

Juggling Family And Work Through Parenting@Work



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- Datin Sri Ismalina

Raising children in the twenty-first century is an enormous task. The pressures faced by the modern family unit are very different even when compared to those faced by parents 20 years ago. The advent of the information boom has fundamentally changed how society works and many parents are finding it hard to cope.

And it does not help that Malaysians are being bombarded with the news of an alarming increase in social ills among children. Not just teenagers but also kids as young as 9 years old.

According to Datin Sri Ismalina Hj Ismail, a trainer for the Parenting@Work program, many families are still hidebound to traditional thinking - the father should be the sole breadwinner of the family and the mother is responsible for the children.

Many families have taken their thinking on familial matters from their parents wholesale, namely placing less emphasis on the emotional and psychological well-being of their children.

But, according to her, that thinking must change. Parents are children’s first and most important teachers - and yet they seldom receive the training and support that allow them to be aware of the importance of their parenting actions, stay aware of children’s needs, cope with the challenges of child-rearing, and juggle the demands of a full time job, all at the same time.

Ismalina knows all of the problems firsthand. “When I was working fulltime, I experienced all these conflicting orders. I had to perform at work, which sometimes means coming back very late. And yet, I am still a mother, which means I want to spend time with my kids. And because of work, I have so little time to spend on them. By the time I get home, my children are already asleep,” she says.

“This is where the Parenting@Work program comes in,” she says. “To tell them [parents] that while work and career is important, family is still of paramount importance. It strives to teach parents to juggle between career and kids.”

Parenting at work is a program prepared by Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara [LPPKN] with a panel comprised of professionals from different backgrounds. It consists of five topics - knowing yourself, one body with many hats, creative parenting, parenting style and stress management.

Running in multiple states at the same time, it is a one-day program to educate and raise awareness among the working population of Malaysia. An interactive session, a class has a maximum size of 60 or 30 couples. However, she says that as the response from the public has been so enthusiastic, she has had to expand the number of couples in her sessions.

“The main objective is to share with the public, especially working parents, how to balance between family and work,” says Ismalina. “We talk with parents, share ideas on how to ‘steal’ some time to be with their children and teach parents to evaluate their time and their priorities.”

However, getting both parents to stay and talk about their problems is the biggest challenge faced by Ismalina. “I have observed that if both husband and wife come to our program, the wife will clam up and not open up as much. ‘What happens at home stays at home’ is the general feeling, which is typically very Malaysian. We are very private about our private lives,” she comments.

To find out more about the Parenting@Work program, log on to <http://ismalina.blogspot.com>