

MILESTONE MOMENTS

A Collaboration by M.A.P and MindsHeart



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Welcome to this month's edition of Milestone Moments!

As parents in Singapore, we know how important it is to equip our children with the skills they need to succeed—both academically and personally. This month, we're shining a spotlight on self-consciousness, a vital component of children's emotional and social development.

Self-consciousness, when developed positively, empowers children to understand their strengths, manage their emotions, and build meaningful relationships with peers and family. It's about helping them embrace who they are while learning to navigate the complexities of growing up in a fast-paced society.

In this newsletter, we'll delve into expert insights and practical tips help you support your child's journey toward self-awareness and emotional resilience. Join us as we explore the ways in which self-consciousness can transform your child's life and help them thrive in all aspects of their journey!

Beyond the Report Card: Self-Consciousness is the Key to Your Child's True Potential

As a parent in Singapore, you're no stranger to the fast-paced and competitive educational landscape. But beyond the grades and achievements, there's another crucial aspect of your child's development that deserves attention: **self-consciousness**. This might not be something you discuss every day, but it plays a significant role in shaping your child's emotional and social well-being.

Think about it—when your child starts to recognize themselves as individuals and understand how others perceive them, it's a game-changer. They begin to **develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and learn to handle setbacks with more resilience**. It's like when they come home from school and say, "I felt really proud of myself today because I helped my friend with a math problem." That's self-consciousness in action—it's not just about recognizing their own emotions but also **understanding how their actions impact others**.

Despite its importance, self-consciousness often takes a backseat in conversations about child development. This might be due to **cultural norms that prioritize academic achievement over emotional intelligence**. In Singapore, conversations around mental health and emotional well-being have gained traction in recent years but still **face cultural barriers such as stigma or prioritization of academic success**. This makes it even more important for parents to actively engage in fostering their child's self-awareness.

Let's continue the conversation about fostering self-consciousness in our children to help them grow into resilient, empathetic individuals ready to face life's challenges with confidence!





Mirrors, Mistakes, and Milestones: A Parent's Map to a Child's Growing Self-Consciousness



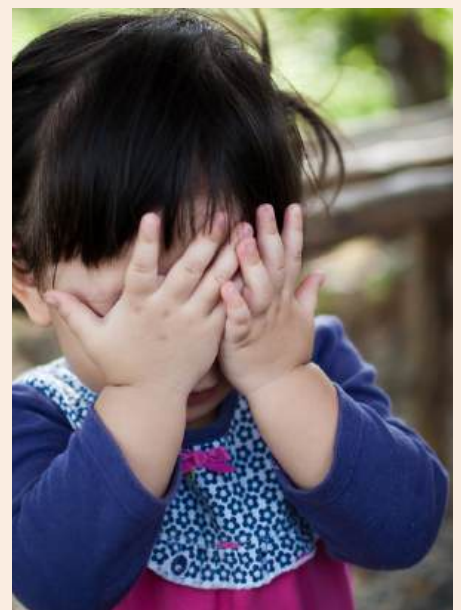
BY MOSES WONG, FELICIA CHUA
M.A.P LEARNING AND CONSULTANCY

Understanding Self-Consciousness

As parents, we've all been there—watching our children grow and navigate the world around them. One of the most fascinating aspects of this journey is how they develop self-consciousness. It's that moment when they **start to realize they're individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and actions, and that others might see them in a certain way.** But what does this mean for our kids, and how can we support them as they figure out who they are?

What Is Self-Consciousness?

Self-consciousness is more than just feeling shy or awkward. **It's about understanding oneself in relation to others and the world.** Think of it like this: when your child feels proud after showing you their artwork or embarrassed after spilling juice in front of friends, they're experiencing self-conscious emotions. These emotions—like pride, shame, guilt, and embarrassment—are **key to developing a sense of identity and self-esteem.**



What Can Negatively Impact Self-Consciousness Development?

While self-consciousness is a natural part of growing up, some factors can disrupt its healthy development:

1. **Excessive Criticism:** Constantly criticizing your child can make them doubt their abilities or feel inadequate. Think about how you would feel if someone constantly pointed out your mistakes without offering support.
2. **Unhealthy Comparisons:** Comparing your child to others can make them overly focused on what they lack instead of appreciating their strengths. It's like constantly telling them they're not as good as someone else.
3. **High Expectations:** In Singapore's competitive environment, many children face pressure to excel academically or socially. Unrealistic expectations can make them overly self-critical and fearful of failure.
4. **Family Stress:** A tense home environment—whether due to financial struggles or parental conflict—can affect a child's emotional stability and hinder their ability to develop a positive self-image.



The Effects of Struggling with Self-Consciousness

When self-consciousness develops in an unhealthy way, it can have lasting effects on a child's emotional and social well-being:

- **Low Confidence:** Children may feel they're not good enough, which can limit their willingness to try new things.
- **Social Anxiety:** A fear of being judged can make children hesitant to interact socially or participate in group activities.
- **Emotional Struggles:** Persistent feelings of guilt or shame can contribute to anxiety or depression over time.
- **Identity Challenges:** Without a solid foundation in self-awareness, children may struggle with forming a clear sense of who they are as they grow older.

Understanding your child's journey through self-consciousness can help you see the world through their eyes—a world filled with discovery but also challenges. By being aware of the factors that influence this development, you can better appreciate the complexity behind your child's emotions and behaviors as they navigate growing up in today's fast-paced world.



"MUM, DAD... DO YOU KNOW THAT I FEEL LIKE I'M NEVER GOOD ENOUGH?" – A TEACHER'S HONEST TALK ABOUT CHILDHOOD SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS



BY MOSES WONG, FELICIA CHUA
M.A.P LEARNING AND CONSULTANCY

As educators who've walked the education system of Singapore for years, we've seen how self-consciousness quietly shapes our children's lives. From the Primary 2 student who hesitates to answer questions even when he knows the answer, to the Secondary 3 girl who stays up until 2.00a.m. rewriting notes because they're "not neat enough," these struggles are more common than most parents realize.

The Hidden Weight of Self-Consciousness

In our classrooms, we see how self-consciousness manifests in different ways. Some children become **perfectionists**, erasing their work until their paper tears. Others develop what we call "**learned helplessness**" - they stop trying because they believe they'll fail anyway. We remember one Secondary 1 boy who told us, "If I am not going to score AL1, why bother trying at all?" **This mindset doesn't just affect their grades; it steals the joy from learning.**



Why Singapore's Context Makes It Harder

Our unique educational environment intensifies these challenges in several ways:

1. Academic Pressure Cooker

- Singapore consistently ranks among the top in global education benchmarks, but this comes at a cost. The MOE's 2023 report shows our **students experience significantly higher stress levels** compared to international peers - particularly around national exam periods.

2. The Kiasu Paradox

- Our **cultural emphasis on not "losing out" creates constant comparison**. One Secondary 2 student confessed: "I feel like I'm running a race where the finish line keeps moving further away."

3. Early Academic Identification

- While our system helps students focus on their strengths, **some children form fixed mindsets prematurely**. A parent shared, "My daughter struggled with fractions in Primary 4 and concluded she was 'bad at math'."



3 Common Pitfalls in Parental Support

Even with the best intentions, **parents often unintentionally undermine their child's confidence through subtle communication patterns.**

1. One frequent misstep is **dismissing struggles** with phrases like *"This is simple—why can't you get it?"* which implicitly shames difficulty. This approach can **make children feel inadequate and less motivated to try.**

2. **Comparison**—whether to siblings (*"Your sister never needed this much help!"*) or peers—is another silent confidence killer. While Singapore's competitive landscape makes comparisons tempting, they **can lead to unhealthy self-perceptions and decreased motivation.**

3. Perhaps **the most pervasive issue is overemphasizing results**. Comments like *"Where are the other 5 marks?"* or *"Why only 85%?"* after a test redirect attention from learning to perfection. This fixation on grades can **create undue stress and anxiety, detracting from the joy of learning and personal growth.**



What Actually Helps: Lessons from Our Classrooms and Smart Parents

You don't need to overhaul your parenting style to make an impact. Through years of trial and error, we've learned what truly makes a difference:

1. Expressing Gratitude Openly

- One family we know makes a point to express gratitude throughout the day. Whether it's thanking a sibling for help or acknowledging a beautiful sunset, this practice **helps children focus on life's positives.**

2. Emotional Check-Ins

- Another family has a daily "Feelings Check-In." Asking "How did you feel today?" **helps children develop emotional intelligence and understand all feelings are valid.**

3. The Power of "Not Yet"

- When a Secondary 2 girl cried over a 'C5' in math, we shared our own failure stories, then introduced "not yet mastered", "working on it", instead of marking answers wrong. This small shift **reframes learning as a journey.**

4. When Adults Show Vulnerability

- Share your own blunders! A parent once told his son about failing a test—his relief was palpable: "Wait, adults mess up too?" **This made them feel safer to try difficult problems.**

Our Final Message to Parents

We know you want your child to succeed. But **true success isn't about never failing—it's about not being afraid to try.** The students who thrive long-term aren't necessarily those with straight A's, but those who've learned to be kind to themselves.

As one parent wisely told us: *"I don't need my child to be the best, because no one can be the best. I need them to believe they're enough."* That's the gift we want for all children—the **unshakable belief that they are enough.**





BEYOND THE MIRROR: UNLOCKING CONFIDENCE IN CHILDREN WITH COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY



BY GERALD BOH

CLINICAL DIRECTOR, MINDSHEART LLP

As a psychologist in Singapore, I've seen many children struggle with worries about how others perceive them. They often ask themselves questions like *‘‘What if others laugh at me?’’* or *‘‘I’m not good enough.’’* These concerns can lead to avoidance or emotional distress. But there’s hope. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can help children change these thoughts and grow more confident.

I recall a parent once telling me, *‘‘I just want my child to be happy and confident, but I don’t know where to start.’’* That’s a sentiment I hear often, and it’s exactly why I want to share how CBT can help.

Understanding Children's Worries

Feeling concerned about how others view them isn’t inherently bad. It becomes a challenge when children believe everyone is watching them or that the worst will happen. I remember a boy who thought everyone noticed his mistakes during assembly. He felt like he was under a microscope. But with CBT, we can help them see things differently.

Let’s take a moment to reflect on our own experiences as parents. Have you ever felt like you’re being judged by other parents at school? It’s natural, right? Children feel this way too, but they might not have the words to express it.



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A Simple CBT Guide for Parents

1. Understand Their Feelings

I worked with a girl who didn't want to wear her new prescription glasses. Her parents asked if she was concerned about what others may say. They didn't tell her not to worry; instead, they said, *"It's okay to feel nervous. Let's find ways to make this easier."* This **simple acknowledgment reduced her anxiety and opened the door for further conversation.**

Why it works: **When children feel understood, they can start to change their thoughts.** It's like when you validate your child's feelings after a tough day at school. You might say, *"I know it was tough today, but you handled it well."* That validation goes a long way.

2. Find the Thought Behind the Feeling

Ask your child, *"What were you thinking when that happened?"* A child afraid of group work might think, *"I'll say something wrong, and everyone will laugh."*

Tip: **Use stories or pretend play to help them see things from another perspective.** For example, *"What would you tell a friend who felt this way?"* It's amazing how creative kids can be when they think about helping others.

3. Check If the Thought Is True

Help your child look for evidence. *"Has anyone actually laughed at you before?" "Is it more likely that everyone is focused on you, or their own work?"*

I recall a boy who kept a journal of times when his friends responded kindly. Over time, he felt less anxious. It's a simple yet powerful exercise that you can try at home.

4. Choose a Better Thought and Action

Replace the thought with a more helpful one - *"Even if I make a mistake, I can try again."* Encourage them to take small steps, like raising their hand once in class. As a parent, **show them how to be kind to themselves**. Say, *"I felt nervous today, but I reminded myself that everyone makes mistakes."*

Why CBT Works for Children in Singapore

In my years of practice, I've seen Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) help countless Singaporean children. Our unique social and academic environment makes CBT especially effective for three key reasons:

1. Targets Academic Stress

Singapore's competitive education system often triggers anxiety (*"What if I fail?"*). **CBT teaches kids to challenge these thoughts** by asking: *"Is failing one test the end of the world?"* or *"What can I learn from this?"* Studies show school-based CBT programs here significantly **improve self-control and stress management**.

2. Fits Our Practical Culture

Singaporean parents appreciate **structured, results-oriented approaches**. CBT's step-by-step framework—**identify thoughts → test their truth → take action—resonates**. For example, a child afraid of public speaking might:

- Spot the thought: *"Everyone will laugh."*
- Check facts: *"Did classmates laugh last time?"*
- Practice small steps (e.g., *presenting to family first*).

3. Works for Diverse Needs

Research confirms CBT adapts well to local contexts, from mainstream schools to children with autism. **Simple techniques like "thought diaries" or role-playing help kids across ages and backgrounds**. Even brief school interventions show lasting gains in self-esteem.

The Bottom Line

CBT gives Singaporean children tools to thrive in high-pressure settings. **By focusing on actionable skills—not just emotions—it aligns with our pragmatic values while building resilience.**

When to Get Help

If your child:

- Avoids school or social events often.
- Gets physical symptoms like stomachaches before school.
- Talks negatively about themselves a lot.

Consider seeking professional help. Remember, it's okay to ask for support when you need it.

Final Thoughts

As parents, you're teaching your child how to handle their thoughts. Start small: spend 10 minutes a week talking about emotions using CBT techniques. Over time, these conversations will help your child feel more confident and prepared for life in Singapore. Remember, every small step counts, and it's never too early to start!



TEACHER, HELP!

*What's the right balance
between pushing my child
and protecting their
self-esteem?*

Ms A.

I remember when I first started teaching, I found myself caught between wanting the students to excel and worrying about the pressure they might feel. It's a delicate balance many of us face as parents and educators in Singapore. Here's what worked for me and what I've seen work for many families:

1. Focus on Effort, Not Just Results

- Instead of just praising grades, I started emphasizing how hard they worked. For example, I'd say, "I can see how much effort you put into this assignment—that's what matters most."

2. Pay Attention to Emotional Cues

- If your child seems overly stressed or anxious about academics, it's a sign to adjust your approach. I recall a parent who realized they were inadvertently adding to their child's stress by focusing too much on grades. Once they shifted their focus to effort and progress, the child's anxiety began to ease.

3. Model Healthy Attitudes

- Children learn from what they see, so make sure you model healthy attitudes towards challenges and setbacks. I often share stories of times when I faced difficulties and how I overcame them. This helps them understand that mistakes are opportunities for growth.

4. Encourage Balance

- Ensure your child has time for activities they enjoy outside of academics. Whether it's sports, art, or simply playing with friends, these experiences help develop a sense of identity and self-worth beyond grades.

Remember, the goal is to raise children who are confident, resilient, and motivated to learn. By striking the right balance between encouragement and support, you can help your child thrive in Singapore's competitive environment.

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