

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR TEO CHONG TEE, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(SOCIAL AFFAIRS), AT THE SINGAPORE KA YIN CHONG
ASSOCIATION'S DISBURSEMENT OF SCHOLARSHIPS CEREMONY
AT THE SINGAPORE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
ON SUNDAY, 25 APRIL 1982 AT 7.30 PM

I am pleased to be here this evening on the occasion of the disbursement of scholarships ceremony by the Singapore Ka Yin Chong Association. I understand that 55 students will be receiving scholarships, of whom 28 are from primary schools, 12 from secondary schools, 10 will be going to Pre-U and the Polytechnic and another five will be going to tertiary institutions. I am sure that their parents are proud of them and I hope that the recipients of these awards will continue to pursue their studies with the same zeal and perseverance in the years ahead.

I wonder how many of our youngsters realise the pains and efforts their parents make in order that they can get a good education. When you were young you may perhaps recall having had your share of "nagging" or "scoldings" over doing homework. I am sure many of you thought that your parents were making much ado about nothing. When you grow older you will realise that your parents were concerned that you do well in school so that you will be able to get a good job and be economically independent. Looking one step further, you will probably realise that parents are also concerned that you get a good husband or wife, as the case may be, and only when you are well settled can they really be freed of their anxieties and worries about you.

Many youngsters tend to regard this concern as interference. "My parents won't let me do this", "I didn't ask to be born" are quite common statements that our counsellors have heard. It is only when they themselves become parents that they begin to understand why their parents acted the way they did and I won't be surprised if many will act as their parents did! On the part of parents, many feel that they are not getting the appreciation

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they should be getting. Whenever their children talk back or argue, parents tend to feel hurt or shut them up with statements like "I did so much for you and this is what I get" or "I'm doing this for your own good".

Stresses of the nature I have mentioned are common to any family. What is important is that such stresses should not disrupt family living, for example, the ties between parents and children. Much publicity has been given to the concept of filial piety lately. I would like to give my views on this. I view filial piety as one element of the parent/child bond which is again one aspect of meaningful family living. How parents and children can contribute towards the achievement of meaningful family living is, to my mind, an equally important issue which encompasses the concept of filial piety. Here, the importance of parents and 'family educators' must be emphasized. The teaching as demonstration of important aspects which go towards meaningful family living is a role which today's parents must realise.

I notice a growing tendency amongst parents to "do things" for their children. This is especially so nowadays when parents are concerned over their children's performance in school such that they try their best to ensure that children are "free" to do their homework and participate in school-related activities. To an extent this is good. Children should be given adequate time to study. But do parents realise also the importance of teaching their children the concept and the reality of household responsibility? I am afraid that today's children grow up thinking that their main aim in life is to study and parents do tend to reinforce this idea. I am of the view that children should be given some responsibility in the family; after all they are part of the family too. Chores like sweeping the floor and making their own beds, are tasks that can easily be assigned to them. They will learn not to take things for granted and also begin to understand that being a part of the family has its responsibilities as well which have for too long been shouldered by parents.

I subscribe to the belief that many people do not fully realise or understand the problems of others until they go through it themselves. This does not mean, however, that we don't try to understand. Active participation in household chores and responsibility can help children and youngsters understand their parents' problems. Explanations and clarifications by parents can be another. It is unfortunate that many questions asked by children are brushed aside. "Why is mummy looking so tired?" "Why is daddy so grumpy today?" or "Why does grandfather always repeat things?" are questions which, if answered well, can bring about a better understanding by children of their parents and the world of "grown-ups", and a greater exposure to the facts of family living.

You may well ask why I am laying so much stress on understanding. You have all heard of the phrase "generation gap". It is a catch-all label which conveniently explains almost all of the misunderstandings and problems between parents and their children. This label also does a good job of preventing questions being asked and explanations being given. Apart from this, this label does nothing else. Differences between people of different age groups will be there but with understanding, and the creation of opportunities for understanding, persons in the family will be enabled to live together more harmoniously. So let us be more aware of the need for more communication between parents and their children, and the need for parents to be more conscious of their role as "educators" in preparing their children for living in the family.

At this point, we should realise that parental example itself is an important aspect which influences children's outlook on the family. How parents relate to grandparents is a very important lesson which children subconsciously pick up. Let me digress to give you a rather humorous example, from a folk tale in Asia.

A mother, father and their six-year-old boy lived together with the boy's grandfather in a village. Whilst they were not rich they managed to survive. However, the grandfather was becoming senile and would do nothing but sit around the whole day. The boy's parents got impatient and started to think: of what use was the old

man except to eat the three meals a day. They decided then to take him away. As the old man could not walk, they had to make a big basket to carry him away and so they started making the basket. The boy was curious and asked his father why he was making the basket. The father said that it was to bring the grandfather away. The boy said nothing. The next day, the boy offered to help his parents to make the basket. When asked why (as he preferred to play with his friends almost every day) the boy said: So that I will know how to make a basket to carry you away next time. Needless to say, the parents did not continue with their endeavour.

If parents respect the grandparents, their children will also do so. Parents should also teach children to give up seats to grandparents, do chores for them, addressing them correctly, etc. These are some of the practical elements of respect. If the grandparents live in the family for example, parents should be more alert in teaching their children how to be considerate to them, particularly if they are old, or having some ailments such as hearing loss. Parents themselves should likewise be considerate. Children and youngsters are very quick to detect double standards and to question why they must do it when parents themselves don't need to.

Parents alone cannot bear the sole responsibility of educating the child in family living. Teachers, pastors, counsellors, etc., also have to gear themselves towards this goal. The relevant ministries and government departments should also propose or implement programmes towards the achievement of this object.
