



Men

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Readers,


Men and the challenges they face is the theme for this magazine. We tried to address social issues from a male perspective. Our goal was to take a broad look at men and the topics that interest them.

Singapore bookstores are flooded with publications for men. However, little has been written about real problems confronting real people. This magazine relies on first-hand accounts of men who took the time to share their experiences and relate how they met life's many challenges.

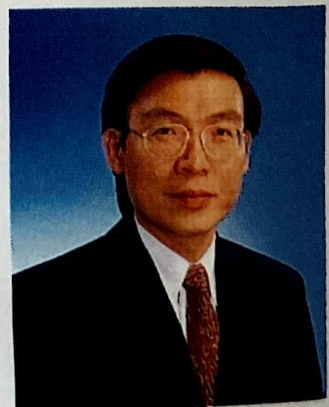
This magazine would not have been possible without the support of the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS). I also want to acknowledge the contributions of our editorial team and the Society Against Family Violence (SAFV) Executive Committee.

Finally, this magazine is dedicated to men. Read it, ponder over it, pass it around and share it. Most of all, if some of the points make sense to you, act on them.

Warm Regards,



Benny Bong
President
SAFV



Contents

- How to Succeed **2**
- Is Success Enough? **4**
- Financial Strength **6**
- Time Management **8**
- Love & Commitment **10**
- Getting in Touch **10**
- How Men Express Themselves **11**
- What Fatherhood Means to Me **12**
- First Time Father **16**
- My Son & Me **17**
- Fathers in Transition **18**
- World's Best Dads **19**
- Being a Father **20**
- Mentoring Boys **22**
- Helping Boys to Become Good Men **24**
- A New World Order **24**
- Happy Age **25**
- Understanding Violent Men **26**
- Addicted to Sex **28**
- Back From Addiction **31**
- Helplines & Community Resources **32**
- Courage to Change **32**
-

How to SUCCEED

Work. The word conjures up all kinds of images. At the positive end of the spectrum are the images of joy and satisfaction; at the negative end are slavery and grudging compliance.

How we view work reflects the fit between our temperament on the one hand and the demands of our job on the other. But for Singaporeans, the work ethic is a given and it is non-negotiable. As an island state, bereft of natural resources, Singapore's only assets are our brains and brawn.

We labour in pursuit of commonly recognised goals known as the Five Cs: Companion, Car, Condo, Credit Card and Club Membership. To make it today, two-income families are the norm. For those of my generation, the family planning slogan for the 70s and 80s was: "Boy or girl, two is enough. The less you have, the more they'll have." "More" referring to material wealth, which we presumed led to happiness.

"Success" is the most obvious word to be associated with "work." Since we spend so much time on the job, we crave results and seek recognition for what we do and how we do it.

I have been in the work force for 27 years: six years with two non-profit organisations, 18 years with an American multinational company, and the last three years with a Singapore welfare organisation. From my experience, I have learned that to be successful you need the following attributes: *ambition, energy, intellect, style and guts.*

Ambition means having the passion and commitment to do our best. In order to realise our full potential in our work environment, we need to explore new dimensions and go beyond what our job requires. However, we should not be too obvious or impatient. If we commit ourselves to the right actions today, tomorrow will take care of itself and we will be rightly rewarded with a promotion or pay rise.



by Lee Soo Jin

Energy refers to the willingness to go the “extra mile” for our colleagues, customers and superiors. This may mean coming into the office when no one else is around or burning the proverbial “midnight oil” at home to clear work backlogs. By possessing a “divine discontent” with the status quo, we practise the principle of “continuous improvement” in all tasks undertaken. Even if we think we’re performing at 100%, this could be only 60% of what our boss expects. Indeed, if we are to meet and exceed everyone’s expectations, much energy is required.

Intellect does not refer to having a MBA degree. It is about having good judgment and a keen awareness of the work environment. Someone with a strong intellect is able to “connect the unconnected” by linking up bits of information from various sources and seeing the bigger picture before others do. He knows and understands the organisation and what it takes to do things cheaper, better and faster.

Style alludes to a person’s Emotional Quotient or EQ. It means being aware of the corporate culture and following norms practised in the organisation.

Someone with style is able to communicate his ideas simply and effectively to many different audiences. When responding to others, he recognises that how information is communicated is as important as what is being communicated. He always answers the “Why, Who, What, How, When and How Much” questions in any business proposition.

Guts refers to courage and a “dare-to-win” mindset. It means taking risks and persevering for the good of the organisation. It begins by being bold enough to ask simple, even seemingly stupid questions. In my corporate career, I’ve often found that it’s easier to seek forgiveness rather than approval. Of course, you’ve got to be sure that the results will justify your actions. It takes guts to act first and then ask for permission later.

High scores in ambition, energy, intellect, style and guts assure us of becoming a success in our work and worthy of consideration for moving up to the next step in the organisational ladder. Now we must ask ourselves, “Is this all we want?”



Is **Success** *enough?*

In recent years, I have come to believe that finding significance is perhaps more important than becoming successful. I may be considered successful in my work by gaining accolades from my superiors and respect from my associates and clients. I may be handsomely rewarded for my job commitment and performance. But in the pursuit of success have I neglected my family members? If so, then maybe I am a "workaholic" and a "human doing" instead of a "human being."

As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "There is more to life than increasing its speed."

Webster's Dictionary defines "significance" as "having meaning or importance." In order to go beyond success, we must ask ourselves, "In carrying out our work tasks are we improving the quality of life of those around us or do we only seek to satisfy our own selfish needs?"

To me, significance can be found with the help of the lesser-known Cs: Character, Compassion and Contentment.

Our work experiences help form our character. So as we strive to excel in our work, we must always be aware that what we do affects who we are in terms of our identity, integrity and personality.

The satisfaction we get from being successful at work is often short lived. Each time we get promoted, we have to prove ourselves all over again. And so it is with the success “game” in just about every organisation. Will it never end? At some point, we start asking ourselves, “Is success putting my soul in danger?”

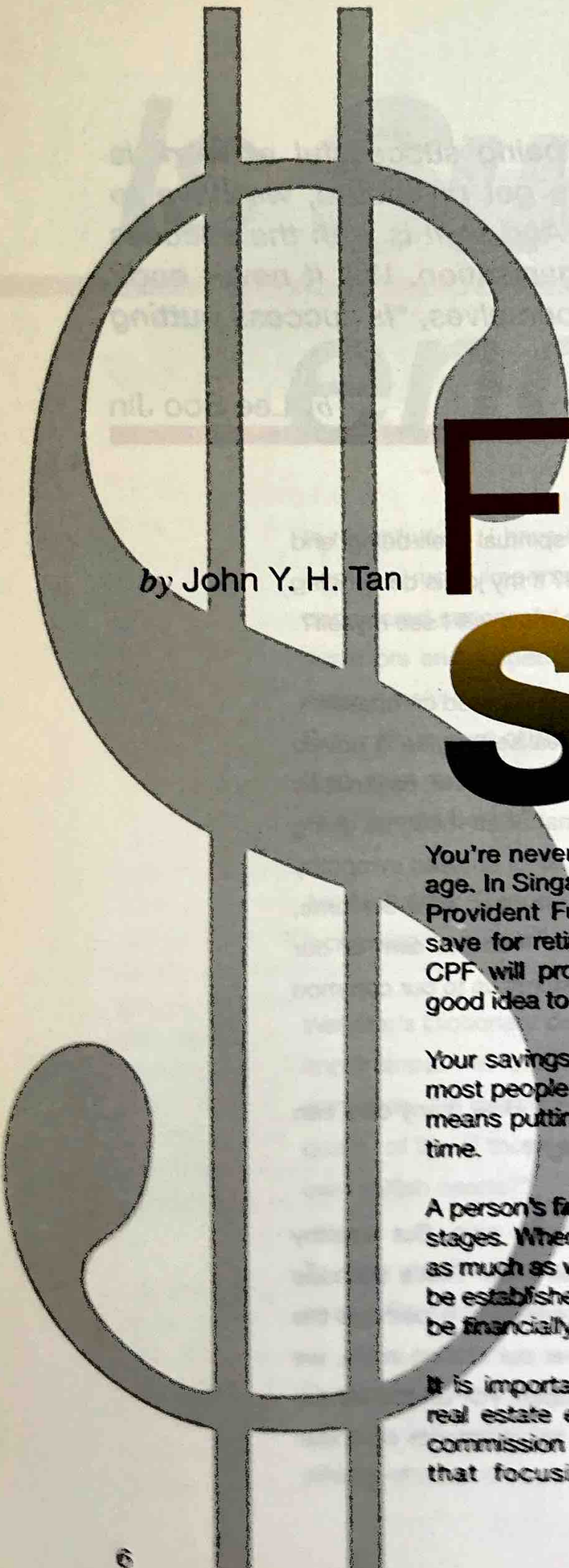
by Lee Soo Jin

If my job is taking precedence over my spiritual well-being and family life, what kind of person will I become? If my job is demanding me to make moral and ethical compromises, how will I see myself?

The ability to understand the suffering of others is called compassion. From my own experience, I have come to realise that life is not so much a series of progressions as a process. In the continuous climb upwards, it is not the victories that matter as much as going on after the defeats. As we make this climb, all of us need sympathy and understanding from others. In return, we must give our time, talent and money to a cause that is greater than our own or our organisation's self-interests. Compassion restores us to our common humanity.

How many beds can we sleep on each night? How many cars can we drive in one day? When is enough, enough?

Success is often equated with how much we own. But wealthy people are not necessarily happy with their lives. That's because contentment, or the satisfaction with what one has, is perhaps the most elusive prize in our life quest. Whatever our station in life, we must have a sense of contentment to be happy. For unless we are at peace with ourselves, then all our earthly achievements will mean nothing. ☺



by John Y. H. Tan

FINAN STRE

You're never too young to start planning for your old age. In Singapore we are fortunate to have the Central Provident Fund (CPF) that helps every Singaporean save for retirement. Don't assume, however, that your CPF will provide for all your retirement needs. It's a good idea to save even more money on your own.

Your savings plan should cover a span of 40 years. Yet most people wait until they are close to retirement. This means putting aside a lot of money in a short period of time.

A person's financial development usually occurs in three stages. When we are young, we should focus on earning as much as we can. At mid-life our financial base should be established. By the time we reach old age, we should be financially secure and able to enjoy our retirement.

It is important to set realistic goals. Melvin went into real estate expecting to earn thousands of dollars in commission on a single transaction. He soon learned that focusing on smaller properties with lower

Living within our means is easier said than done. What we see in the media and the intense comparisons we make among ourselves are encouragement to spend money. However, we need to remain practical and save money, not only for ourselves but to leave our children when we are gone.

FINANCIAL STRENGTH

commissions but higher turnover, was more profitable than spending his time trying to clinch the elusive big deal.

Hasty investments will, more often than not, lead to disappointment and financial disaster. Whether it's stocks or real estate, make sure you have enough money to carry your investment when the market drops.

Hard work is the best way to earn money. Watch your spending habits and be careful how much you buy on credit. Paying on the instalment plan can double the purchase price for big ticket items, such as furniture and electronic goods.

You also need to save for emergencies. When Mazlan was diagnosed with a stomach ulcer he was grateful for Medisave because it paid for his hospital expenses. However, spending money depleted Medisave funds he would need later in his old age. To be on the safe side, he bought a health insurance policy for him and his family.

Spending to the limit of our incomes puts us in danger if a crisis hits. The Asian economic crisis of 1997 is a reminder to us all of how unpredictable life can be and the wisdom of having cash reserves set aside. ☺

TIME MANAGEMENT

by Benny Bong

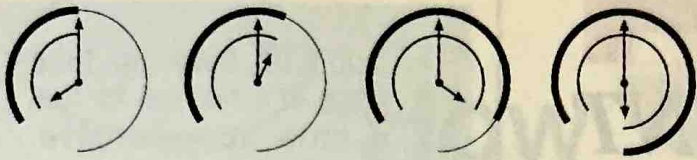
We have all faced the same dilemma – too much to do in too little time. However, if we look closely at our schedules we will see that it's not how much time we have but how we manage it.

Time management involves planning. One method is to list all the activities you've been involved in during a typical week. Then estimate how much time is spent on each activity. Now consider whether more or less time could be spent on each activity. Perhaps an activity should be dropped. Review your notes and revise your schedule accordingly. Try to keep to this revised schedule in the coming week.

But what happens when you have an ever-changing weekly schedule? Work out a list of tasks you need to do in the week ahead and then categorise them according

to what you must do, want to do, should do and don't really need to do. As you look at your list, give priority to urgent tasks that must get done within a certain time frame. Consider eliminating tasks that don't need to be done.





It is easy to get sidetracked. Many people find it difficult to say "no." However, you must remember that by spreading yourself too thin, you won't accomplish as much.

There are times when additional assignments can't be avoided. Working as a team will distribute some of the work load. Delegate work that doesn't require your personal attention. When you do, make sure you give clear and adequate instructions on what needs to be done. Group similar tasks together. Filing, making telephone calls and writing correspondence are tasks that can be done en block rather than throughout the day.

STRESS BUSTERS

All of us feel stress and each for different reasons. When you've decided you've had too much, try a few lifestyle changes. Give yourself more time to complete tasks and to get from one place to another. During long waits for meetings and appointments bring

something along to do or read. Maintain good relationships with friends and families. Find a sport you like. You don't have to be a pro to enjoy soccer, basketball or tennis. Fun on the weekends can off-set the pressures of a demanding work week.



LOVE & COMMITMENT

by Jeannie Koh

Our modern and affluent society makes it easy to opt out of a serious relationship and avoid the responsibilities of marriage and family. Most of us have enough money to survive on our own. Casual sex to satisfy our needs is everywhere. So isn't it better to remain single and play it safe?

Too many of us want to avoid pain and refuse to give of ourselves. However, it is a psychological fact that satisfying your own desires and doing whatever pleases you are proven paths to unhappiness.

Committing to someone else means giving up the precious liberties of bachelorhood. You can still go to pubs, play soccer and hang out with your friends. But you also must engage in activities your wife likes such as going to the movies and spending time with her family. However, making sacrifices demonstrates to your partner how precious your relationship is and deepens your love for each other.

Staying committed means accepting the imperfections of your partner. We do not live in a perfect world. All of us have faults. Love is a power that can withstand faults, and commitment is the bond that transcends imperfections.

For men and women, marriage is an opportunity for growth. Sacrifice and acceptance require courage but result in enormous personal rewards. ☺



1. Don't be afraid to take risks. It's normal to feel a little apprehensive. After all, choosing a spouse is one of the biggest decisions you'll ever make. But get out there and look.
2. Don't limit yourself. If you are quick to judge a woman because she is too short or tall or too educated, you might miss out on someone very special.

GETTING IN TOUCH

3. Find a role model. Who, in your life, strikes you as being a happy and successful man? How does he relate to people? What can he tell you about emotional fulfillment?
4. Start talking. Women enjoy a good conversation. It's okay if you don't have the answers to everything. Finding out more about the woman in your life will lead to greater intimacy.
5. Enjoy the mystery of it all. Relationships don't follow a step-by-step manual. Life is full of surprises, so expect the unexpected.

How *Men Express* Themselves

by Benny Bong

Men like to sit down and talk rationally. They like to communicate facts. Emotions are seen as negative. Men filter out emotions because they don't know how to handle them. When a woman presents her emotions to a man, his defences automatically come up and he backs away.

Men and women talk differently. A man listening to his wife's problems goes into problem solving mode. His wife wants to know, "Why can't you just listen? Why do you have to resolve it?"

For couples, a good strategy for being able to communicate clearly is to use "I" messages that force the speaker to take ownership and express a point of view or an emotion.

Let's look at a case where a husband wants his mother to come and live with his family but his wife objects. If the man says to his wife, "What's wrong with you? Why can't you be kinder to my mother?" he's implying there's something wrong with his spouse.

If he says, "I'm hurt and confused because I don't know what to tell my



mother," then he's addressed his emotions and the action he needs to take to resolve the issue.

Men who can't verbalize their feelings find other ways of expressing themselves. Withholding intimacy is a very powerful expression of a man's anger. Often, a man will project his anger onto another party. Instead of aiming his anger directly at his wife, he'll criticize her mother or their children instead. Channeling energy into work is a way of containing anger. Men who withdraw into other areas of their lives are also denying their wives access to their time.

These expressions are seen as less destructive than physical violence but they can be equally disastrous to a relationship. ☹

What Fatherhood

If one regards 27 as a young age to get married, at least by today's standards, how about becoming a father at 28?

Yes, fatherhood began early for me and this was at a time (it still is, actually) when remaining single, free and available was the *de rigueur* lifestyle among my peers. Strange as you might think, I chose to be a dad early on in life because of fear.

Let me explain, I know of many friends and relatives who, having got married, decided to postpone parenthood until such a time when they are ready. It's all fine and dandy; there's nothing wrong with that. The plan worked for most of them but, as I'm sure you'll agree, things don't always work out the way we plan them. For a few of my friends and relatives, and that of my wife's as well, parenthood never came in spite of all the planning, attempts, countless visits to numerous doctors, and crippling medical bills. The despair and desperation that these perfectly healthy people went through as a result of the unexplained infertility must have been nightmarish. What was worse was that some of these couples drifted apart after years of co-existence. With no bond to stoke the flames of love, the fire often dies, eventually.



My wife and I feared such a situation. There's nothing in the book of marriages that says every couple will be able to have a child of their own. Most will, of course, but there's always that minority few who can't. We then decided that we would let Nature take its course. Boy or girl, we had to have at least one child! Our game plan was to take what we could get first and plan the rest later. Nature, it seemed, acted in concert with our plans. Our first child, a boy, came within the first year of our

“ Boy or girl, we had to have at least one child! ”

means to me... by Mazlan Samad

marriage. Our second and third children, again boys, were born eight and 10 years later.

I would be lying if I say that fatherhood is a bed of roses. It is not. On the other hand, I would also be doing great injustice to other parents if I had unwittingly implied that fatherhood is all pain and no gain.

Fatherhood to me is a bit of everything. It's an amalgamation of joy and happiness, trials and tribulations which, when added up, adds richness and fulfilment to one's life. I would have been emotionally poorer had it not been for my children.

Trials and tribulations came aplenty and early too. At the age of four months, Riza, my first boy developed a hernia. The paediatrician explained that it was not a rare condition for young children but what I had also wanted to know was: Why mine? I could empathise with my boy; if an adult could feel the pain and discomfort of such an ailment and

feel miserable for it, what more a little baby?

I felt pain each time he cried, which was frequent. He quieted down each time I held him in my arms, as if he understood my and everyone else's care and concern. But the greatest pain for me was to hear his intense crying as he was taken to the operating theatre. Being alone without familiar faces, in alien surroundings and in the hands of complete strangers must surely have been harrowing for any child. And I couldn't do anything about it. That was the debilitating part, to say the least. However, as strange as it may sound, I found strength in such adversity, my love for my first child grew stronger.

In many ways, that was the first real 'bonding' between my boy and me. It was my first crash course in fatherhood and the challenges that came with it.

Another crash course followed soon enough, this time in financial security. The medical bills, though not large, were enough to throw our household budget off-course. A substantial portion of our savings went towards settling the medication, specialist fees and

hospital bill. Somehow, I should have thought of family medical insurance as soon as I became a father.

Many other crash courses followed, especially with the arrival of my two other children. In particular, Rizuan, my second boy, provided my wife and me with our greatest lessons in perseverance and patience. It was also our biggest test in parenthood. Unlike our other children, he was colicky in the first phase of his life. There were days when we hardly slept; I knew what eyebags were and they didn't look nice on me.

The days, weeks and months took their toll on my wife and me. In that six to eight months, our way of life was drastically altered. Trips to the beach for picnics stopped, jaunts across the Causeway for the usual getaways also stopped, and dining out became impossible. What was frequent, however, were trips to GPs and specialists. Amid all this, there were the issues of work and career that we had to juggle. There were times when I questioned if I had made the right decision in becoming a father. Fortunately, they were only fleeting thoughts during moments of distress.

My wife and I are blessed with having supportive parents and that helped tremendously. The wonderful thing about grandparents is that they always seem to know what to do with their grandchildren. They weren't the least ruffled by Rizuan's frequent bawling. On the contrary, they were more gentle

and extra caring with the child. My mother-in-law once said something which I shall always remember. She said that parents often lament that they were saddled with a problematic child. They should instead consider it a blessing to have a child to love and care for in the first place.

Perfect sense if you ask me.

Compared to the first two, life was easier where my third child was concerned. When you're the youngest, everyone dotes on you. Attention was part of the package and Raif, my youngest boy, was getting loads of it, especially from his elder brothers.

Fatherhood is not solely about having little babies and managing them through their first phase of life. Fatherhood extends right to the fullest extent of life itself.

Riza is now a strapping young man of 13. He is taller than his mum and almost as tall as I. First-borns are always special and Riza is no different. The fact that he is a well-adjusted kid who respects his elders, is obedient and diligent has inspired me tremendously in my efforts to be a better father. There is extreme satisfaction in being a father when you know that all the extra love, efforts and time you had invested in a child in his or her crucial formative years have not been wasted.

Rizuan, on the other hand, has outgrown his condition and has developed a strong sense of independence, both in mind and actions. He is now five years old and I am often amused by his argumentative ways, creative sense of reasoning and articulate manners. He will make a good lawyer some day.

Raif, the youngest of the lot, is now almost three years old and the apple of everyone's eyes. His chatter and banter often drive his elder brothers nuts. He loves to be hugged and will demand his goodnight kiss from everyone. To me, it's little things like these which elevate the meaning of fatherhood.

Seeing the three of them together, either playing, laughing, teasing or even quarrelling, is a sight my wife and I cherish. All right, perhaps the "quarrelling" part isn't something I enjoy but then again, I derive a certain degree of amusement just watching how they, especially the younger two, try to convince the other parties into doing things their way. And if persuasion fails, a nudge or a pinch often follows, which then sends the aggrieved party running to mum or dad, or both, for comfort, support and quick intervention.

I guess every child, and for that matter adults too, desires to love and be loved. To me, fatherhood best exemplifies this maxim. Of course, you don't have to be married to love and be loved, but parenthood offers the

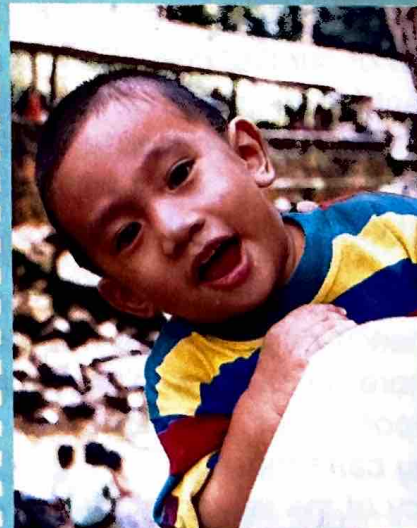
extra spark and gleam to one's life. If I had to live my life again, I wouldn't miss fatherhood for all the money in the world. There's an incredible amount of richness not to be missed. ☺



Riza, 13



Rizuan, 5



Raif Hakim, 2

1st TIME FATHER

by Fook Kong

Doris and I are the proud parents of a daughter and son, ages 14 and 11. Although many years have passed since our children were born, I'll never forget when I became a father for the first time.

As an expectant father, I found that the classes we went to were very helpful, at least for the first child. I learned how to help my wife breathe and to be more relaxed during labour, plus other important aspects of looking after a child during the first few months. All this preparation helped me play a greater role as a father not only during the delivery but after the baby was born.

Doris had a natural delivery and I was very excited to see the baby come out. My heart was beating so hard that even afterwards, when I was alone outside the ward, I continued to be very excited. When our second child was born, I was happy to have a son but the level of excitement wasn't as high as being a father for the first time.

After the birth of our first child, Doris was in confinement for one month and stayed with her mother. Again, because of the classes, I knew what to expect when she faced a slight case of the baby blues.

Of course, both pregnancies affected our sex life. When a child comes, the wife becomes more involved with the child and the opportunities for sex become less. But you can't measure intimacy by the frequency of the sex act. In terms of actual closeness and our affinity for each other, there is no lack. ☺

Centre for Fathering

Founded in December 1999, the Centre for Fathering aims to teach men to be better fathers. Founding fathers Raymond Koh, Edwin Choy and Wong Suen Kwong are friends who gave up their jobs and sold their automobiles to start the centre located on Upper Thomson Road. They give talks at schools and conduct four-hour Saturday seminars on fathering at KK Women's and Children's Hospital. Bonding Camp is an all-day programme held in Jurong. Fathers and their children learn to depend on each other by doing confidence building activities such as climbing ropes.

Koh is quick to point out that the centre's efforts are "two-prong." He says: "We can't focus just on the fathers and leave the mothers out because parenting is collaborative." The centre does pre-marital counselling and marriage enrichment seminars. Says Koh: "The best gift you can give your children is to love their mother."

For more information call the
Centre for Fathering at
455-0038. ☺

My Son

I have found that the best way to be part of Luke's life is to make him part of mine. Since he was a baby I have tried to include him in the things I do. When he was an infant, I took him into the pool with me each evening for a swim. He went with me

by Carl Ettensperger

to get his first haircut. I taught him how to use a public toilet, wash his hands and dry them with the blow dryer.

Like many American fathers, sports is a bridge between me and my son. I've helped coach Luke's Little League team since he started playing at the age of six. On the weekends we play catch. If there's a good game on TV, we watch it together.



& Me

I spend a lot of time on the road and at the office. When Luke was about five, I started taking him with me to work on Saturday mornings. Of course, I didn't get as much done as I would have on my own, but being together was good for both of us. Then I started taking him on short business trips. Now he is ten and comes into the office on a regular basis. All my staff know him and he is very aware of what I do when I am not at home.

As a father, I think it's important for me to teach my son how to make a living. My father was a farmer, and I grew up to become an architect. Even though I am not in the same line of work as my Dad, I learned a lot from my father about applying myself and getting the job done. I must do the same for my son. Last weekend I gave Luke a tape measure and the two of us went to a job site and took measurements.

With my Dad and me it was all work and no play. I want to have some fun with my son. On the weekends we see movies together and build sand castles on the beach. 🏖️

Fathers in

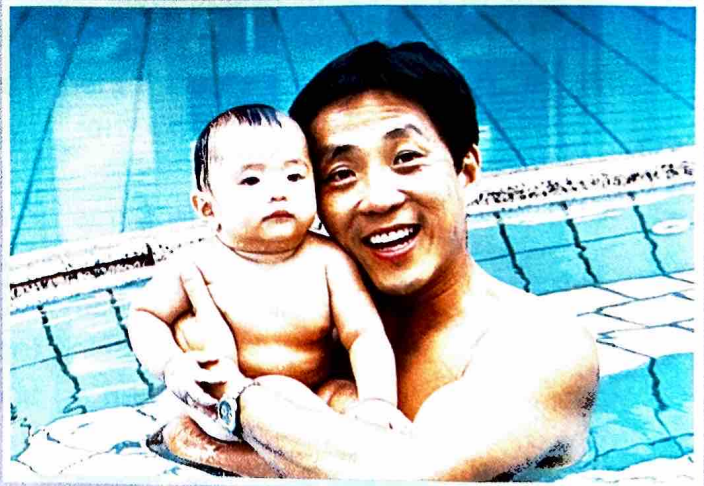
by Wong Suen Kwong

As a counsellor and father, I see that nowadays, many men are getting involved in day-to-day homemaking and childrearing tasks. Even though our Asian society is steeped in the tradition that taking care of the home is only for mothers, it is encouraging that more fathers are now coming forward to share these domestic tasks.

But fathering is more than doing. Ken Canfield, author of the book, *The Heart of a Father*, believes it is critical that “we who are fathers deal with our hearts in order to connect with our children.” Our struggle is that like most men, we are not skilled in matters of the heart. We try not to deal with our feelings and the feelings of our loved ones.

In his book, *The Men They Will Become*, American paediatrician Eli Newberger claims “men need to be reassured that their gender doesn’t automatically disqualify them from having the capacity to be excellent, engaged parents.” Rather than focus on “equal responsibility,” Dr. Newberger suggests a clearly defined “collaboration” that satisfies both partners and responds to their children’s needs.

He also points out that in America, the idea of fathers as “junior partners” in the home is relatively recent. In the 17th and 18th centuries, fathers were active in all aspects of domestic life. The Industrial Revolution took work to the factories and placed fathers outside the family circle. In the 19th century their input shifted from



TRANSITION

direct emotional contact with their children to the paycheck.

Close relationships with our children do not come naturally. Fathers need to work to achieve this connection in order to be involved in the overall development of their children. Fathering is about relationships. Men who connect with their children at the “heart level” are the kinds of fathers our families now need. 🐼



In his book *The Emperor's Embrace*, author Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson describes fathers in the animal kingdom. According to his research, the world's best dads are the emperor penguins in Antarctica.

One month after mating, the female lays an egg and transfers it to the male who carries it around balanced between his feet in a brood pouch for two to three months. The female joins other females in the colony and goes out to sea to find food and rest. She returns when the egg hatches. If she is late, the father feeds his newborn penguin milk, a substance secreted from the lining of his esophagus.

Once the chick is safely transferred to the care of its mother, the father goes out to sea for about a month to regain his strength. When he returns, he and the mother take turns feeding their chick. 🐼



Best Dads



Being a

Don't be afraid of babies. Learn how to hold and cuddle an infant. Once that child grabs hold of your finger you will never be the same man again.

Apply the corporate concept of multi-tasking to your home life. Cooking, cleaning and playing with your children are now part of your life. Learn how to do them with grace and ease.

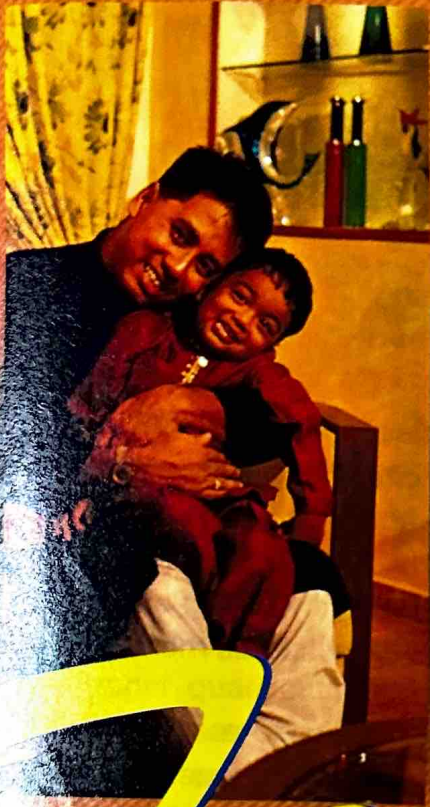
Talk to your children about subjects that interest them. Don't limit your conversations to school work. Find out what interests them. You'll be amazed at what they know.

Get involved with your kids. Time goes by fast and you will miss a lot if you don't see them growing up.

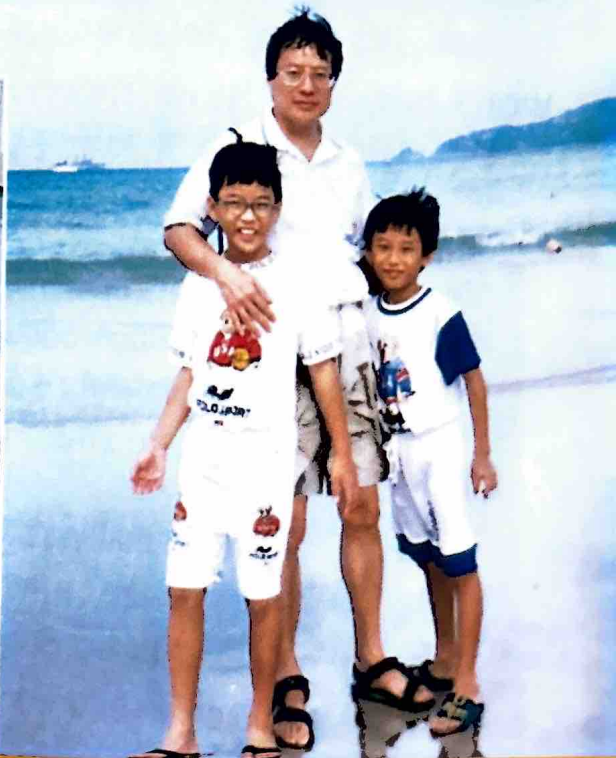
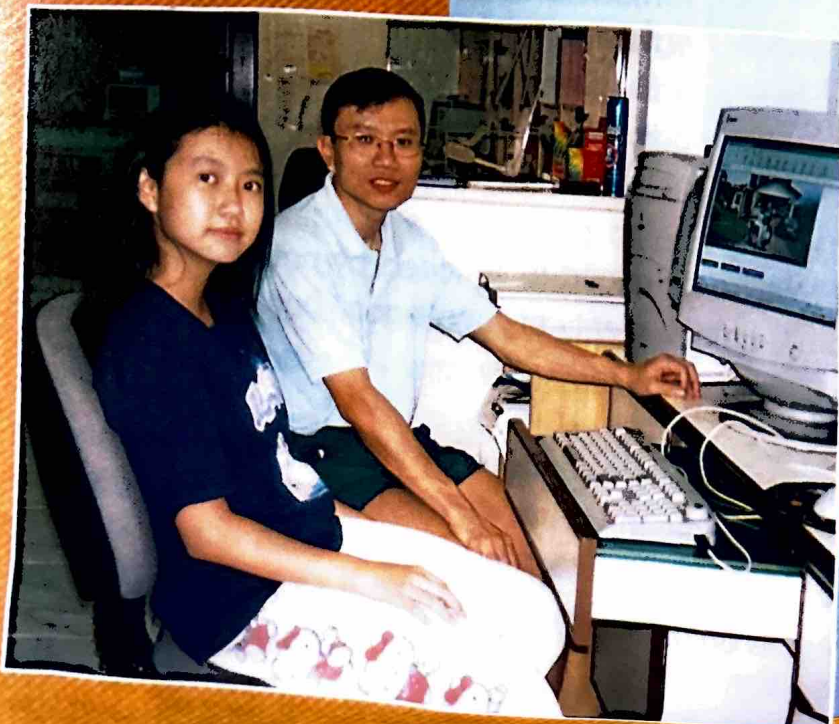
Be age appropriate in your manner towards them. Teenagers don't like to be hugged and kissed, whereas young children do.

Learn all you can about fathering. Read books and magazines, attend seminars, watch television programmes featuring positive fathers and observe public figures who are good role models. 🌟





Father



Mentor

by Louis Sim

With the loosening of traditional social and family ties, parents are finding it difficult to teach values to their children. In ancient societies, village elders helped instill in children a sense of worth and their value to the community. Today's nuclear family is increasingly isolated. Although we can't go back in time, adults can help their communities by taking on the role of village elders by acting as mentors.

Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*, recounts the adventures of the Greek warrior Odysseus. While Odysseus is away from home, his good friend **Mentor** teaches and guides his son, Telemachus. The word "mentor" now means wise and loyal advisor.

All children need good role models. However, from my own experience, I wish that as a young boy I had a mentor to help guide me.

I did not come from a rich family and I did not speak English well. I was not much of a success in formal education having only earned my "O" levels. Everyone thought that if I didn't succeed in school, I would not make it in Singapore at all.

Despite such odds, I was determined to succeed by not being afraid to make mistakes. I admit, I made plenty of "boo-boos" but I did not let my failures stop me.

I started making little notes to myself about my life goals. I wanted to be a millionaire, a lecturer, someone who was popular and respected. I wanted to be Somebody. Within two years, I became a school sports champion and from then on, I told myself, "Nothing and no one is going to stop me."

ring BOYS

Today, I am happy to say that I am a successful entrepreneur. I run a company promoting literacy in Singapore. I am a lecturer who conducts workshops for students. I am popular and respected. I am a Somebody. Although I never got my paper qualifications, I consider myself as having earned a Bachelor of Street Smarts, a Masters of Common Sense and a PHD in Perfecting His Dreams.

Now that my two children are grown and pursuing their own dreams, I have decided to contribute to society by becoming a mentor. I dedicate a significant portion of my time to working in schools where a large number of students come from low-income families. Whereas I have no formal training as a counsellor, my life experience has given me a perspective on raising boys. There are plenty of books on the subject but few people are willing to "get their hands dirty" and work with students on a daily basis.

My strong belief is this: Don't tell children what to do because they will forget. Show them and they will remember. Involve them and they will learn. ☺

Boy Talk

Dr. Donald Russell, a psychiatrist at the Judge Baker Guidance Center in Boston, Massachusetts, works with juvenile offenders. Boys in trouble, he says, want to tell their stories to a sympathetic listener. However, getting them to talk is difficult. He recommends starting out in a private setting or engaging in an activity the boy enjoys to help him relax.

He suggests maintaining a distance. If you zero in on what's bothering the boy, he may get embarrassed. A good way to start the conversation is with the word "sometimes," such as "Sometimes kids..." Don't fill up the silence with conversation. Give the boy time to bring up what's on his mind.

Taking the boy for a ride in a car is a good technique. It gives you time together and puts the boy at ease because you're not looking at each other face-to-face.

Helping Boys

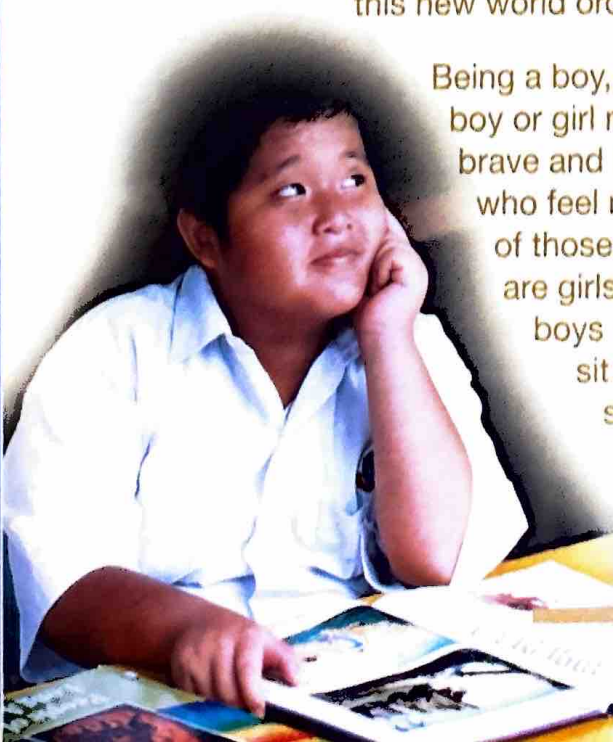
to become Good Men

- **Listen.** Too often we scold children and don't take the time to find out what they are feeling and thinking. Remember, whatever they tell you is confidential so respect their privacy.
- **Attention.** Fathers are quick to compliment their daughters and give them a kiss on the cheek, but they often forget about their sons. Boys need to be praised and given a loving hug or pat on the shoulder.
- **Comfort.** If girls can cry, boys should be able to as well. Don't discourage boys from crying and if they need it, give them a shoulder to cry on.
- **Self-Confidence.** Praising boys when they do well is a great help to them. Often they are confused by conflicting expectations among family, friends and school.
- **Guidance.** Boys need to know the limits for their behaviour for each stage of their development. Their imagination can go beyond their abilities and common sense. They need a firm hand.
- **Respect.** Let boys know that you believe they can grow up to be good men. Once they trust you, boys will count on your feedback and advice. ♡

A New World Order

Boys today are the men of tomorrow. Many of them already accept this new world order. Tan Qi Han, a Primary Five student, says:

Being a boy, to me, means nothing. I don't think being a boy or girl matters much. People say that boys should be brave and tough, but some boys are sensitive crybabies who feel no sense of security. I dare say that I am one of those sensitive crybabies. To me, I can say, there are girls who are tough and brave. People say that boys should have the most say, but this does not sit well with most girls. Everyone has to carry some sort of burden. Males have to serve in the army but women have to give birth! ♡



Happy Age

乐龄

by Lim Chee Kong

When the economic crisis hit in 1997, the company I was working for decided to scale down its operations. I was offered early retirement and took it. It was a snap decision and although I don't regret it, I advise others to prepare more for their retirement.

The transition from a structured to an unstructured lifestyle is a challenge. I worked as a quality control supervisor. My job kept me very active. I was in charge of about 20 people. Every morning I woke up with a million things to do. Suddenly I was asking myself, "What shall I do today?" I now sit on two committees of voluntary welfare organisations. I like helping other people. My retirement has purpose.

I am an active member in a club for retirees. Being with other people keeps my mind and body healthy. Our club organises classes. We play table tennis, go bird watching and travel together. I enjoy the fellowship and the chance to pursue new interests.

Regular exercise is important at any age. I used to jog but stopped because of my knees. My wife and I go for a 30-minute walk each morning. We enrolled in tai chi exercise classes at our community centre. We are very active and don't plan to spend our old age in rocking chairs.

Our weekends are devoted to our grandchildren. My daughter and son-in-law both work. On Saturdays they run errands. Sundays are when we all get together. Spending more time with my family is the most rewarding aspect of retirement.

Chinese refer to this time in life as the "Happy Age." Like every other stage in your life, there are ups and downs. My life experiences have taught me never to withdraw from life but to go forward and meet life's challenges. Staying involved with your family and community keep you healthy and alert. When I retired, staying at home and putting my feet up were never an option. ☺



Singapore Action Group of Elders (SAGE) is a voluntary welfare organisation founded in 1977. SAGE Counselling Centre offers a toll-free helpline and face-to-face counselling services for anyone who needs to talk about matters concerning the elderly. For more information call 1800-353-8633.

UNDERSTANDING **VIOLENT** Men

by Ellen Bai



Men in Recovery (MR) is a self-help group that began under the auspices of SAFV in 1991. Its goal is to help men end the violence in their lives.

Jon Khim (not his real name) is a member of MR who decided to speak out because he feels that wife battering "is always told from the woman's point of view."

He has been married to his wife, Maggie, for almost ten years. They have two children and it was partly for their sake he went into therapy.

When the couple married they moved into a small flat. They both worked. Jon pitched in and did his share of the household chores. However, he felt Maggie didn't do enough and when he complained, she did nothing about it.

"So I started mopping the floors and tidying up the place and I thought she could at least come over and help, but she didn't," he recalls. "I started to boil inside."

Their arguments followed a pattern. Jon's criticisms began an exchange of verbal abuse that led to violence.

"When we argued, my wife's mouth was in gear faster than her mind," he says. "I could never say what I wanted to say. The only way, I thought, to shut her up was to give her a wallop. After that she would keep quiet and go to her sister's place."

He acknowledges that hitting his wife was wrong but says outsiders often overlook how both parties behaved before the physical abuse occurred. "I believe we both played an equal part in the scenario leading up to it," says Jon.

The births of their two children brought more problems. Jon envisioned a traditional upbringing with rules such as a set bed time. Maggie let the children go to bed whenever they pleased.

Feeling angry and left out, Jon started seeing another woman. When Maggie found out he defended himself by saying he "needed a listening ear."

"I told her, 'You have no respect for me. Now, instead of boiling over inside, I have someone to talk to.' But then she said, 'You must choose her or me.' I thought of my kids and reminded myself that neither one of them asked to be brought into this world. My wife and I decided we both have to make sacrifices for them. That's when we went into counselling."

Jon joined MR. The group talked about how to recognize and deal with anger before losing control.

"For me, it was my shoulder muscles tensing up that meant I was no longer in a good frame of mind," he says. "Instead of saying to my wife, 'This has to be done my way or else,' I learned it was better to shut up, walk out and talk about it later."

The camaraderie among the men helped with his recovery.

"We felt the whole of society was against us and that we were black sheep," he says. "We were the guys who never got things our way. Our

parents and our families always wanted something different."

Through discussions and role-play, the men learned different ways to express themselves. Jon realised that in parenting his children he wanted to be different from his authoritarian father.

"If I want them to say 'please' then I must say 'please' to them," he observes.

He also started seeing things from his wife's point of view.

"Men are brought up to run the whole show," he says. "The wife is human, too. She has feelings and her own opinions. We agreed to disagree."

With the help of a marriage counsellor, Jon and Maggie came to the realization that fighting wasn't getting either one of them what they wanted. Because he hit Maggie, Jon got no support from his friends or family.

"Everyone would say to me, 'No matter what, you're wrong because you got violent,'" he claims. "Now that I'm not violent I get some sort of consideration."

Looking back on his life, Jon remembers that when he hit his wife, he didn't regret what he did. He felt she deserved it. His biggest fear was other people's response. Because he was afraid of criticism he was reluctant to talk about his problem. Jon advises those with a violent family member or friend to first try and be a good listener.

"My way would be not to advise the person but to hear what he had to say. As people listened to me, the volcano that was building inside me started to cool down. It wasn't until I felt I was heard that I could begin my recovery."

Addicted to SEX.

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*It is hard
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Sexual addiction is nothing new. As long as there has been sex there have been sex addicts. However, it's only recently that it's been treated as a disease.

Men who visit prostitutes every now and then don't fall into this category. They are driven by curiosity or the urge to experiment. Usually they stop once they get scared.

Why go to a prostitute? There's the element of detachment and the perception of not getting involved. It's not like a moral relationship. You have no inhibitions and no emotional responsibilities.

And then there's the moral issue. From the outset men who see prostitutes know that it's wrong but it contributes to the experience. As humans don't we all have that desire to do wrong and not get caught?

A man doesn't become a sex addict overnight. It's a process that may begin with a sexual encounter that is such a high he can never forget it. He wants to recapture it again and again. Sex becomes a panacea for all his ills and pains.

If you ask me why a particular person is addicted to sex, I couldn't give you an answer. I can only say that sex is one of the basic human appetites

A Singapore psychiatrist with 24 years experience treating sex addicts and their marriage partners, shares his views on sexual addiction.

so you might as well ask why other people get addicted to eating. Maybe there's a genetic tendency. It's a common experience for someone to be addicted to alcohol and after he recovers, the sexual addiction will emerge. He's given up alcohol but his sexual encounters increase to the point where his genitals are in his head.

It is hard for others to understand that this is a compulsion and that for the sex addict, sex is no longer a pleasure. It's something he has to do to the point where he is not afraid of the consequences. AIDS and the possible breakup of his family aren't deterrents.

Unlike an alcoholic who can take one, two and three drinks without disrupting the people he loves, the sex addict's first encounter with a prostitute pushes him outside the acceptable boundaries of behaviour.

Sex addicts who are deprived of sex go through withdrawal, the same as any other addiction. They experience dysphoria and discomfort which leads to depression.

Few men are open to treatment. They come into my office with a different agenda. Usually they see me because their wives have threatened to leave them. They present me with an overt problem such as their marriage and tell me, "Please leave my sexual habits alone." I accept that but after we explore deeply I come to a stage where I can say, "Hey, you have an addiction."

Counsellors will say these things don't happen without a reason and there's a tendency to rectify marital problems. My experience is that unless you deal with a sex addict as an addict even after you solve his marital problems, he'll still go to a prostitute.

Addiction is a family illness. I have never come across an addiction that didn't permeate the whole family. Usually everyone is in denial and wanting to believe the person they love will change.

In my practice, I see wives in tremendous pain. They've endured years and years of emotional abuse.

“ *The guilt a wife suffers is tremendous and also the shame.* ”

They feel helpless and they spend all their energy struggling to preserve their marriages and keep their families together. When they reach out to me in this state they are markedly incapacitated.

The wife in a situation like this is in a precarious position. She has become very vulnerable and dependent on her husband. This creates fertile ground for emotional abuse.

In an Asian society there's more denial and a tendency among women to feel more self-blame. The guilt a wife suffers is tremendous and also the shame. Her husband is seeing prostitutes and she prefers to keep it in the closet.

I see a greater willingness among Singaporean women to rationalise. It's not uncommon for a wife who knows her husband is seeing a prostitute to put up with the situation by saying, "As long as he comes home and he's a good father." This high level of acceptance corrodes a woman's self-respect.

My response is to help a patient clarify where she stands now and understand how she's been abused. My usual response is to recommend a geographical treatment – a separation – she needs to get out. After she's healed she can decide on either permanent separation or reconciliation.

In a marriage there are three components – the husband, the wife and the relationship. The husband must recognise he needs help and run his own recovery track. The wife must journey back to her self-esteem. When both are selfishly healed then they can get back together but first the relationship must heal in its own right.” 🐾



Back from

Addiction

Sometimes life is too much. Rather than cope with the pain, some of us choose to escape into fantasy worlds. Drugs and alcohol help make us forget. Certain types of behaviour such as compulsive shopping are attempts to fill the emptiness within.

Raja S. (not his real name) joined a 12-step programme in 1991 because he wanted help with his addiction to gambling. Once a week he attended a meeting with people who openly talked about their addiction and methods of coping.

Understanding his family history was important to Raja's recovery. He says: "I knew gambling was a serious problem because my father was a gambling addict, too. We had all sorts of trouble because of this. We didn't have enough money to pay the rent, or even buy food."

In addition to gambling, Raja discovered that he engaged in other kinds of self-destructive behaviour.

He says: "I started drinking when I was a teenager and I have come to realise alcoholism played a big part in my abusive behaviour. It was one of the key ways I coped with pain."

Today, Raja claims he is a much more "aware person." He is able to recognise compulsive behaviour and get help when he feels he doesn't have the power to resist it. Raja is still involved with the same 12-step programme.

He says: "Instead of selfishly fulfilling my own desires, I am committed to giving myself to the service of others. I want men in Singapore to know there is hope for change. I want to help show them a path that will lead them out of their misery and to a better place for them and their families." 🍀

by Ellen Bai

Helplines and Community Resources

AIDS Helpline

Mon-Fri (8am - 5pm)
Sat (8am - 12pm)
252 1324

AMP Hotline

Mon-Fri (2 - 7pm)
345 2911

AWARE Helpline

Mon-Fri (4pm - 10pm)
1800 774 5935

Care Corner Mandarin Counselling Centre

Daily (10am - 10pm)
1800 353 5800

Centre for Fathering

Mon-Fri (9am - 5pm)
455 0038

Counselling and Care Centre

Mon-Fri (8:30am - 5pm)
536 6366

Family Service Centre Hotline

Mon-Fri (9am - 5pm)
Sat (9am - 1pm)
1800 838 0100

MCDS Family and Children's Welfare Branch

Mon-Fri (8:30am - 5pm)
1800 258 6598
Sat (8:30am - 1pm)
1800 258 6527

Parentline

Mon-Fri (9am - 5pm)
289 8811

SACAC Community Health Office

Mon-Fri (9am - 5pm)
733 9249

SAMH Helpline

Mon-Fri (9am - 6pm)
1800 283 7019

SOS Hotline

Daily (24 Hours)
1800 221 4444

SPPA

Mon-Fri (9am - 5pm)
1800 294 3757

Courage to Change

If you have decided to make some changes in your life in order to tackle the challenges you face, remember to be patient with yourself. For many years you have lived a certain way. Changes aren't going to happen just because you made a decision. They take time.

Don't be discouraged by setbacks. You are not a machine that can be programmed. Changing your behaviour is difficult to sustain and requires daily effort.

Stay positive. Get out and enjoy life with your family and friends. You are your own worst critic so don't be too hard on yourself. If you've done something you're not happy with, don't give up. Think about it, what you could have done differently and go on with your life. The greatest mistake you can make is to give up on yourself.



