a foundation for positive feelings such as compassion. Babies and toddlers copy the emotions of people they interact with, which is a necessary precursor to empathy. A two-year-old's understanding of empathy is limited by his or her personal experiences, such as goodbyes or a toy being snatched away. Empathy needs to be repeatedly modelled by caregivers so that it becomes part of their behaviour.

**> AGES 3 TO 4: Time for Connections**  
At three, children make the connection between emotions and desires. They are able to respond to a friend's distress with soothing gestures. Sometimes, they can only relate to the feelings of others if they themselves share the same feelings and perspectives. Four-year-olds are capable of seeing a situation from another person's perspective, but they need to know that not all reactions to feelings are appropriate or acceptable.

**> AGES 5 TO 6: Time for Compassion**  
As children become more aware of their own emotions, they begin to recognise them in others. Their emotional vocabulary expands. This allows them to have in-depth discussions about emotions. At this stage, they are learning how to read non-verbal social cues such as actions, gestures and facial expressions.

**HOW TO TEACH EMPATHY AND COMPASSION**  
Our ability to empathise is a mixture of our disposition and environment. Empathy is not fully internalised unless children apply it to real-life situations. The 'Start Small Dream Big' (SSDB) movement, for instance, provides experiential learning opportunities for young children to be engaged in acts of doing good and serving the community. Here are some strategies to help children learn about empathy and compassion.

**1 Recognise emotions.** Teach words about feelings and emotions. Create faces in a mirror and talk about how



the expressions make children feel — for instance, happy, mad or sad.

**2 Capture 'value-able' moments.** Take photos of thoughtful and considerate interactions in your classroom. Display the photos, and label the emotions or acts of compassion.

**3 Role-play.** Have an open conversation with children. Validate difficult emotions. Ask a child who is distressed what would make him or her feel better. Encourage other children to come up with meaningful ways to show compassion.

**4 Model empathy.** Initiate caring gestures such as a hug. Use a gentle and calm voice to communicate with an agitated child by using "I" messages, such as "I don't like it when you hit me. It hurts." These model the importance of self-awareness, from which empathy develops.

**5 Read storybooks about emotions and empathy.** Some titles to explore:

- *I Am Happy: A Touch-and-Feel Book of Feelings* by Steve Light
- *My Many Colored Days* by Dr Seuss
- *Baby Happy Baby Sad* by Leslie Patricelli
- *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig
- *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?: A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids* by Carol McCloud
- *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson



**ANG-OH CHUI HWA**  
ECDA Fellow and Principal, Far Eastern Kindergarten  
Mrs Ang believes that character, construction, compassion and communication are key determinants of a good preschool programme. She also considers the early childhood years the best time to engage children's minds and shepherd their hearts.