



Parenting under pandemic. No panic!

This once-in-a-century pandemic has been lasting for 3 years, changing everyone's daily life. Parents work from home, students learn at home, as well as new arrangements like "suspending classes without suspending learning", "early summer break", etc., bring hassles to both parents and children. So, what are the essential parenting practices to nurture our children under pandemic?

How to strengthen parent-child relationship by true "accompaniment"?

Under the pandemic, parents often work from home while most children only have half-day school or take online lessons at home. Parents and children gain more time to bond with each other at home. I suggest that parents can make good use of this opportunity for parenting activities like watching movies (such as Hayao Miyazaki's films), cooking, outings, designing games (refer to "Practicing Mindfulness with Children"), reading, etc.

As the saying goes, a sense of security is the best nutrition for children's brain development, while parental accompaniment is the best stimulation. Experiment has proven that children can learn faster when they are accompanied by adults (guided

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play). In other words, under the guidance of an adult, children can discover the learning outcome behind the experiment faster than they play on their own.

Since the sense of security is what children need, parents should try to put aside their mobile phones, like how Woody in “Toy Story” accompanies Andy whole-heartedly without reserve and always being by his side. You can even refer to Lao Ji, a Chinese 1980s writer and documentary director, who accompanied his 5-year-old son to travel to 25 different countries, leaving their footprints on both the Arctic and Antarctic Circles. He perfectly demonstrated the true beauty of parent-child round-the-world trip. Apart from learning outside of the book knowledge, they also created beautiful memories shared between parent and child.

How to foster children’s concept of “lifelong learning” and the ability of “self-directed learning”?

Hong Kong parents are accustomed to put their children on a tight schedule. Children get used to doing activity every moment to avoid a waste of time. This is called Autopilot Mode. In contrast, e-learning emphasizes on self-directed learning (self-directed learning mode), so that children will keep learning lifelong. It also includes stress resistance, self-care ability, social contact, moral education, intellectual curiosity and independent thinking, etc.

I often say: with an appreciative eye, you will see your children’s strengths. With a critical eye, every behaviour of your children can become weaknesses. The so-called “self-directed learning” has to be achieved through parents’ encouragement and allowing more freedom for their children. Or, we can learn from the dolphin parents who are neither harsh nor condoning. They are able to maintain both authoritativeness and balance in raising their child to become smart, happy and good at communication.

Written by Harvard-trained psychiatrist Dr Shimi Kang, “The Dolphin Way” is awarded the “Winner of the 2015 USA Book News International Book Award for Parenting and Family”. The book introduces seven tips:

- 1) Calm yourself down
- 2) Let your children know parents understand them
- 3) Define children’s goals

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- 4) Trust your children that they will be successful
- 5) Believe your children will become smarter through play
- 6) Teach your children the goal of competition is not winning
- 7) Let children get adequate rest to enhance their problem-solving ability

How to improve children's ability of social circles integration?

The three core instincts of children are curiosity, playfulness and sociability. Curiosity drives children to approach and explore; playfulness drives them to practise different skills; sociability drives them to pass on what they have learned to other children. That's why the essence of social play is to teach us how to cooperate with others, restrain impulses, follow norms, practise negotiation skills, etc. Children can practise these skills repeatedly during social play.

Despite suspend classes and go out less directly reduce children's ability of social play under pandemic, I recommend parents should no matter what, ensure their children to enjoy outdoor play with other children freely without the interference of adults. The keys are freedom and opportunity. You must know it's good for children to play. Children possess the ability of socialization and playing can reinforce their interest and ability to learn.

People always say, "If there's a will, there's a way!" In-depth parental accompaniment can cultivate children's ability of self-directed learning and social play. The main premise is to let children discover the own self they like. Let's strive together for our children's better future. Parenting under pandemic. No panic!

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