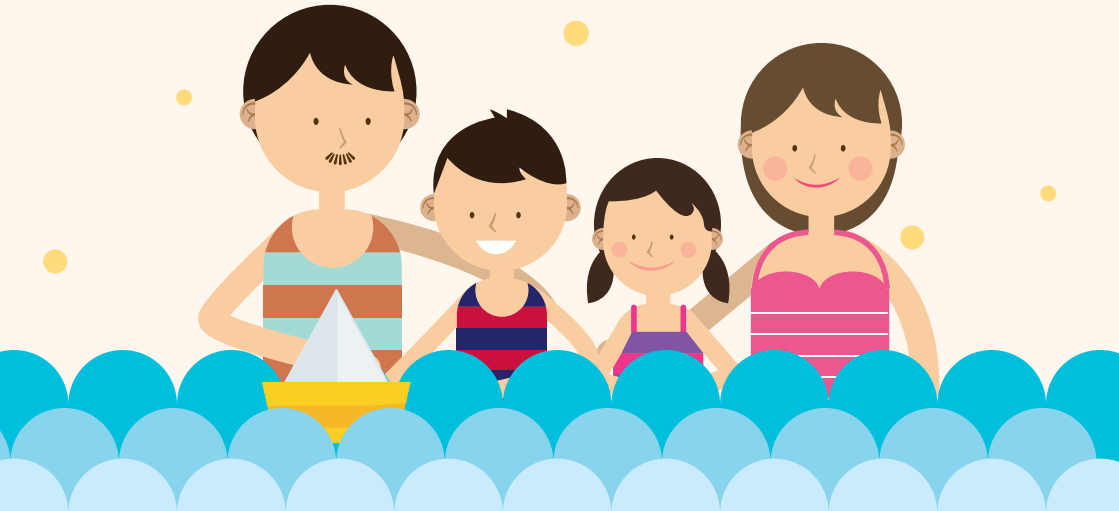




Children's Opinion Series

SPEAKING YOUR CHILD'S LOVE LANGUAGE

Spending quality time with your child



Advocating for children's **OPINIONS**



THE MAKING OF THE CHILDREN'S OPINION SERIES

SUKA SOCIETY'S WORKSHOPS

SUKA Society conducted nine workshops in 2016 with youths from refugee, Orang Asli, and urban poor communities. The youths freely shared their thoughts and opinions about their family and support system, their emotions, and their goals. The workshops were conducted to provide the youths with tools to develop resilience, and for them to learn how to resolve obstacles that they may face in pursuing their goals.

WHY THESE BOOKLETS?

SUKA Society published a series of three booklets: **Speaking your child's love language**, **It is OKAY to ask for help!** and **When parents fight, children suffer** as a follow-up to the workshops, aimed at promoting the opinions of youths and children on issues important to them. We hope that key people in children's lives, such as parents, teachers, decision-makers, and people who work closely with children, will find these booklets helpful in developing ways to connect with children, understand them, and to help improve their lives.



Let's begin with Ivy's story

I think parents do not need to spend a lot of time with their children. But parents can do things like prepare breakfast for their children before school, and see them off to school before going back to bed.

My family rarely spends time together. Sometimes we go for a holiday for a week, usually in December. I think it is important to bond with the family. Parents nowadays don't understand their children because they are busy finding money.

My parents don't really understand me. I cannot share my deepest feelings with them. I don't know why. I am afraid that they will be stressed if I share my feelings with them, because they also have their own work.

Since young, whenever I have a problem, I will not tell my parents. I will keep it to myself. I don't like people to say that I am being difficult. If I tell my parents something, they will listen without saying anything. I would like them to comment, but they don't.



MODERN LIFE, BUSY FAMILIES

There are many children like Ivy. Children, whether they live in rural and remote villages, or urban town centres, have less time with busy working parents, which is part of today's modern life syndrome.

In most families today, both parents have to work in order to make ends meet. This includes working in full-time or part-time jobs, working from home, or doing work which is unpaid (such as domestic work, looking after children, or tending to family businesses).

This leaves parents with little time to spend with their children. Their conversations are limited to, "*Hurry up, you have to go for tuition*", "*Have you done your homework?*", or "*Time to go to sleep!*"

Some parents have to continue their work at home, while others may be exhausted at the end of the day. Their children are used to being told, "*Don't disturb daddy or mummy*", and amuse themselves by watching television, or spending time with friends instead. Some children end up spending more time with domestic helpers or are alone at home.

bonds that matter

Once children start school, they spend a great deal of time with school teachers and friends. Should these supporting figures replace parents as the children's role models and mentors?

Parents play uniquely different roles compared to teachers and friends. In their parents, children should find a safe haven. These are the people who should love them unconditionally and protect them.

Fifteen-year-old Ozni is from Johor but lives in a hostel in Raub, Pahang and says that she feels closer to her friends and teachers at boarding school. She says that they understand her better than her parents do.

"My father works in Singapore and my mother spends most of her time, including weekends and holidays, working in her shop," she says.

Ozni's family does not spend much time together, due to her parents' busy work schedules. It saddens her that they do not even get to enjoy short holidays or trips together.





forming attachments

Every evening, Rose's (*not her real name*) father used to play with Rose when he came back from work. Rose was still very young when her father left the family without a word, because of his mental health issues.

The impact of this loss of attachment on Rose only became apparent when she started going to school. She was not able to make friends or trust her teachers, and she had learning problems.

We all have a deep longing for relationships, and a need for closeness and human touch.

"I feel sad that my own parents don't know or understand me. Sometimes I wonder, why is it that my mother gave birth to me, but she doesn't know me as well as others do."

- Ozni, 15

Alex Lui, Head of the Psychology Department at HELP University says, "Those who spend more time with the children have a greater influence on the children as children will become more attached to the people they spend more time with".

when children are neglected

"They don't spend enough time with us because they go to work at 6am and come home at 6pm. And sometimes at night I don't feel like staying home so I will go over to my cousin's house."

- Ika, 15

Fifteen-year-old Ika craves a closer relationship with her mother and stepfather. Children like Ika may suffer from emotional neglect. Their basic needs are met, but they are not given enough attention and love.

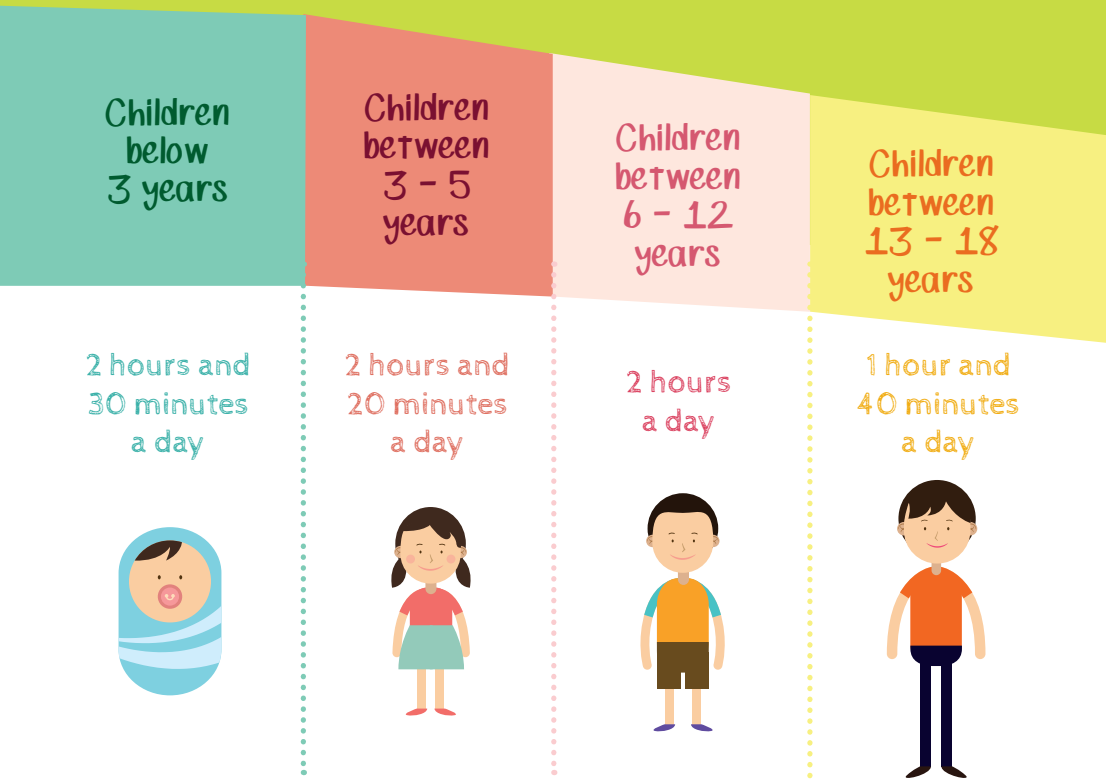
Child education psychologist, Lau Cheng Yi, says that neglect can affect children's development and learning abilities.

"For example, the parents may not be providing enough stimulation or guidance for language development because they do not spend enough time with their children," Lau explains.

And, language is very closely tied to social interaction. When children do not have anyone to talk to, they may become socially delayed, i.e. they do not learn how to talk to people, to negotiate, and to interact with others.

As children grow, parents spend less time with them

In 1998, the National Population and Family Development Board conducted research on Child Care and Parenting Styles Among Working Parents in Malaysia¹. The study found that working parents spend less time as the child grows:



¹ Anjli Doshi. 'Malaysia's Approach to Building Resilient Families'. National Population and Family Development Board, Malaysia (1998).

the curse of technology



We are living in the age of digital technology. While technology opens up new channels for communication and sharing, senior consultant paediatrician, Datuk Dr Amar-Singh HSS, believes that some parents spend more time on technology than with their children.

At the same time, children and young people have also caught on to this addiction to technology. "Children communicate more in the virtual world than they do in real life," adds Dr Amar-Singh, who is also head of the Paediatric Department, Hospital Raja Permaisuri Bainun, Ipoh.

There is limited value to these online communication and relationships, as opposed to children spending meaningful time with their parents, family members and friends.



Tune off, and tune in...

The most important way to ensure quality time with your child is to turn off your devices.

When parents are constantly on their phones – either at the dinner table, while out together or while driving – it makes children feel as if they are not important. Children also do not have face-to-face interactions with their parents, which is the primary way that they learn.



Spending Time together pays off

Children benefit in many ways when they spend more time interacting with their parents.

Better cognitive development

According to child education psychologist, Lau Cheng Yi, a child's language skills is markedly improved when parents spend more time with the child. "Parents will talk to their children when they are together and the children will pick up different aspects of the language."

Lau says that parents can provide an enabling environment for children to learn on their own or with their parents. "If there are books lying around the house, even if their parents do not read to them, the children will look at the books out of their own curiosity. This will prompt their parents to read with them in their free time or explain things to them."

A study published in U.K.'s Economic Journal in 2016 found that when mothers spent time with their children (aged three to five years) in educational activities, such as reading, the children's cognitive skills improved². At seven years, these children showed an increased development in verbal skills.

Social development

Children develop social skills from a very young age by interacting and establishing relationships with family members. When parents spend more time with their children, they can nurture communication skills, family values, and a sense of trust and bonding in children³.

And, as the children get older, the family time can also encourage cooperation and sharing.

² The Guardian. 3 Dec 2016. Child's cognitive skills linked to time spent with mother. (www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/dec/03/childs-cognitive-skills-linked-time-with-mother)

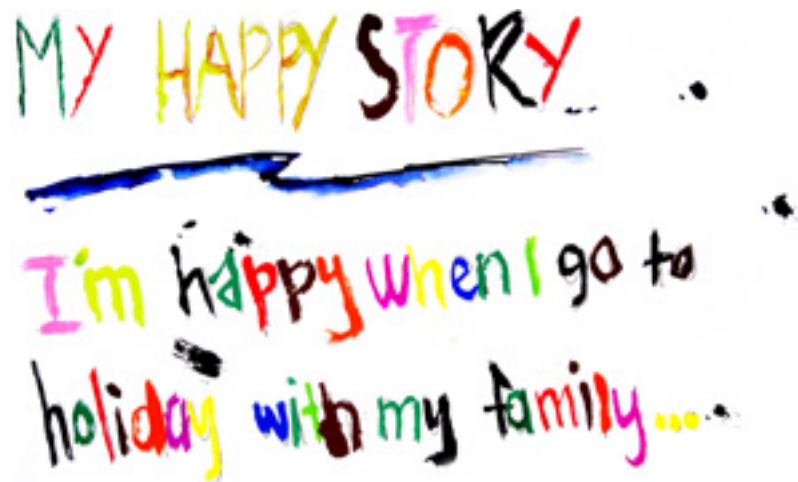
³ The Bump. How Does Spending Time as a Family Affect Children? (www.living.thebump.com/spending-time-family-affect-children-8367.html)

Emotional development

When children know that their parents are there for them (not just present, but engaged with them), they learn to build confidence and self-esteem, and develop better emotional well-being.

Contrary to popular belief, children who spend a lot of time with their parents do not necessarily become clingy. They can learn to be independent, provided parents give them the opportunity to explore, teach them to solve problems on their own, and guide them when necessary.

“There needs to be time (spent together) but not an overwhelming amount. Children need their own playtime to learn to be creative, and to be by themselves. However, parents’ presence is important, even if parents and their children are doing different things in the same place,” says Alex Lui, Head of the Psychology Department at HELP University.



“My Dad and Mom” Artwork by Tan Sheng Chee, 6

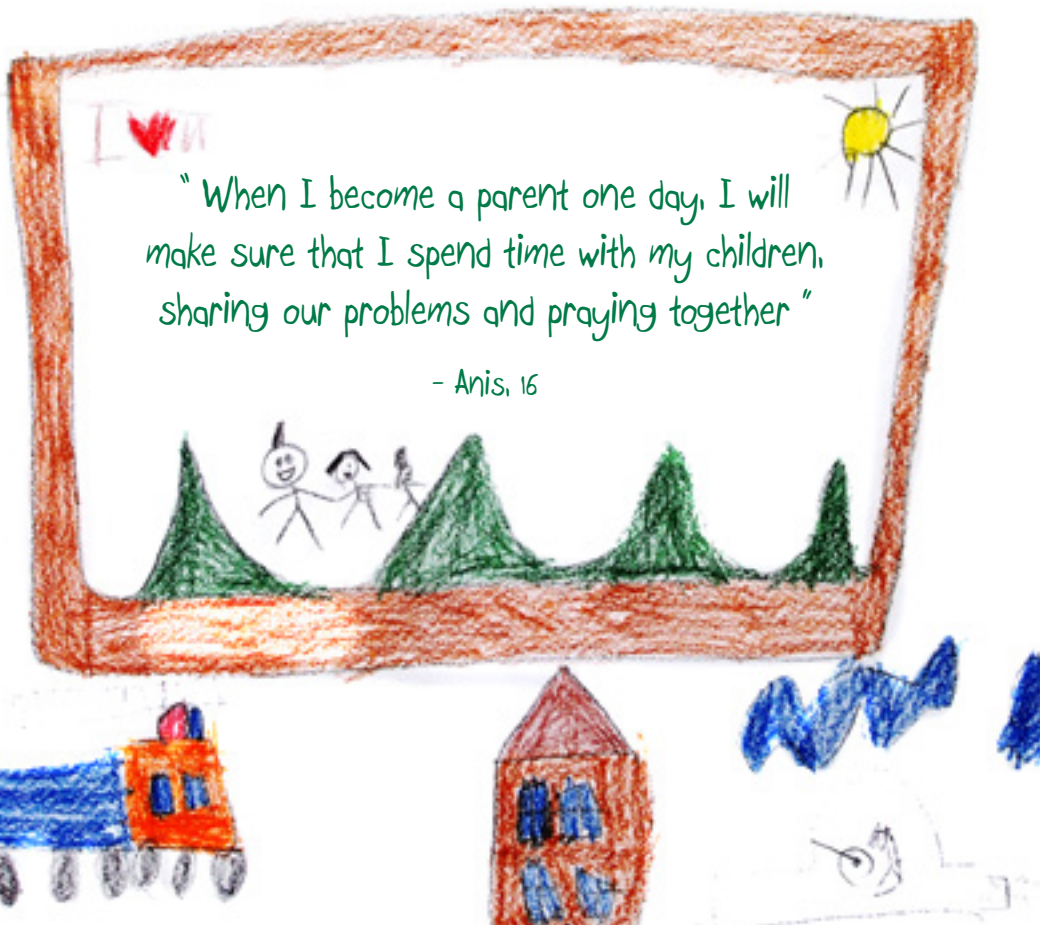


IT WORKS FOR YOU TOO!

Parents also benefit from spending more time with children. When parents spend even just a few hours of quality time with the child, doing activities that he/she loves, it helps parents to be back in touch with the child.

Parents will be able to see the world through the child’s eyes and gain some valuable perspectives.

Quality VS. Quantity



"Holiday on the mountain" Artwork by Alvin Lew, 6

Make it meaningful

Spending time with your child isn't about finding more hours in a day – it is about making those few hours meaningful.

For most working parents, the time that they spend with their children is limited to the mornings when they send the children to school or the babysitter, and the evenings when they come back from work.

Fifteen-year-old Ika says that **fathers should teach or help children with their studies whenever they have free time.**

Parents should try to turn the dinner time into family time with their children and refrain from just asking the children whether they have done their homework.

"Dinner can be a safe time to talk about anything," says child education psychologist Lau Cheng Yi.

Seventeen-year-old Clay says that quality time means more family interaction. **"Spend more time with your children. Don't let your children play with gadgets because it will make the family anti-social. They will eat with their heads down, playing with their gadgets,"** she says.

Many children see holidays together as the ideal way to spend time with their parents.

Justina, 13, says that parents can bring their children out for *jalan-jalan* (an outing). **"Parents should spend time with their children so that the children won't feel bored,"** she adds.

"Actually I've forgotten what it feels like to be together, because we only have meals together on special occasions like birthdays, and it's been quite a while - 6,7 years since we spent time together. So I've forgotten what it feels like to be together as a family."

- Qian, 19



"My dad comes home late every day, so family time is usually on weekends and church days. The kids "makan sendiri" and mom and dad "makan sendiri". I'm not really sure if I want more time together. My father is busy and my mom seems to want more time to herself. She'll always eat late at night when the kids are asleep.

Maybe a vacation together would be nice."

- J.S (19)



"I don't really spend time with my family because both of my parents are busy with work. Weekends are busy. I usually only meet my parents in the morning. After school at 6pm, I just go into my room and sleep.

The next morning I meet my parents again, so there's not enough time to spend with them. We rarely eat together, it's been hard to eat together since January, including weekends.

My parents work overtime. I've got five siblings and I'm the eldest. I take care of my siblings. My aunt stays near us, but I cook, sometimes my mom cooks."

- Hafiza, 19



Great ideas to spend Quality Time



1. Daily routines

Let your child choose and read one book with you at bedtime.

Chat with your children during the drive to and from school/babysitters.

Get your child to help out with simple house repairs, e.g. fixing a leaky tap or cleaning the air-conditioning filter. This teaches them responsibility and life skills.

2. Family activities

Weekends: Go to the park, watch a movie, watch a concert, have a special brunch, organise a picnic, play a sport, play games/puzzles, or read books together.

Special occasions/holidays: Take a trip, go camping, volunteer together for charity, work on a family project (e.g. build something for the garden or the children's bedroom, create an artwork, or bake a dessert).

Several times a week or during the weekend, allow your child to choose an activity and do it together. Give it your undivided attention and follow through until it is complete.

3. Play times

Find an opportunity to play with your child every day, e.g. play a game of "I Spy" on the way to school, or a quick game of cards after dinner. It doesn't have to be boisterous to be fun.

Play your child's favourite sport/computer game together. If you cannot play it, learn more about it so that you can talk to your child about it.

Avoid being a cynical adult and think like a child/youth – use your imagination and talk about subjects like, "What would you do if you had a million Ringgit?" or "What kind of superhero power would you like to have?"

Do something of your child's choosing.

4. Sharing

Make this time a safe space for your child to talk freely to you about anything he/she wants.

Schedule 15-20 minutes a day of one-on-one time with each child. Try not be distracted by your work, phones or the other children.



"Akar ini, adik-beradik saya. Saya anak nombor tiga. Yang macam awan ini, ia melambangkan kedamaian. Yang macam tali Tarzan melambangkan ibu dengan saya suka pergi kebun. Tepat pukul empat atau lima, kami suka duduk di luar dan tengok senja."

"These roots represent my siblings. I am the third child. This cloud-like object represents peace. The Tarzan vine represents my Mom and I. We like going to the farm. At four to five o'clock in the evening, we like to sit outside and enjoy the view of the sunset."

- Izajuliah, 14



"I drew my home because mom and dad are at home. I like to stay at home."

- Nina (5)

Once a week, have a special themed dinner, e.g. pizza night, sushi night or *roti canai* night. These should be meals that children can get involved in making (there are lots of instant, frozen options that are easy to prepare).

Eat at least one meal together every day, and spend some time chatting to your children.

Over the meal, ask everyone to share something great about their day.

5. Mealtimes

Don't lecture or punish children during mealtimes.

Whenever possible, prepare a meal together with your children. If there is no time, prepare a simple meal, such as a sandwich or some fruits.

Wash dishes together as a family activity – each member of the family can do one task, e.g. collect the dishes, wash them, dry them and stack them.

Reinforce positive behaviour, by telling your child you appreciate it when he/she does something helpful, kind or good. This shows your child that you have been paying attention to him/her.

Show genuine interest, not half-hearted or distracted attempts.

Laugh and be silly with your child as often as possible.

6. Finally, the little things

Even when you're in a rush, always give them a hug and a cheerful word when dropping off/picking up at school.

If your child has a smartphone, send them fun or affectionate text messages regularly, instead of messages nagging them to come home or do their homework.

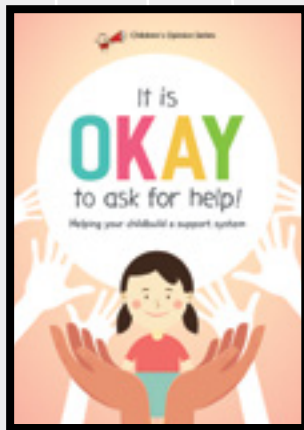
Try not to be critical or judgemental about the choices they make, e.g. what they want to wear, watch, read or eat.



"I am happy when I am playing with my friends. I like ninja turtles and transformers I am excited when I take a trip to Penang with my family. I enjoy drawing, making sand castles with my family on the beach."

- Mal, 8

Collect all 3 booklets from the series!



Booklet 2

It is OKAY to ask for help!



Booklet 3

When parents fight, children suffer

DID YOU FIND THIS BOOKLET HELPFUL?

We would love to hear your opinion about this booklet.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

If you find this booklet helpful, you may like to pass it on to your family, friends and colleagues. Feel free to contact SUKA Society for additional copies.

Digital booklets are available at our website:
www.sukasociety.org

Write to us at:

enquiry@sukasociety.org

Or call us at:

03-78774227

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