

PART 1

TIPS TO PARENTING – REFLECTIONS FROM A FATHER OF 6

What?? Six children?? Yes, this is usually the incredulous response I receive when I reveal that I am blessed with 6 wonderful gifts.

My wife grew up surrounded and bolstered by the love of many relatives and cousins, so she has always longed to have a large family, and the fact that we now have six children doesn't really come as a surprise. Our oldest child (boy) is now 16 and the youngest (boy) is three years old. The rest in between are daughters aged 15, 13, 11 and 8.

My wife and I love kids. Well, maybe I wasn't as excited about kids from the start. I especially feared children dashing into me out of nowhere in crowded places, and babies crying incessantly. But with each child of our own, I learnt to appreciate and cherish them. Right from the start and throughout the parenting years, I was encouraged by my wife to change the kids' diapers, brush their teeth, play with them, and more. With the realization of my significant role as the leader of the family, I grew closer to the children and kept improving my fathering skills. From being an activity-based dad to being their story-teller, tutor, mentor and coach.

Meeting Mental Needs

One of the key skills any father has to learn is to tell stories spontaneously when putting the children to bed at night! But just in case – always have a storybook with you in the event of a mental block! During occasional dinners in the evening, we would engage in quizzes, where each child would be posed a question in turn - be it from the movies, general knowledge or the religious text. The older children would be given more difficult questions, while the younger children got the easier ones. This practice has rubbed off on them and they have even started giving quizzes to each other and even to us parents, with token prizes included!

Our family newsletter called "The Lye Family Times" is occasionally published by two to three of our kids without our help, and this newsletter includes games, puzzles, jokes, upcoming news and updates of our family activities. We also coach our children in their school subjects when needed (my wife was instrumental in developing their reading skills from young, while I made myself available for their Mathematics questions).

Meeting Physical Needs

We used to go to a Sports Stadium near our house or to the Civil Service Club for exercises or a swim. Our children learnt their inline skating and basic badminton skills from me; while their cycling and basic swimming skills came from my wife. However, continuation of our physical activities is one aspect where we need to get back on, looking at how my girth has expanded over the years!

Meeting Emotional Needs

One of my kids asked why we decided to have such a large family. I think that she's at the age where she's conscious that many of her friends have small nuclear families, and she feels different. In her mind, having an additional sibling or two is a luxury and a larger family means that the 'pie' (be it time, money or material things) is cut into smaller pieces. When she complained that she didn't feel special, my wife and I decided to work out something to make sure the kids felt loved and cherished as individuals.

We set up "Family One-on-One Dates (F.O.O.D)", where either my wife or I would go on a date with each of our children at least once every quarter. We have a meal and do whatever they enjoy – be it playing computer games, window shopping, or even setting up a tent at the beach. This idea evolved over the years. Initially, we were very idealistic, hoping that we could get the kids to share their thoughts and feelings within 15 minutes on a daily basis. What a big mistake! By the time each child warmed up, the rest of the children in the queue were getting impatient and started to protest as their turn was being delayed. After some tinkering and lots of thought, we've now hammered out a system where each child gets to go out with either ! parent at least once every 6 to 8 weeks.

Meeting Spiritual Needs

On top of the F.O.O.D, we also empower the kids at home with daily prayer time where we practise OL (organizational learning) using a 'Talking Stick'. We also conduct family meetings once in about every two months. If there's something the kids disagree with us about, that's the best time to bring it up, as the agenda calls for a review of the past two months, a discussion of the present and a look into future plans. With six kids, you can be sure each of them has his/her own unique personalities and likes to make known his/her own individual wants and needs. As parents, we have to step in at times to clarify that there is a difference between the two (needs and wants), and impart values such as discipline, integrity and simplicity.

Part 2 will be in next month's article