



*Converging*  
**PROFESSIONAL WISDOM**  
**FOR Family Well-Being**

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## **Message from Mrs. Patricia CHU, Chairperson, CIFA**



With the Covid19 pandemic spreading quickly throughout the world, this quarter is a most challenging one for all, including individuals, families, medical professionals, businessmen, government officials and politicians. Inevitably, activities in the family, educational institutions, private, government and civil society are being affected. These involve school suspension, work at home, closing of businesses, cancellation of fund raising activities, ban on gatherings and lockdown controls causing widespread fear, worries and uncertainty among all. As many have pointed out, it has long lasting psychological, social, economic and political effects requiring collaborative and innovative ways to cope with this unprecedented situation.

During the quarter, major activities of CIFA including the Exchange Programme on Wofoo 3A Project 2018 and the fund raising Walk For Family Well-Being have to be cancelled, depriving participants the opportunity for sharing and exchange of knowledge and good practice, and enjoying a healthy morning walk to raise funds for CIFA. At the same time, deadlines for submission of projects for Wofoo 3A Project 2020 and early bird registration and submission of abstracts for the 6th Regional Symposium have to be extended. Despite that, on-going work of CIFA continued and for the first time, the Council had a most fruitful Zoom meeting with the largest number attending from all over the region!

In this issue, we are most thankful to the Ministry of Social and Family Development of Singapore for providing a very informative piece on the 2nd Asian Family Conference held in November 2019 with representatives from CIFA Council being invited to join, the feedback of which had been featured in the last issue. High quality keynote and panel presentations on 'Parenting For Stronger Families: Challenges and Opportunities' and new initiatives on parenting programs advocated and supported by the Ministry were shared, giving much food for thought for participants.

On a similar theme, Ms. Bawany Chinapan of Malaysia shared her thoughts on 'Parenting : What does it take?' highlighting that quality parenting has a pervasive impact on child's development. It would be important for parents to be their children's guide rather than heroes, and positive parenting advocates that all children can flourish the most when they are left to explore and have freedom to do so.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a growing concern in Hong Kong as there is an increasing number of cases reported to the Social Welfare Department each year. The 'Women Helping Women – Step Out from Violence Project' involving social welfare organisation and tertiary institutes is a good attempt to explore the phenomenon of IPV in HK providing inspiring and valuable findings so that we are more informed in mapping out strategies and approaches in service development and delivery.

Before I sign off, I would like to share my thoughts on the lessons learnt from the pandemic. During the past quarter I have been receiving numerous messages from family and friends on the issue. While some are painting negative and worrying pictures, I am pleased to note that most are positive and forward looking, especially those raising philosophical thoughts on what the virus has taught us. Yes, it is a time for us to stop and ponder on the meaning of life, appreciation of hygiene and healthy life style, more time with our beloved family members, showing concern for others, and on a wider front the effect on the environment, humanity and international collaboration!

Let's stay safe, healthy, calm and positive! Let's pray for the speedy recovery of the infected and that normal routine of life will resume, with a new perspective and insight!



# 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian Family Conference 2019

## Parenting For Stronger Families: Challenges And Opportunities in Singapore

Organised by the Ministry of Social and Family Development

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian Family Conference was held on 13 and 14 November 2019 in Singapore. Themed 'Parenting for Stronger Families: Challenges and Opportunities', the conference was organised by Singapore's Ministry of Social and Family Development and saw around 350 participants, comprising academics, researchers, policymakers from government agencies, and practitioners from social service agencies and non-profit organisations. Participants enjoyed the rich discussion and diverse perspectives shared on emerging trends, policies, and practices to better equip parents with positive parenting practices.



### Keynote Panel Session (left) & Panel Session (right)

From left to right: Professor Matthew Sanders (1<sup>st</sup> Keynote Speaker), Professor Daniel Shek (2<sup>nd</sup> Keynote Speaker), Professor Paulin Straughan (Keynote Moderator), Ms Anne Hollonds (Speaker), Professor Cynthia Leung (Speaker), Assoc Prof Esther Goh (Speaker), Dr Thang Leng Leng (Moderator) (Credits: MSF)

It has become increasingly important to provide parents with the right parenting support, as more face stresses and challenges in raising their children. External factors such as societal and cultural expectations can add to parental stress. Parent education programmes, when done well, have proven to foster better child outcomes, better familial relationships and greater parental confidence. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian Family Conference aimed to share the benefits of parenting programmes more widely.

At the conference, two keynote speakers – Professor Matthew Sanders and Professor Daniel Shek – shared their views on the impact of positive parenting and how parenting programmes can be further improved. Professor Matthew Sanders (Professor of Clinical Psychology, Director of the Parenting and Family Support Centre at University of Queensland and founder of Triple P – Positive Parenting Programme) shared that for parenting programmes to work on a larger scale, there is a need to adopt a multi-level view, where different levels of intensity of interventions are available to meet the needs of different families. This should be supported by a multi-disciplinary approach involving trainers from different disciplines, such as social work or childcare, to ensure that programmes are able to cover different areas of need.

Professor Daniel Shek (Chairman of the Family Council of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Associate Vice President, Chair Professor of Applied Social Sciences, and Li and Fung Professor in Service Leadership Education at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University) shared evidence that positive parenting practices such as being responsive to children lead to a more positive and warm parent-child relationship, and more resilient children with stronger socio-emotional and cognitive abilities. Conversely, dysfunctional parenting practices, such as being too controlling, would lead to child behavioural and psychological problems, and leave a negative impact on the child's self-esteem, learning competence and prosocial behaviours. He also highlighted the need for more research on Asian societies and families to better understand of how culture impacts parenting.

Besides the keynote speakers, there were also three panel sessions which focused on findings from parenting research studies, the effectiveness of parenting programmes in Singapore, and the topic of grandparenting. Dr Cheung Hoi Shan (Assistant Professor from the Division of Social Sciences in Yale-NUS College) stressed the importance of understanding different parent styles, such as authoritative or permissive styles, within their cultural contexts, and more local studies need to be done in this regard. Parenting practices should also be tailored to each child's temperament, as the same parenting practice or behaviour may have different effects on different children.

Dr Dorcas Yap (Senior Psychologist, Department of Child Development at the Singapore Kandang Kerbau Women's and Children Hospital) and Ms Vivienne Ng (Chief Psychologist, MSF) shared evidence on the effectiveness of the Triple P and Signposts parenting programmes, which have been proven effective in bringing about better parenting and child outcomes in Singapore, such as greater parenting competence, lower parenting stress, improved emotional states and reduced behavioural problems in children.

Besides parents, grandparents also play an important role in child and family outcomes. Professor Cynthia Leung (Department of Applied Social Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University) shared that, while grandparents were generally happy to care for and spend time with their grandchildren, some found grandparenting stressful and a major responsibility that resulted in less sleep and reduced participation in social activities. She encouraged more grandparents to participate in grandparenting programmes, as grandparents who participated in the Grandparent Triple P Programme in Hong Kong reported higher confidence in managing their grandchildren's behaviour, compared to those who did not attend the programme.



### Group photo with CIFA Chairperson, Council Members and Representatives who attended the AFC 2019

From left to right: Professor Daniel Shek (Keynote Speaker), Professor Cherng-Tay Hsueh (CIFA Representative), Mr Richard Tan (Senior Director, Women's Development and International Relations Division), Mrs Patricia Chu (CIFA Chairperson), Ms Bawany Chinapan (CIFA Council Member), Ms Charlotte Beck (Senior Director, Family Development Group/MSF), Ms Candice Keng (CIFA Representative), Mr Wong Kwong Sing (CIFA Council Member) (Credits: MSF)

To better support parents in their parenting journey, MSF has been working more closely with schools and community partners. For example, evidence-based parenting programmes such as Triple P and Signposts have been offered to parents since 2014, to enhance their parenting skills and improve their sense of parental competence. At the conference, Mr Desmond Lee, Minister for Social and Family Development, announced further enhancements in these efforts. 10 Parenting Support Providers (PSPs) will be appointed on a regional basis, to work with schools to deliver parenting programmes and other related services more holistically to families in Singapore. This will improve access to parenting support services.

Another of MSF's key community partner is the Families for Life (FFL) Council, which aims to build strong and resilient families. Under FFL's initiative Family 365, FFL rolled out a suite of complimentary one to two-hour family life education programmes at workplaces and community touchpoints to equip families with knowledge and tips on parenting. The FFL Website (<http://www.familiesforlife.sg>) also provides families with parenting information such as raising resilient children. The Ministry also works closely with the Centre for Fathering who promotes national movements such as Dads for Life and Mums for Life in schools and the community, to galvanise parents to support each other, and work towards active parenting.

As parents of new-borns may need more support, MSF has developed the Baby Bonus Portal Resources, a one-stop portal for parents of new-borns to receive information on caring for their new-born. Singapore has also recently implemented the Moments of Life app, a one-stop convenient mobile app for parents to access a range of services, such as keeping track of their children's medical appointments and obtaining information on parenting information and events.

More can be done to support parents in their journey. This includes understanding parents' attitudes, values and beliefs in parenting. The Ministry is embarking on a Study on Parenting in Singapore to understand the parenting styles, attitudes and practices of Singaporean parents and possible influence on child outcomes. The findings will help us understand different profiles of parents and inform on how to better design and target our parenting programmes and initiatives, to provide parents with more tailored support.

Visit MSF website (<https://www.msf.gov.sg/events/Pages/Asian-Family-Conference-2019.aspx>) for more info about MSF AFC 2019 and the speakers.

This article is contributed by the Family Development Group of the Ministry of Social and Family Development, Singapore. For more information, you may contact the Family Development Group at [msf\\_fdg@msf.gov.sg](mailto:msf_fdg@msf.gov.sg)





# Parenting: What Does It Take?

## Introduction

Most western studies may point towards authoritative parenting style to beget children with better education, social and emotional state (Jeynes, W.H, 2007). These researches regarding parenting control or styles indicated the consequences of different kinds of parenting style, be it authoritarian, permissive and, or uninvolved. Over the past decades, books have mushroomed and backed by researches to cater to the demands of educated parents. We are overloaded with information. Parents are tugged by consumerism on how to parent better. Parents are feeling compelled to compete and not being left behind in using parenting kits for successful kids today! How to be a good parent hounds the modern parents.

**Bawany CHINAPAN**  
**Family Therapist**  
**Malaysia**

## Modern Parents

The modern parents have more convenient access to knowledge through technology than our own parents had in the past. Children, on the other hand, are also facing emerging challenges like information overload and immense pressure to perform given all the facilities in a modern society. Children today also face higher depression and anxiety rate than ever before! The reality is that many fine people who love their children are good enough parents in every area except for one: they fail to respond to their children's emotions in a validating and affirmative way. They fail to communicate to their children that emotions are real, that the children's emotions matter (Gelb, S. (2019). As a family therapist, I have seen many parents struggle with their own unresolved issues or unfinished business coming from their family of origin that impacts their parenting.

## Impact of Earliest Bonds with Parents on Child Development

Many researches indicated that the earliest bonds formed by children with their parents have tremendous impact on the children that would continue throughout their life. Psychoanalyst, John Bowlby (1969), believed children who maintained proximity to a responsive and nurturing parent or caregiver were more likely to grow up happier and healthier. These children would grow up to have healthier relationship with self and others. They were able to cope better with negative emotions in social interactions, possess more positive emotions with interactions (Simpson, 1990) and have positive emotional- regulation skills (Cooper et al., 1998). Therefore, the quality of interaction with our parents as children has great impact on how we grow up as adults in relationship to others. Emotionally healthy and secure children would become emotionally healthy parents to their children as opposed to emotionally neglected parents.

Dr. Jonice Webb (2019), a therapist who specializes in childhood emotional neglect (CEN), asserted that the emotionally neglected children would grow up puzzled, wondering why they lack emotional skills to understand their own feelings and the feelings of others. Disconnected from their own emotions, they would struggle to identify exactly what they want, feel and need. As parents, the emotionally neglectful adults may be loving and well-intentioned but they still, perhaps through no fault of their own, fail to notice their children's feelings and respond to them adequately. And by failing the children in this way, emotionally neglectful parents fail to teach their children the emotion skills which their children need for their lifetime. Now, as an adult looking back, we may readily recall all that our parents have given us, but hard to see the vital ingredients they failed to give



is emotional validation, attention and attunement, emotion skills, and emotional intelligence. Inter-generational relationship would change as children move into adulthood, bringing with them the history from childhood onto new sets of expectations as adults and parents. The question is, are we emotionally neglectful parents or emotionally healthy parents looking at the relationship we have had with our own parents, our developmental history, family structure and composition?

The issue is that many grown-ups have never learned how to truly be well-adjusted grown-ups, in large part because their parents or caregivers were not equipped to teach them enough. So they tend to pass along the similar interactional patterns to their children, perpetuating the cycle of inadequate parenting and shaky life skills. Many grow up not caring for themselves in a deeper sense like maintaining emotional wellbeing and prioritizing self-respect and self-worth. Hence they might not be able to make positive choices for self-care. However, in real life situation, we can always choose to be different in how we parent our children and learn to care for, to love and respect ourselves so that we would not become the emotionally neglectful parent to our children.

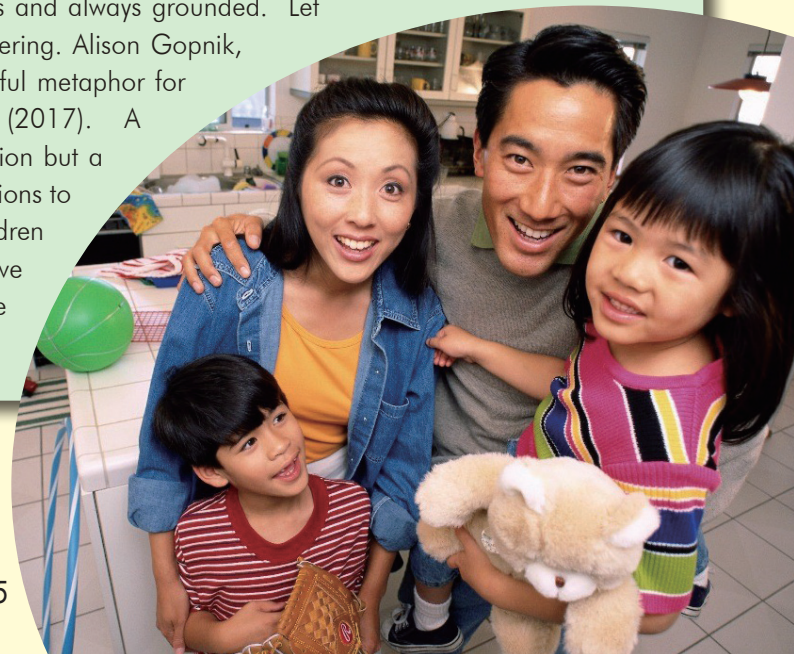
## Impact of Positive Parenting on Child Development

One of the key themes of Positive Parenting propagated by the Professor Mathew R. Sanders, founder of Triple P- Positive Parenting Program is promoting self-regulation. He proclaimed that parents' behavior, affect and cognition are determinants of good parenting and can be modified and learned. Quality of parenting has a pervasive impact on children's development. It is a choice which our children are counting on, so that we make and choose to do things differently from how we were brought up. This is also in line with other prominent authors such as Dr. Shefali Tsabary who wrote *Conscious Parenting* (2014). Conscious parenting is about becoming mindful of your own behavior and engaging with your child as an individual. Dr. Shefali, who is a clinical psychologist and was a famous guest in Oprah Winfrey Show asserted that in order to connect with your child, parents need to first connect with themselves. She talked about parents projecting their own ideas and expectations onto their children, creating a 'mini' us in our children. This in many ways makes our children grow up troubled and plagued by dysfunction. We might fail to see that they are independent individuals who may lead their own life in accordance with their unique spirit. Dr. Shefali believes children come in with their own blueprints within them to be actualized but as parents we fail to pay close attention to it and end up imposing our own vision on them to and urge them to live our destiny. If as parents we have lost our inner compass, how could we then be there to help our children to reach their own full potential? Many children grow up directionless, disconnected and discouraged. On the other hand, many parents lack good self awareness and bequeath their children own unresolved need, unmet expectations, and unfulfilled dreams. Apparently, the problem focus might lie with the parents' awareness when teaching positive parenting.

## Conclusion

Avital Schrieber Levy, founder of [parentingjunkie.com](http://parentingjunkie.com), echoed that parents need to look within themselves to become better parents because as parents we need to be happy and successful before we can model for our children. Self-sacrificing for the sake of children is a misguided choice and not noble. How parents live their life is the foundation of the children's curriculum. Every interaction within and between them and relationship with others represent what our children have learned. It would be important to be the child's guide rather than to be the hero. A guide is someone who has overcome their own challenges and always grounded. Let the child learn and overcome his challenges without interfering. Alison Gopnik, a developmental psychologist, has put up a very meaningful metaphor for parenting in her book, *The Gardener and the Carpenter* (2017). A carpenter believes he has the power to transform his creation but a gardener does not, but rather give the plants the best conditions to flourish. Alison Gopnik recommends to parents that all children can flourish the most when they are left to explore and have freedom to do so. When it comes to looking at parenting be a gardener and not a carpenter!

Picture courtesy from Positive Parenting, Malaysia.



# Intimate Partner Violence Survey:

## How can we support Victims and help them to Seek Professional Help as Soon as Possible?



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According to the Hong Kong Social Welfare Department, about 3,000 cases of intimate partner violence (IPV) reported each year in this city. There is a growing concern of IPV in the community. However, victims of abuse often encounter difficulties and

hesitation in the help seeking process. The Hong Kong Family Welfare Society (HKFWS) is keen on fostering harmonious family relationship, as well as on promoting zero tolerance for domestic violence. With the sponsorship of Women Helping Women Hong Kong (WHWHK), HKFWS has developed programmes from 2012 to 2018 through "Women Helping Women – Step out from Violence" project (the Project). It helps those families in the midst of chaotic situation and emotional sufferings, to get out from the abusive relationship, and finally turn a new page in their lives.

In order to understand the help seeking experiences of abused women, HKFWS and WHWHK, in collaboration with the City University of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University conducted a survey on partner violence. The survey has collected the data of 284 women from June to December 2017, 83 participants were from the Project and 201 were service users of HKFWS Integrated Family Service Centres. They were invited to report the tactics used in spousal relationship conflicts (violence in the past), occurrences of being coercively controlled by partner (Women's Experiences with Battering Scale), and help seeking experiences.

### Findings of Intimate Partner Violence Survey

1. 98% of the interviewed women experienced psychological abuse; 63% experienced physical abuse; 35% experienced sexual abuse; and 35% suffered injury caused by physical abuse by their partner. More than 90% of respondents experienced one or more forms of abuse.
2. 65% of the women would not leave their home, while 35% would leave home as a result of IPV, which lasted for 1.6 months in average. Among the women who chose to leave home, 81% chose to return home. Their main reasons for returning home were "not wanting to leave their children behind" and "taking care of their children".
3. Women who did not live with their partners still experienced abuse by them, and 44% of them reported experiencing serious violence. Women also reported using violence against their partners, with 51% reported using serious violence.
4. Women who lived with their partners are significantly more likely to have been seriously abused and to have used serious violence against partners (80.3% vs 83.2%) than women who did not live with their partner (43.6% vs 51.1%).
5. Women who did not live with their partners had less interpersonal support, especially in the aspect of "substantive support" and "belonging", than women who lived with their partners.
6. Most of the abused women showed signs of depression and anxiety.
7. Comparing the time of help seeking, the abused women reported their readiness to seek help from their siblings/relatives (2.2 years) and parents (2.7 years). They were less likely to seek timely assistance from professionals or others and the time



lag of help seeking were medical professionals (3.4 years), friends/neighbours (3.5 years), police (5.0 years), and social workers/counsellors/welfare agencies (5.1 years) respectively after the first violent incident.

8. The women participants affirmed that the most effective helper was social worker/counsellor/welfare agency (6.7 out of 10 points), followed by healthcare worker (6.3 out of 10 points) and police (5.9 out of 10 points). The effectiveness from friends/parents ranged from 2.1 points to 5.5 points out of 10 points.
9. Respondents had in average received 23.7 months of service from HKFWS, of which 89.1% were currently receiving services from HKFWS Integrated Family Service Centres. 82.4% of respondents thought the case service was helpful and 87% thought the overall service was helpful.

## Inspirations and Recommendations

### 1. Most Abused Women are still living with their Intimate Partners

From the findings, we found that most abused women, for various reasons, are still living with their intimate partners despite they have experienced years of violence at home. In this light, family workers definitely should help these women to be more aware of their own safety and be more alert to the changing moods, coercive control and violent behaviours of their partners. Particularly they should educate these women some protective measures in the midst of family violence. Additionally, teaching them positive communication skills are also vital in helping them in re-establishing harmonious family relationship.

### 2. Leaving their Intimate Partners does not mean Free from Violence

In the Survey, the abused women could not escape violence even after they have left their intimate partners. Some partners would still try to search their places of residence/work, harass or even stalk them while others would resort to different forms of violence through arrangements for child custody visits and alimony. The abused women are always reminded to be keep themselves and their children safe from possible violence. And they are warned that leaving their partners would not imply that they would be free from violence. when they leave their home, they are advised to strengthen their family support and build new social support system in a new community.

### 3. Use of Violence in response to Violence

In this Survey, it is observed that psychological abuse is very common among the abused women (98.1%). At the early stage of domestic violence, the abused women generally did not realize that they were psychologically abused and still believed that the abusers would eventually change for better. However, long-term abuse has caused harm to both the women and their children, leaving them with great stress, depression and anxiety. Some of them would even use violence in response to the violent acts against them, creating another miserable cycle of domestic violence. Unfortunately, they failed to stop the violence from their partners but causing more harm to their own mental and physical health. Moreover, their worries for the well-being and safety of their children and the elderly at home were increasing as well.

### 4. Best Strategy: Seeking Professional Help as soon as possible

We have observed that the abused women usually would take a long time to seek assistance after experiencing the first domestic violence. They took an average of 2.1 years and 2.7 years for sharing their sorrows with their parents/relatives/friends while taking an average of 5 years to turn to a family professional for assistance. Obviously, they are feeling ashamed of the intimate partner violence and marital discord.

In conclusion, the Project is a good attempt to explore the Intimate Partner Violence and we are informed with very valuable messages from the abused women group. In the light of the findings, we would recommend that the abused women should be empowered to stand up to their sorrows of partner abuse and seek help as soon as possible. Through professional assistance, it is believed that they could overcome their chronic stress, psychological pain and shame and rebuild their family harmony through learning to communicate positively with their partners, and most importantly to learn to love and protect themselves and their children in family tragedies.



## Appeal for Donation

The biannual fundraising event of CIFA, Walk for Family Well-being 2020 in March, was cancelled due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Originally, the Charity Walk was organised to raise significant sums to support a number of CIFA events, including the 6th CIFA Regional Symposium 2020 to be held on 25th – 27th November, 2020. Due to the cancellation of the Charity Walk, CIFA can't meet the fund-raising goal without the help of people / organisation like you.

Despite the Charity Walk was cancelled, we would like to invite you to support CIFA now. By giving donations to CIFA, you will be able to help us to continue our family well-being initiatives. If you / your organisation would like to donate, please make a cheque payable to "Consortium of Institutes on Family in the Asian Region Limited"; or direct deposit in CIFA's account: HSBC 808-371793-001 and mail the cheque/ deposit slip to CIFA's office at Portion B, 21/F Wofoo Commercial Building, 574-576 Nathan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong by 15th May, 2020. An official receipt for a donation of HK\$ 100 or above will be issued for tax exemption purpose. Meanwhile, we would be grateful if you could assist to spread the message and encourage your associates and their families to give a donation to CIFA.

Further information on CIFA can be found at [www.cifa-net.org](http://www.cifa-net.org). Should you have any queries, please contact Mr. Timothy Li of the Secretariat at [cifasecretariat@gmail.com](mailto:cifasecretariat@gmail.com) or (852) 2363 0700.

Thank you in advance for your generosity and support.