



# BONDING WITH BABY

**EDUCARER FIZAH FAKIH BUILDS POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH INFANTS THROUGH A PEDAGOGY OF RESPECTFUL, RESPONSIVE AND RECIPROCAL CAREGIVING.**



Ms Fizah builds trusting relationships with each and every infant at her centre

**T**he belief that children thrive on warm and nurturing caregiving underpins Ms Fizah Fakih's relationships with infants under her care at TwinkleKidz @ Bendemeer. Though children have their individual temperaments and personality traits, their brain and holistic development is greatly influenced by the quality of attachments formed with parents and caregivers from birth. To create an optimal learning environment, early interactions should be rooted in the '3Rs' of respectful, responsive and reciprocal caregiving.

"When infants' expectations for the 3Rs are met, their brain experiences pleasure and delight. This strengthens trust between caregiver and infant. Infants will thus feel confident to explore their environment, relate to others and

engage in learning," explains Ms Fizah. On the flip side, babies who feel unwanted, unloved or not respected by their caregivers may later develop anxiety, insecurity and mistrust.

## NURTURING SECURE ATTACHMENTS

Parents often face difficulties in helping their infants ease into an unfamiliar environment or setting, for example, going to infant care for the first time. When educators engage the 3Rs in their interactions and communications with infants, it helps reduce their anxieties.

"We greet every child with a warm smile and a gentle, pleasant voice. Positive and friendly facial expressions and responses will set the tone for the child's day," says Ms Fizah. "Focus on connecting and building a trusting relationship with the child. Treat him as a unique individual; respect his cultural, emotional and physical needs. With a new child, we pay close attention to his needs and emotional signals, and comfort him during the separation anxiety period. Being consistent, reassuring and responding promptly are key to calming the child and



Observe each infant closely and fine-tune routine care to meet individual needs

## A 3RS CHECKLIST

### BE RESPECTFUL

- ✓ Use "please" and "thank you" when speaking to children.
- ✓ Give children your full attention. Kneel down to their eye level and maintain eye contact.

### BE RESPONSIVE

- ✓ Treat children as unique individuals. Take note of each child's temperament, cues and feelings, and show affection accordingly.
- ✓ If a child is more cautious in new situations, anticipate his reaction and provide comfort and assurance. Don't rush him if he needs more time to do certain tasks.

### BE RECIPROCAL

- ✓ Communicate in a calm, gentle manner. Give the child time to respond or show interest.
- ✓ Explain your actions during caregiving routines. Say: "I'm going to remove your diaper to clean you up" or "Let's count your toes as we wash them: 1, 2, 3..."

building a strong bond. By closely observing his eating and sleeping habits, we can fine-tune routine care tasks such as diapering, bathing, feeding and naptimes to meet the child's individual needs."

## CONSISTENCY MATTERS

It is in the child's interest for both parents and educators to maintain consistency. Educators should involve parents as much as possible. Ms Fizah shares routine care tasks and the 3Rs with parents, and also encourages them to share their caregiving practices at home. That way, what is practised in the centre can be mirrored at home and vice versa, creating a consistent, predictable environment where children feel safe and secure and learn best. ●

# MENTORING MISSION

**RAMAKRISHNA MISSION SARADA KINDERGARTEN'S MENTORSHIP AND SCAFFOLDING HELPED EDUCATORS TO BETTER NURTURE CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE AND SELF-REGULATION.**



Rewarding children's good behaviours with badges is further reinforced by peer acknowledgement

**W**ith its wealth of experience in developing emotional competence and self-regulation skills in children, Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Kindergarten has mentored four preschools to deepen educators' knowledge and pedagogical skills in this area. "The preschools find our sharing relevant and practical as they know we have gone through similar challenges and found strategies that worked for us," says principal Ms N. Pushpavalli.

## WORKABLE STRATEGIES

Teachers from Sarada Kindergarten visited the mentee centres to understand their culture and challenges, and worked with educators to come up with appropriate strategies and action plans to manage children's behaviour. Mentee centres then weighed the pros and cons of each strategy and decided which best suited them.

"There are different pedagogies to manage emotional and behavioural

issues, depending on the age of the child," says Ms Pushpavalli. For very young children, the adult can help the child regulate his social and emotional interactions with clear dos and don'ts. Older children can be involved in exercises where they reflect on good and bad behaviours (see box for more strategies).

Teachers are advised to openly acknowledge positive behaviours displayed by children in the presence of their peers. These behaviours are then made visible on a notice board that can be shared with visitors and peers, for further reinforcement.

## INSIGHTS AND TAKEAWAYS

Ms Rosa Lim, a teacher at Whiz Kids Montessori @ Hougang, one of the mentee centres, has gained new insights into the teacher's role in facilitating children's acquisition of skills to manage their emotions.

"I learned that it is important to create an intentional environment where children have opportunities for purposeful engagement and interactions with adults and peers.

One way is to integrate self-regulation skills into storytelling sessions and games," says Ms Lim. "I also learned that self-regulation skills need time to nurture, so a consistent approach is necessary. It is vital that educators explicitly teach these skills to our children."

"The long-term goal for cultivating self-regulation in children is to nurture self-directed and confident learners," adds Ms Pushpavalli. "When a child is able to self-regulate his emotions and behaviours, he becomes engaged. His ability to think and make connections anchors the new learning." ●

## BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

Strategies to strengthen emotional competence and foster self-regulation.

### REWARD CHART

Mounted on a wall, this pictorial chart displays jars labelled with each child's name. Children get a coloured 'candy' in their jars when they abide by classroom rules such as 'eyes on teacher' and 'quiet mouth'.



### SELF-REGULATION BOARD

Children take part in identifying good behaviour (e.g. "I can wait", "I can share") and bad behaviour (e.g. "shouting", "snatching") and post comments on their class' self-regulation board.

### BOOK OF PRAISES

A two-way communication tool for teachers and parents, this handwritten log of the child's positive behaviours at home and in preschool serves as a reminder and reinforcement.



### STAR AWARDS

Certificates for exemplary conduct are presented to children during the centre-based Recognition Day.



In 2017, ECDA introduced a new Honour Roll for Early Childhood Innovation Mentor Centres. Preschools that have clinched two or more distinction and/or merit ECDA Innovation Awards for four consecutive years take on a mentoring role to nurture a culture of innovation and professional excellence in the sector. Besides Sarada Kindergarten, the other three Mentor Centres are Odyssey The Global Preschool (Fourth Avenue), St. James' Church Kindergarten (Harding) and Ascension Kindergarten.



Children pick up valuable self-regulation skills during a firefighter role-play game

“ It is important that my child learns to identify her emotions as she will be better able to make out what is causing her to feel a certain way. This will help us understand the reasons for her emotions and behaviours, and we can teach her how to manage them better in the future.

**MDM TAN SUAT LAY,**  
mother of N1 child Darina Lim

## POSITIVE REGULATION

**SKOOL4KIDZ PRESCHOOL @ PUNGGOL WATERWAY CASCADIA HELPS CHILDREN LEARN TO REGULATE EMOTIONS THROUGH SHARING DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES WITH PARENTS.**

**S**kool4Kidz Preschool @ Punggol Waterway Cascadia integrates self-regulation skills into lesson plans and daily experiences. The centre employs different strategies for children of different age groups so that they acquire relevant skills to regulate their emotions, as part of their social-emotional development.

### AGE-APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES

“Babies have different ways of calming down. Some need physical contact such as hugging or rocking; others prefer to be swaddled,” explains Ms Bondoc Charlotte, the centre’s Early Years Educator.

As toddlers start to form their own ideas, the centre encourages them to choose the materials they use for lessons. “The opportunity to make decisions builds trust between children and teachers, and makes our toddlers feel in control of their learning,” says Ms Charlotte.

Through songs, storybooks and role-play, teachers guide children in

the Nursery class to use appropriate language to express emotions. For Kindergarten children, role-play helps them grasp the consequences of their actions on themselves and their peers. In addition, show-and-tell sessions offer a chance for them to reflect and share thoughts, experiences and different self-regulation control strategies.

### WORKING TOGETHER

“Helping children regulate their emotions can take place anywhere and anytime,” highlights Ms Charlotte. The centre stresses the importance of two-way communication. “Parents can build on what the child has learned in the centre by applying the strategies at home and updating the teacher regularly on progress,” says Ms Charlotte. It ensures consistency, and enables both teachers and parents to implement appropriate regulation strategies and encourage positive behaviour. ●



### PARENTS, TRY THIS!

- **Modelling**  
Demonstrate the type of behaviour you want your child to display. If you don’t want your child to scream when he is angry, avoid doing the same thing in front of him.
- **Scaffolding**  
Praise and affirm your child when he is able to express his thoughts, behaviours and feelings in a positive way, such as when he verbalises his feelings instead of throwing a tantrum.
- **Observing**  
Understand your child’s body language. For instance, when your child independently places a pacifier in her mouth when she is upset, it shows she has acquired self-soothe skills and is ready to pick up self-regulation skills.



Skool4Kidz Preschool @ Punggol Waterway Cascadia is a SPARK-certified centre. SPARK is a quality assurance framework to help preschools identify their strengths and areas for growth, and work towards continuous improvement. For more on SPARK certification, go to [www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKinfo](http://www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKinfo).