

24 JUN 1989

# PRESS RELEASE

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89-SAM-28

Release No.: 19/JUN.  
03-2/89/06/10

SPEECH BY DR SEET AI MEE, MINISTER OF STATE  
(COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION),  
AT THE LAUNCHING OF FAMILY WEEK '89  
IN THE PUB AUDITORIUM ON SATURDAY, 10 JUNE 1989 AT 2.30 PM

This afternoon marks the beginning of the Fifth Family Week - we hope to have this as a continuing event as it clearly reflects one of our national priorities - the importance of the family. Strong families will make strong communities and strong communities will ensure a strong nation.

As you are aware, six Advisory Councils were set up last year in April, to look into the issues of Youth, Culture, Sports & Recreation, Aged, Disabled and Family & Community Life. The Advisory Council on Family and Community Life was appointed to review the needs and aspirations of the family and recommend policies and measures that will enable Singaporeans to achieve a more satisfying family and community life. The Council has since completed its report and the Government is studying the recommendations. The Report will be released to the public soon.

This year's Family Week theme is "The Family Deserves Our Best." It certainly does and what can be better for families than times spent together as a family and I would like to share a few thoughts with you on the concept of Family Together Time.

It is not my aim this afternoon to suggest a whole list of activities for the family. Most of you I believe already have family recreational, educational and other activities. What I like to suggest is a few guidelines for enjoying family time.

Family togetherness refers to the time a family spends together to relate to one another usually through some shared activity. Recreation is one good example. Each family will find its own form of recreation, the purpose of which should be to spend the time together and for family members to involve themselves with each other, whether it be for fun, encouragement, sharing or learning.

Therefore, firstly, family time could involve recreation: As the word suggests, it is a time for re-creating and creativity. It could be making things with our hands, writing ideas with our pens, painting with our brushes or composing things or music or play-acting and dressing up. Creativity is found in both the young and the old. Walt Disney, in particular, believed in the creative powers in the mind of, particularly, the child and often spoke of it.

Secondly, family togetherness should involve communication. When together time takes place in a more relaxed atmosphere, there is further opportunity for the family to listen, to feel, and to respond. While we live in a fast-paced society, families must make sure that they have time to communicate with each other. Communication is the lubricant in family living and cannot always be confined to the time specially set aside for the purpose. Communication can take place any time and meal-times, play-times and TV viewing time are good occasions.

A friend once related an incident with his daughter to me. The child wanted to tell her father about something important that had happened in school that day. She hurriedly began, "Daddy, I want to tell you something and I will tell you real fast." Realising her frustration, my

friend answered in a rather deliberate manner, "Dear, tell it to me but you don't have to tell me real fast. Say it slowly." He never forgot her answer: "Then listen slowly." This incident highlights an important aspect of communication - listening. Communication is a two-way process: It involves speaking and listening, it means giving of ideas and thoughts and receiving of them.

An oft-quoted term is: "quality time". What is quality time? I would like to suggest that it should be time or activity set aside for building family relationships and it could be built upon existing activities in the home programme. In a real way, quality time is undivided attention given to communication.

For example, parents who watch TV programmes with their children should not do so in total silence where both parent and child are not in communication. Parents can use ideas from what is seen for discussing or teaching children values, geography, history, whatever. Home programmes could sometimes be re-scheduled so that "together time" could be incorporated for the family to spend time communicating together.

This brings me to the third guideline for enjoying family time - that of relating with one another.

To enjoy family time, members must feel that it is worthwhile to relate to one another. As families do things together they will understand each other better and share in common family values. Family togetherness and shared sense of values will ensure family cohesion.

Time families are able to invest in relationships is time well spent. Children learn from parents and as they spend time with them in recreation, relationship and communication, the importance of spending time together will be inculcated in them and precious to them. They will also learn to give time to recreation, to build and nurture relationships in the future - when they are parents.

Finally, to have family togetherness requires positive effort. The Saturday or Sunday afternoon siesta is important - but equally important for families is time given to free mind and body from work and routine to relax and to play and fellowship with the family.

In the Chinese, Malay, Indian and Judaeo-Christian traditions, the three-generation family has always been integrated in family togetherness. We should continue to practise these traditions and to extend three-generation participation to family time activities. The older generation has much to contribute in enriching recreation for the family. Today, I often see three-generation families taking walks together, going on picnics, swimming, gardening, and spending time together on hobbies.

In Kaohsiung, Taiwan, I visited a Children Activity Centre where there was a Room called the three-generation room where child, parents and grandparents work on clay and make pottery together, playing and creating together. Such activities are encouraging trends which we should consciously promote and support.

We should try to meet the challenge of maintaining family togetherness in the face of heavy work responsibilities. We can do so by balancing work, family and leisure. It requires careful planning, making right choices and a positive commitment to family recreation, family education and togetherness.

Recreation, communication and relating to each other - these are three important components of "Family Time" - three which we need to build on to ensure that our families will remain cohesive and strong.

Finally, I wish to thank the Organising Committee of Family Week '89, and the many organisations who will see the programmes and activities through during the week.

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