

What Children Want

For the last couple of weeks we have seen some lively discussions on the role of fathering today. This was triggered by the national call to have more babies in Singapore. I think it is a good exercise to try to get a grip on the landscape of the Singapore family in the 21st century.

Personally, I believe that Singapore fathers are more involved in early child-rearing today than in the past. I see fathers carrying and ferrying babies and children in the shopping malls and so on. I know of fathers who cook, do the marketing and do laundry and ironing, besides sending kids to school. This is good progress for our families and fathers are capable of even more. But to do this fathers need to know what their children need from them. I believe more than ever, that the children of today need the "inspirational presence" of their fathers.

One father sheepishly said to me, "I am not good in my studies, so I have nothing to impart to my children." However, children have repeatedly told me that they do not enjoy being tutored by their parents. What they want is for their fathers to stand by them; to be their cheerleaders.

Too often children are already stressed by peer pressure to do well in school. Nobody, including our kids, likes to fail. Nobody WANTS to fail! So disregard the bravados of hurt pride and really see the fear and anxiety that bind our children in school and at the playground, when they think they do not "measure up".

The maxim "A friend in need is a friend indeed" particularly applies here for fathering. Fathers can become inspirational when they go alongside their struggling children and say, "Hey that was tough. I failed too when I was your age and boy was it painful. I learnt that sometimes it's just like that. But I also learnt that I can try again, if I want to."

We are often our harshest critics. It is the same with children. At times like that, having a cheerleader for a father is crucial because children then know that they are loved for who they are, even when they have failed.

In a performance-driven society like ours, we need to show our children that "family" is about unconditional acceptance especially when their chips are down. In this way, maybe we cease to think of our children as OUR pride and joy; and start making parenting more about the privilege and joy of creating, sharing life. Then maybe parenting also becomes less about pleasure-seeking and more about life-giving.

Wishing you a happy fathering week ahead,
Centre for Fathering