



THE TRAILMIX



Issue 5:

Parenting tips to support
neurodivergent children

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Introduction:

The Role Parents Play

Parents are said to be a child's world - Their pillars of support, their rock amidst life's many challenges, their warmth that embraces them unconditionally - and for good reason. While this is true for children neurotypical or otherwise, it is especially so for neurodivergent children. With the unfortunately numerous factors that contribute to the social isolation of neurodivergent children, it is of utmost importance that parents foster a supportive environment at home that encourages open communication.

One way that this can be done is through positive role modelling - Since children see and trust their parents most, they naturally pick up, then internalise certain attitudes that are presented to them. For instance, parents who are willing to communicate with therapists and teachers, in turn adjusting their expectations to be realistic and helpful, may find their child more inclined to do the same.

Nurturer Nancy, Gardener George, Jogging John

BY KAYLYN TJHIN



Being a parent of a neurodivergent child is not easy. The diagnosis may leave you with feelings of helplessness and frustration, and bring about many questions. You may feel lost or confused about what to do next. How can I support my child? How do I know if I am doing the right thing? Such questions are a normal response to a new diagnosis.

First, take some time to understand your child. Get to know their needs, specific challenges they encounter in daily life. Each neurodivergent child is different, and no method of

parenting is one size fits all.

Depending on their diagnosis, your child may need more help in certain areas, such as distractibility, social interaction etc. By taking the time to learn more about your child's condition, you can better support them, and make a profound difference in their life.

Childhood is peppered with challenges that come with growing up, more so for neurodivergent individuals who not only have a harder time coping socially and academically, but also face stigma from others around them.

You can help your child develop a positive self image and build their self-confidence.

While neurodiversity is more widely embraced in society today, there are still many people who remain unaware and ignorant. Having a secure and positive self-image will give your child the necessary tools to navigate the world around them with resilience and positivity. Neurodivergent individuals are also at higher risk of mental illness such as depression and anxiety, which can develop as a result of poor mental health and increased

1. The Importance of Parent-Child Relationship [1 min read]. Fairgaze. <https://fairgaze.com/fgnews/the-importance-of-parent-child-relationship.html>

vulnerability to things like bullying. By fostering self-confidence in your child, you are empowering them to speak up and defend their needs, as well as making them more independent and resilient in the face of challenges.

Your child sees and interacts with the world in a way that is vastly different from others, and their path may not be the one you once envisioned. Here are a few parenting tips to make that journey for you and your child a little easier.

1. Using the Growth Mindset

The Growth mindset is a concept developed by psychologist Carol Dweck. It embodies the idea that one's abilities and skills can be improved through perseverance and hard work, as compared to a "fixed mindset" where individuals believe that their qualities are fixed and unchangeable.



Here are some tips on how to introduce the growth mindset to your child: <https://therapyworks.com/blog/language-development/home-tips/growth-mindset/>

2. Be encouraging rather than scold and seek for perfection

Oftentimes, a neurodivergent child has difficulty understanding what is expected of their behaviour, and may not be able to pick up on certain social cues such as your posture or tone. Hence, scolding or admonishing them may actually do more harm than good. Instead, you can try setting clear expectations, and use positive reinforcements to encourage good behaviour. You should also give out reasonable consequences for undesirable behaviour, which will serve to nudge the child in the right direction. Above all, patience is key: your child might need a little more time and encouragement to pick up a new habit, but these skills and good habits cultivated early on will stick with them for life.



2. Hollingshead MCT. BYU researchers: How a switch to a "growth mindset" is helping empower entrepreneurs in developing nations. News. Published August 8, 2023. Accessed November 29, 2023. <https://news.byu.edu/byu-researchers-how-a-switch-to-a-growth-mindset-is-helping-empower-entrepreneurs-in-african-nations>

3. Good communication

Based on an interview with Ms Low Kiah Yen, a speech and language pathologist from Ovspring Developmental Clinic, clear and consistent communication with your child is very important in fostering a good relationship, and supporting them in overcoming challenges. As a parent, you should set aside time and space to communicate with the child. This can help you understand things from their point of view, especially since young children might not realise the implications of their actions.

Children also tend to be more accepting of feedback when it is communicated in a way that is gentle and non-threatening. For example, according to Ms Low, instead of outright correcting their speech, you should rephrase their sentences more appropriately to 'model the way' and check with the child if that was what they meant. Imitation is one way that children learn from others around them, so displaying desirable behaviours and speech can aid your child in adopting them.

4. Be accepting

Your child is born with a neurodivergent brain, and is predisposed to behave in certain ways. Parents should understand that there is no way to completely eliminate these traits. Instead, learn to embrace the fact that this is how your child will act, and be okay with it instead of insisting on correcting them. It is not easy to accept that your child is different and will lead a different, possibly harder life than others, but your child will undoubtedly be better off with your support. Try to see your child for their strengths and abilities rather than their limitations.

By loving and accepting your child for who they are, you can help them grow to be the best they can be.³

Additional resources:

Here is an article on processing and accepting your child's diagnosis:
<https://www.additudemag.com/neurodivergent-diagnosis-accept-your-child/>

3. Understanding Neurodivergence: A Guide for Parents - LDRFA. Published July 31, 2023.
<https://www.ldrfa.org/understanding-neurodivergence-guide-for-parents/>

Featured Artwork: Free Willy



“Free Willy” is an artwork by
Isaac Low, a 14 year-old student
at Catchwise Learning.

Commentary: Is Asian Parenting Good for My Child?

BY WONG E VEE



We've all heard the stereotypes of Asian parenting, with Asian parents being depicted as cold, unloving, and unreasonable. Asian parents are also often shown to have unreasonably high expectations and are never satisfied with their child's achievements, whereas Western parents praise their children for every small achievement. These stereotypes have been portrayed all over social media, with memes or video skits made by many Asian

influencers, including Singaporeans. Closer to home, one example of the portrayal would be "Da Shi Teng" or "The Caning Song" by Annette Lee and Benjamin Kheng, which garnered over 275 thousand views on YouTube. The song showcases the harsh punishments that are only too familiar for most Singaporeans while they were growing up.

Clearly, Asian parenting does not have a reputable representation in the global community. But for neurodivergent children in Singapore, how does the Asian parenting style affect the child's development? And does using the Asian parenting style necessarily mean it is detrimental for the child?

Academic Success

Right off the bat, one of the key features of Asian parenting is the focus on academic success. Generally, most Asians believe that academic success is of utmost importance, whereas Western parents focus on individual achievements. In fact, studies have shown that Singapore students rank among the top in terms of academic performance.² Indeed, academic success is over-emphasised in Singapore.

1. Morin A. 4 types of parenting styles and their effects on kids. Verywell Family. Published August 9, 2022. <https://www.verywellfamily.com/types-of-parenting-styles-1095045>

2. Hermesauto. Singapore students top maths, science rankings for second consecutive edition of international study. The Straits Times. Published December 8, 2020. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-students-top-maths-science-rankings-for-second-consecutive-edition-of>

Top 5 performers							
Primary 4 Maths		Primary 4 Science		Secondary 2 Maths		Secondary 2 Science	
Education system	Mean score	Education system	Mean score	Education system	Mean score	Education system	Mean score
Singapore	625	Singapore	595	Singapore	616	Singapore	608
Hong Kong	602	South Korea	588	Taipei	612	Taipei	574
South Korea	600	Russia	567	South Korea	607	Japan	570
Taipei	599	Japan	562	Japan	594	South Korea	561
Japan	593	Taipei	558	Hong Kong	578	Russia	543

Singaporean students ranked 1st in the Trends in International Mathematics and Sciences Study (Timss) in 2019²

This already does not look promising for neurotypical Singaporean students, let alone neurodivergent students. Neurodivergent students may already struggle to learn new knowledge in neurotypical ways, so having expectations and a general culture of emphasis on academics may negatively affect their academic performance and overall mental health. These expectations may add unnecessary pressure and stress to them, and a culture of emphasis on academic success may create an unhealthy learning environment.

Culture and Stigmas

The next thing about Asians is the focus on culture and society. Most Asian communities focus on the idea of collectivism, so the goals of society are prioritised over individual ones. While this results in emphasis on family and community, it also causes those who are different to be perceived as “lunatics” or “outliers”.³

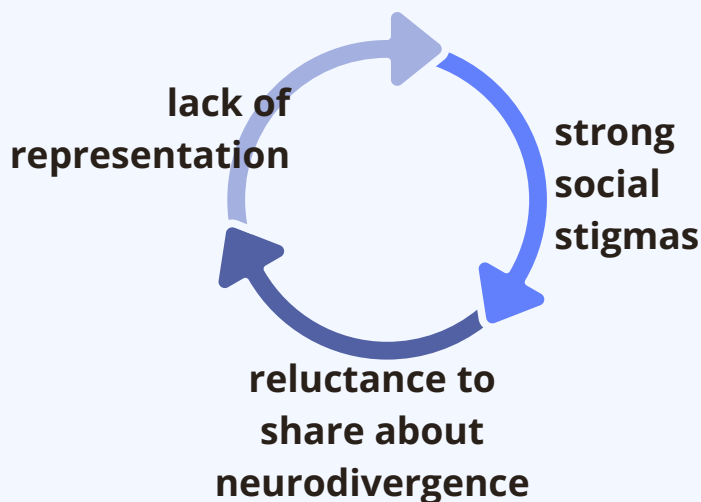
Unfortunately, this means social stigmas are generally more prevalent in Asian communities than in Western ones. (Enter any Asian household and you might just hear comments like “oh it’s just a phase, you will get over it” that Asian parents often make to their children about any topic not seen as mainstream and accepted, such as mental health issues.)

For neurodivergent children, this is a cause for concern. Social stigmas will affect others’ perceptions of neurodivergent children, and may result in discrimination, cyberbullying, loss of opportunities, and difficulties finding jobs in the future. These are just some of the numerous impacts that social stigmas can cause. In short, social stigmas are detrimental to neurodivergent children.

Though, one thing to note is that this whole issue can be seen as a “chicken and egg” problem. You see, the focus on collectivism results in social stigmas and low acceptance of neurodivergent individuals, which causes neurodivergent individuals (and their families) to be reluctant to share about their neurodivergence. This results in a lack of representation and hence understanding of neurodivergent

3. How Does Collectivism Influence Asian Culture – Dose of Asianess. [doseofasianess.com. https://doseofasianess.com/how-does-collectivism-influence-asian-culture/](https://doseofasianess.com/how-does-collectivism-influence-asian-culture/)

individuals, so the misconceptions and stigmas of neurodivergence cannot be corrected. With no correction, the stigmas will just remain and further cause low acceptance of neurodivergent individuals into society, and thus the cycle repeats itself.



Basically, Asian Parenting is Bad?

So, after all this talking, Asian parenting is bad for my child? I should just move out of Singapore and go to a Western country? Is that it?

Well..., yes and no.

Sure, there are perks of Western parenting that Asian parenting does not offer. The focus of individuality in the Western culture can definitely help combat social stigmas and encourage neurodivergent children to express themselves freely. Western culture is also generally

more accepting of different types of people, including neurodivergent individuals.

That being said, it does not mean that Asian parenting (or Singaporean parenting, for that matter) is bad and the solution is to leave Singapore.

In fact, there are some situations where I felt Asian parenting was better than Western parenting. Personally for me, whenever I did not score too well in my exams, my mother would always express her disappointment, because she knew that I was capable of achieving more than what I had achieved. Her parenting led me to push myself to achieve the best I can in every situation and to stretch myself to maximise my full potential. Though some may argue that my mother was too harsh on me and that exams are not the main priority in life, I stand by the belief that if she did not parent me that way, I would not stretch myself to my full potential and become who I am today. In this case, the Asian parenting style helped me learn, grow, and understand myself better.

Another example would be that because Western parenting places emphasis on individuality and does not focus on collectivity, neurodivergent individuals may

eventually find themselves struggling to conform to social norms and interact with others. This may hinder relationships and interactions that neurodivergent individuals have with those around them.

Conclusion: All Parenting Styles are Good Parenting Styles

While Asian parenting does place more focus on academics and collectivity as opposed to the individuality of Western societies, both styles of parenting just want what is best for their children.

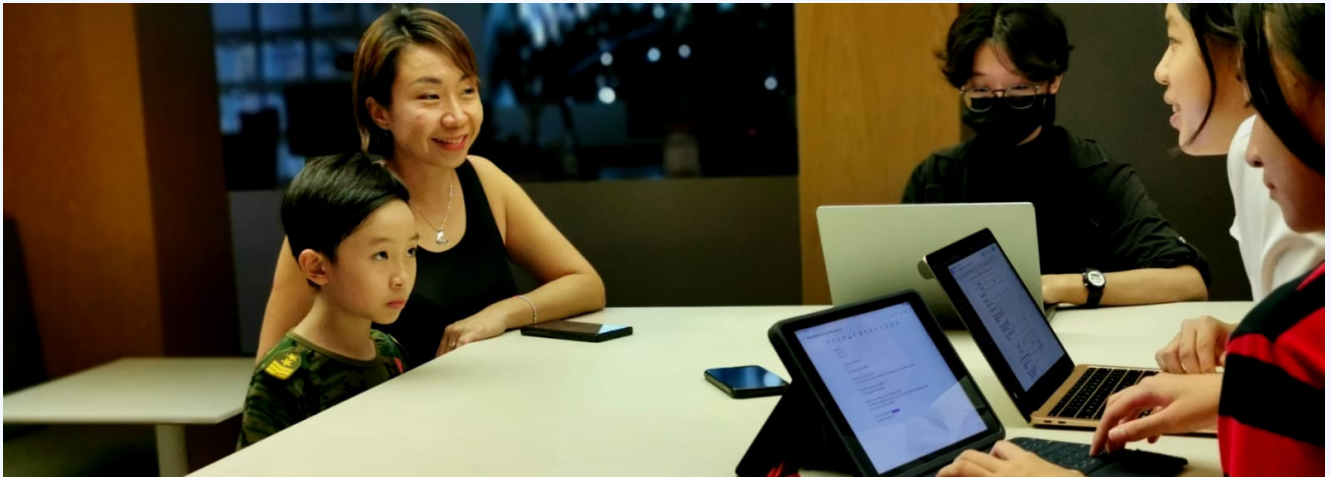
Ultimately, every single child is different and unique in their own way. Each child has their own needs, preferences, personality, and situations, so different parenting styles will work differently on different children. (As the saying goes, “what works for you, may not work for others.”) So long as the parenting style can meet your child’s needs, there really isn’t a “better” or “correct” parenting style to use. Regardless of which parenting style you use, what matters more is that your child can learn, grow, and develop under your care to become a better person in society.

“ There is no such
thing as a
perfect parent.
So just be a real
one.
-- Sue Atkins ”



This is Their Story: Meet Seth and Irina

BY WONG E VEE



Seth and Irina at our interview.

[This article has been edited for clarity]

One of the biggest and most important pillars in a child's journey of growth is their parents. Our interns at Catchwise Learning got the opportunity to interview one of our students, Seth Goh, and his mother, Irina Loo. Seth was diagnosed with autism from a young age. This is their story:

Seth is eight years old. He is currently enrolled in Zhang De Primary School, but has been accepted into St Andrew's Mission School, a SPED school that offers the national curriculum to students with ASD. He will begin Primary 2 there in 2024.

What has your journey in helping Seth looked like?

It was tough initially. He did not have many red flags at first, but we started to suspect [something was wrong] when he was about two because he wasn't very verbal or sociable. A neurotypical child would usually want to engage their parents in simple play, but he just wanted to sit on his own, and he didn't really want to ask for help. He was not very verbal either, so these things started to get us worried.

We went to get help at KKH, and they told us that he was suspected to have autism. This led to the denial stage: I didn't want to officially diagnose him as it may put him at a disadvantage. [Because there was no diagnosis,] we were pursuing a lot of non-targeted therapy, which may have impeded his early intervention. [The therapists] gave him high levels of help but it was not targeted. Eventually, my husband convinced me that we needed to stop wasting time [and delaying help for him]. We decided that having an accurate diagnosis outweighs being in denial, and we sought help in the private sector because it wouldn't be in his official medical reports.

What noticeable changes have you noticed with more targeted therapy?

Seth is definitely more confident, able to articulate better, and he's able to be more involved in two-way conversations. Back then, he would only talk about what he likes and would not deviate from these topics. Now, he's able to have better two-way communication, and he's able to read a book by himself, which he wasn't able to do nine months ago. When he started school, he wasn't able to be on task, he would be slumped on the table, walking around, lying on the floor. Now he can sit for at least 20 minutes before he stands up for a movement break. His self regulation is much better as well.

In this day and age, digital tools are an integral part of our lives. What are some digital tools you use to help overcome Seth's learning hurdles?

We used to frown upon parents who would use digital tools as a distraction, like playing Cocomelon for them during mealtimes, and we thought it was bad parenting. The benefit [of playing Cocomelon] is that the child will be exposed to language [at an earlier age], but I feel that we [parents] could do more talking instead of letting the device do it.

Digital tools when used correctly can work. When we started therapy, the therapist recommended handwriting without tears by using the tablet. Instead of using a pen, he would use his finger to trace the words. Because it is very interactive, he can feel the vibration while he's touching it, giving him feedback. When we wanted to introduce him to numbers and letters, we used the Youtube channels Alphablocks and Numberblocks. Memory apps like flip charts are also pretty useful because he is a visual learner, so he can remember how pictures look on the tablet or TV.

What are your hopes for Seth in the future?

I hope that Seth can lead a meaningful and independent life, be able to self-sustain, be happy and positive, and continue to be himself. I never stopped him from what he wants to be. For example, even after halloween, he still wanted to wear the halloween costumes, so I just let him wear it. Nothing should stop him from doing something he wants, as long as he's not harming anyone or himself. If he grows up to be a confident person he can do anything that he wants to be. So that's my hope and it's definitely beyond academics. He has to at least know how to read and write though because that is essential for daily living.

Do you have any parenting tips for other parents of neurodiverse children?

My tip is to be patient. Personally, I wasn't a very patient parent or person, but after giving birth to Seth I've gained a lot of patience. I used to think that academics is everything, but after going through this journey, I learned that it's not everything. We should see the child and develop him in other ways that he is talented in, and never impede creativity. Academics is just something that is part of life, but it is not everything. He can be good at sports, arts and crafts, speech and drama, but the main thing I believe in are social skills, self-confidence and resilience, because these are all life skills that are very important. [It is also important to] have a growth mindset and never stop learning. I just want him to enjoy his childhood and the journey of growing up. I don't want to be one of those parents who just focus on academics. Having said that, I know academics are also important, so my mindset is "can pass can already".

"I used to think that academics is everything, but after going through this journey, I learned that it's not everything. We should see the child and develop him in other ways that he is talented in, and never impede creativity."

Is there anything else you would like to say to other parents with neurodiverse children?

I want all parents to embrace their children and start intervention early. We are their voice and shouldn't delay seeking help, especially when they are below 5. The child will definitely benefit a lot with early intervention. We should never delay help for fear of embarrassment or social stigma, or thinking that they would grow out of it because they are still young. Embrace your child's other talents, but take time to practise self-care for yourself as well. I'm [also] thankful for all the support from parents, and therapists. Before finding out about Seth, I didn't know there was actually so much support available for neurodivergent children.

"I want all parents to embrace their children and start intervention early. We are their voice and shouldn't delay seeking help"




Seth after the interview

Thank you Seth and Irina for sharing their story!

THE END!

We hope you
enjoyed this issue of
The Trailmix!



**Want to give feedback? Want to write an
article or stand a chance to be featured
in our next issue of The Trailmix?**

We want to hear you! If you have any
feedback, suggestions, ideas, articles,
or artworks, contacts us at
contact@catchwiselearning.com!

note: Ts and Cs apply

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