



Newsletter – Jan 2009

CFSM Singapore

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Children and Discipline

My grandson Evan has two whorls on the back of his head. Chinese tradition has it that children with this distinctive mark have a stubborn streak, wilful - a mind of their own. We seem to see, perhaps sub-consciously look for these traits, in his behaviour. As an infant, and when he cried, it was long and persistent, even when he fell asleep crying, his body will continue to shudder with sobs, 10-15 minutes into his slumber. He also screamed to have his way, or when his elder sisters teased him. We put this down, indulgently, to having to fight for attention, and his rights.

His mother, believes in encouraging us, the four grandparents, to participate in the upbringing of her children. We had a pretty good track record with her two elder girls. Like his elder sisters, Evan grew up with the benefit of attention from 3 families. His mother spoils him as being “my last baby” but is firm with him. As grandparents, to this our “only grandson”, we were indulgent, but patiently firm when it comes to important issues. We learned that we have to reason with him a lot more than we need to with his two elder sisters. Very quickly he learned to accept a firm “No” from us. Then, he was taught not to scream and throw tantrums but to say “no” – we demonstrated that we respected his “no” whenever reasonable. We celebrated his two year old birthday a few weeks ago. I have noticed recently that he notices, understands, and reacts appropriately, when I give him an exaggerated knitted- eyebrows-disapproving frown.

None of us have ever punished him or spanked him. Yet we were definitely disciplining him, and teaching him to live with, and respect others. I believe this aspect of “continuing education” has to be consistent and regularly reinforced over the next 15-20 years, if not by us- the grandparents, then by his parents.

I was therefore rather upset to read in the papers some months ago, that parents and defence lawyers are publicly complaining that the Judges in our Juvenile Courts are too “intimidating and turning hearing s into shelling sessions for the wayward youths that come before them”. The lawyers complained that the Juvenile Court Judges are “berating and hectoring” the offenders. Some of the parents of these juvenile offenders, defended and offered excuses for their children’s offences, and opined that the Judges are not in keeping with what is now “normal” among modern youth.

In Singapore today, only those children who committed their offences when they were younger than 16, appear before the Juvenile Courts. I do not personally know of any youth or parents of a young person who had been brought to court. I therefore believe that our Police and Prosecutors do not take lightly the decision to take youths to Court. I know that in Singapore there are procedures for unofficial and official “stern Police warnings” for youths caught for minor offences against the law. When they have to go in front of the Juvenile

Courts the matter is usually serious. If these indulgent parents think that the Judges should not even scold their errant teenagers then perhaps there should be legislation to empower the Judges to punish their parents who are clearly negligent in their parental duties.

My wife, a Secondary School teacher for more 39 years, had always said that whenever a child gives them problems in school, and the teachers have to meet and speak to the parents they invariably discover that there are problem parents. Among the teachers they have a saying that “behind every problem child there are problem parents”. No one would say it publicly as it would be “politically incorrect” for educators to voice these truths. One teacher even said, only half in jest, that it would have been a lot more effective that instead of public caning for the worst offenders in school, the School Principals should publicly cane the parents instead. Or, at least, have the parents present on stage when their children are punished for repeated offences. In our Asian society, shame and public opprobrium is still a very powerful tool of social discipline.

I remember an incident more than 10 years ago when the American Chinese boy Michael Fay was trialled and sentenced for vandalism. His American step- parents and natural father kicked up a shrill, public row to prevent their child from being punished. American diplomats blustered and tried to bully our Courts and politicians to treat him special, as he was an American citizen. Even the US President Clinton got himself involved.

Another boy of Hong Kong parents who was similarly punished for the same offences (few people remember his name and the local papers kept referring to him as “the son of Jiang Long” - a well known and respected Director of the local TV station) accepted and took his punishment.

Both were caned and served their sentences. No more was heard of the Hong Kong boy. That his misbehaviour disgraced his respected parents no doubt kept him on the straight and narrow after that experience.

Michael Fay , after he went home to the USA, however, went on to repeatedly re-offend, and was later charged in US Courts for drug possession and other offences.

I am in total agreement with Ho Kong Loon – a teacher who in his article in the TODAY Newspaper on 24th December, wrote..” Bullying in schools is one of the manifestations of the lack of firm discipline, which starts with liberal parents who insist on handling their kids gingerly with a huge dose of over protectiveness and indulgence. Schools under immense pressure from vocal and demanding parents, cave in to their insistence that only the parents have the right and responsibility to discipline their kids.”

Now, these irresponsible and over indulgent parents with their lawyers, are publicly complaining that Judges of the Juvenile Courts should not scold or hector their errant kids. When parents are not willing or not able to discipline their children and yet get very self-righteous when others in authority tried to teach their errant children some discipline then it is time that the parents get punished.

In the Chinese San Ji Jing - Three Character Classics (which for 700 hundred years – until 1940’s – was a primer for all Chinese children to learn by rote) has the following gems of wisdom in the final last verses. “Learn diligently when young, apply when you mature. Respect and honour superiors, minister to those under you... then □□□, □□□ (- *Yang min shen, Xian fu mu.* - Have your name made famous, bring glory (show up) your parents). Our Asian culture understands that the shine of a good person reflects well on his/her parents.

In our Asian culture, we are ashamed to bring shame to our parents. Let us not lose this.

The CCC teaches.....

2223. Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility by first creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for *education in the virtue*. This requires an apprenticeship in self denial, sound judgement and self mastery – the preconditions of all true freedom.

Teenagers must serve “an apprenticeship in self-denial..... and self-mastery”.

An apprenticeship presupposes that there is a teaching, practising master. As parent are you this master?

Quotation from Familiaris Consortio....

“The family must educate the children for life in such a way that each one may fully perform his or her role according to the vocation received from God.”

The Church knows and understands the difficult aspects of this parental task
.....

“Other difficult circumstances in which the family needs the help of the ecclesial community and its pastors are: the children’s adolescence, which can be disturbed, rebellious and sometimes stormy....”

Is the CFSM up to the task of providing this help?

article by.....mark

CFSM Annual General Meeting

Date : 22 February 2009 Sunday

Time :1.30pm –5pm

Place : Novena Church *(Peter Donders Room)

Please note that family mass will follow after the AGM. You are welcomed to bring your children along as there will be separate activities organised for them.