

# SEAS CENTRE AND YOU

## Leading a Harmonious Life

Mental Wellness | Family Harmony | Good Interpersonal Relationships



Translated by: Grace K. M. Chan

## **Preamble**

Maintaining healthy psychological well-being of immigrants and their families is a vital part of successful immigrant adaptation. Without doubt, most immigrants and their families feel much stress and encounter difficult challenges as they learn the way of life in a new society.

The publication by SEAS providing the guidelines and suggestions for maintaining healthy psychological well-being for immigrants is both timely and important. The booklet is written in Chinese\* and directly addresses the concerns of immigrants and their families in their own language.

The suggestions in the booklet are clearly communicated. Personal stories told by real people are truly inspiring. This book would become an invaluable resource for all immigrants who read Chinese.

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\*Note from SEAS Centre:

The launch of this booklet, originally published in Chinese, was met with much positive feedback from the Chinese community. In response to numerous requests for an English version for dissemination to the community at large, we moved forward with the plan to translate and publish this booklet a second round.

## **A Note from the Editor**

Skills and knowledge may be important, but these cannot compare with the importance of harmony in one's life. Only through a life of harmony can one gain self-knowledge and live out one's true self; only with a harmonious family and good interpersonal relationships can one enjoy a blissful life.

Life is not perfect. Each person encounters one set of troubles or another in life. All kinds of problems arise from our daily life, career, family and emotions. These can have a huge negative impact on us, even leading to physiological and psychological illnesses which, if not treated in a timely manner, can cause permanent damage. With the continual development of society, and the rise in standard of living, people are paying more and more attention to health, with health referring not just to the physiological health of the body but, more importantly, psychological health. How to maintain a healthy state of mind is specifically the main theme that SEAS Centre hopes to explore with you by publishing the booklet “Leading a Harmonious Life”.

Over the last 26 years, SEAS Centre has provided the Greater Toronto Area with comprehensive personal and family services. A year ago, with funding from Ontario Trillium Foundation, it launched a special series of “Leading a Harmonious Life Program” activities, including: regular themed workshops, weekly

Gentlemen's Chat Room (men's support group sharing), Ladies' Health Seminars, Harmonious Life Booster Station and Reaching New Heights Men's Program...etc. From these activities, we have accumulated quite a number of care cases, as well as an abundance of small group sharing materials, of which there is no lack of fairly typical, general and extremely enlightening information. Many participants provided us with their input: they hoped that we would organize this information and disseminate it to the community via different forms of media. This would benefit more people in need, while at the same time performing the function of preventative education. As a result, we are very grateful to Ming Pao Daily News (Toronto Edition) which, for two consecutive weeks from February 21 to March 2, 2012, published for us a case study of the difficulties experienced by a new immigrant family. On top of this, we are also very grateful to North American Weekly Times (Toronto) which, on every Friday starting March 9, 2012, publishes for us an article based on small group sharing materials. Upon the publication of the printed word, there was overwhelming response from the readers, with the number of people enquiring about services and participating in program activities having increased noticeably. In view of this, SEAS Centre Board Members came up with the idea of compiling all this print information into a book, in the hope that the slogan "SEAS Centre and You, Leading a Harmonious Life" can be implemented into action, and bear harmonious fruit in the community!

Today, SEAS' "Leading a Harmonious Life" booklet is published! That our wish can come true is attributable to the valuable support rendered by our corporate sponsor Royal Bank of Canada, to which we want to express our heartfelt thanks! Apart from this, we also thank Dr. Eric Fong, Professor from the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto, for penning a preamble for this booklet. His recommendation and insightful opinions certainly add interest to the book.

One's state of mind determines one's fate, one's fate shapes one's life. How can we possess a healthy state of mind? How can we embrace a harmonious life? Using plain language, this book combs through and analyzes the things that happen in one's life and, by means of real life cases, demonstrates the causal relationship between maintaining a healthy mentality and achieving a harmonious, blissful life. Here we wish that every reader of this book will be able to lead a harmonious life!

SEAS Centre "Leading a Harmonious Life" Booklet  
Editorial Team

# **Index**

- 1. Building a Harmonious Life Together:  
A New Immigrant Family's 360-degree Case  
Sharing**  
(A series totalling six articles was published between  
2012-02-21 and 2012-03-02 in the Toronto edition  
of Ming Pao Daily News, a Chinese newspaper.)
  - A. Challenges in Family Harmony for New  
Immigrants**
  - B. New Immigrants and Family Violence**
  - C. How New Immigrants Improve Relationships  
with Youths Amidst Cultural Differences**
  - D. Harmony in the Workplace**
  - E. How New Immigrants Cope with Stress**
  - F. Spousal Harmony - Journeying through Life  
Hand in Hand**
- 2. How to Achieve Inner Peace and Harmony**
- 3. Recognize Your Emotions**
- 4. Learn to Control your Emotions, Do Not be a  
Slave to Anger**
- 5. Growth through Stress**
- 6. How to Increase Personal Adaptability**
- 7. How to Maintain Family Harmony**
- 8. The Art of Spousal Communication**
- 9. How to Establish Good Interpersonal  
Communication**
- 10. Secret Tips for Expanding Connections and  
Building Good Relationships**
- 11. Service Case Sharing #1**

**12. Service Case Sharing #2**

**13. Service Case Sharing #3**

**14. Epilogue: About SEAS Centre**

# **1. Building a Harmonious Life Together - Article 1: Challenges in Family Harmony for New Immigrants**

(A new immigrant family's 360-degree case sharing, totalling six articles, published as a series between 2012-02-21 and 2012-03-02 in the Toronto edition of Ming Pao Daily News, a Chinese newspaper.)

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A year ago, Mr. Chen and his wife brought their 15-year old son Xiao Cong and five-year old daughter Xiao Ling from China to Toronto. The family cramped into a small house. Mr. Chen was formerly a renowned engineer who held a management position in a well-known enterprise in China. His wife was a high school teacher of Chinese Literature. The family led a middle class lifestyle and lived happily back then. However, for the sake of their children's future, they finally immigrated to Toronto.

## **Husband Works Hard to Further his Studies Spends Less Time with Family**

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In Toronto, since Mr. Chen was not fluent in English and had no Canadian recognized licence or experience, for a long time he was unable to find suitable work. He had to settle reluctantly with a job as a factory worker that a friend referred him to. He was determined to learn English and obtain a recognized licence. He attended classes after work and on weekends, and used all his

spare time at home to study, spending less and less time with family. Mrs. Chen had originally hoped to get a job, but because she had to look after Xiao Ling, she ended up staying home to take care of household chores and the children. In the past Mrs. Chen had never had to do household chores or cooking herself, so she had to learn a lot of things from scratch. Sometimes family members were not satisfied with her homemaking or cooking, but she continued to work at these tasks diligently. In order to maintain ties with society, she often participated in the children's school functions and acted as volunteer. She took LINC classes in the neighbourhood to learn English, and taught Chinese at a Chinese school on Saturdays. She hoped to master English quickly so that she could find a part-time job to help ease the family's financial burden.

### **Noticeable Drop in Son's Grades**

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Xiao Cong and Xiao Ling both attended local public schools. Xiao Ling had adjusted well to the new school environment, and her grades were very good. Mrs. Chen was delighted to see that her daughter loved reading, so she often took her to the library, reading books together with her whenever she had time.

As for 15-year old son Xiao Cong, he had a problem with his grades. Back in China he was a Grade A student. Now, except for getting A's in Mathematics and Music, grades in other subjects had dropped noticeably. In the past he had been an active member of his school, often representing the school in various competitions.

Now he no longer took part in any activities. He had become quiet and inexpressive. Every day he hurried home from school to play on the computer. At times he would sit in front of the computer right after school till the next day.

Mrs. Chen's heart ached to see Xiao Cong's grades deteriorating. She thought Xiao Cong was too lazy, as all he did was play video games. She tried hitting and scolding him. She also tried to motivate him by buying him presents. Despite all that, Xiao Cong only became more withdrawn, more uncommunicative. One time Mrs. Chen in her anger scolded Xiao Cong severely and banned him from playing on the computer. She was shocked when Xiao Cong flew into a rage in his room, screaming and yelling and throwing things all over the place. Mrs. Chen tried to discuss Xiao Cong's problem with her husband, but each time he was unwilling to talk about it. Mr. Chen was very disappointed with and angry at Xiao Cong. He had always wanted his son to excel and be outstanding, to become a doctor or engineer one day. He felt that all the sacrifices he had made were for his son, but Xiao Cong neither worked hard nor was grateful for what he had done for the family. Each time he saw his son playing on the computer, he scolded him angrily. When he became all agitated, he would even use foul language to scold Xiao Cong.

Mr. Chen blamed his wife for not taking good care of the home and teaching the children, thus causing their son to do poorly at school. On her part, Mrs. Chen felt that her husband did not care about them or thank her for all that she had done for the family. Every day he only went about his own business, not taking on his share of responsibilities in doing housework or teaching the children. As soon as he came home, if he was not scolding their son, he would be finding fault with her on little things. This started a rift in their marital relationship.

Mr. Chen had been in a bad mood of late as he tried to cope with heavy stress at work: due to poor business, the factory was laying off part of its staff. Even though Mr. Chen survived this round of layoffs, the risk of being let go was not yet over. Also, he knew that in the last while his mother was in poor health. His aged father was not able to take care of her, and back home there was nobody he could trust that could lend a helping hand. His heart was burdened. He had hoped to apply for his parents to come to Toronto to live with them, but he was worried about the family's financial situation. If he was let go, his family's finances would be in trouble, and he would not be able to apply for his parents to come. Besides, the couple's relationship was not too good. He felt that there was nobody to provide him with understanding or support. He had no bosom friends to talk to. The more he felt pressured, the easier it became for him to get into arguments with his son and wife.

Does the story of Mr. Chen's family sound familiar to you? If your story is somewhat similar to Mr. Chen's, let us tell you, many people have similar experiences. This is not the end of the world. Even though there may not be a perfect solution to the problem that Mr. Chen is facing, we will be publishing a series of articles to share with you, so that you could learn how to handle and improve interpersonal relationships. We hope that you could gain some insight into how to improve the difficult situation you are encountering.

How can we lead a harmonious life? We first start our understanding from the two Chinese characters "he" (和) and "xie" (諧) which make up the Chinese phrase "harmony" (和諧). The roots of both characters "he" (和) and "xie" (諧) are "mouth" (口) or "speech" (言). From here we can see that harmony has to be achieved through communication or using speech for expression. Add to that, the other component of the character "xie" (諧) is "jie" (皆), which means "together", "united". Therefore, the structure of the characters itself explains the basic method of leading a harmonious life. It is only achievable through learning to communicate with the people around you.

## **Need for Mutual Accommodation, Tolerance and Understanding**

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Another meaning to "harmony" is mutual accommodation, referring to mutual tolerance and understanding towards people around you. It takes time and patience to be able to live in harmony with people around you, and it requires active work in many areas. It is difficult to get results if you only depend on yourself or the other party to work at it. Leading a harmonious life cannot be achieved simply through desire or expectation. It is the result of continuous hard work. Therefore each person needs to open up communication channels, and by so doing foster understanding of the other party. This ought to be an interactive and two-way process. This should then be the first step of building a good relationship, and is also the most important step.

## **Building a Harmonious Life Together - Article 2: New Immigrants and Family Violence**

(A new immigrant family's 360-degree case sharing, totalling six articles, published as a series between 2012-02-21 and 2012-03-02 in the Toronto edition of Ming Pao Daily News, a Chinese newspaper.)

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Do you still remember the life challenges faced by new immigrant Mr. Chen, and the alienation and barriers between him and his family members? Below were the nightmares and troubles experienced by another member of the Chen family, Mrs. Chen:

Mrs. Chen and Mrs. Li were good friends. Mrs. Li's child and Xiao Ling were classmates. The two often saw one another at school and got to know each other. Every Wednesday, after dropping off their children at school, they would have breakfast together. This was the dialogue between Mrs. Chen and Mrs. Li one time over breakfast:

Mrs. Li:                    Mrs. Chen, this Friday there's a seminar on health at the community centre. How about we go together?

Mrs. Chen:                I'm not going. I have things to take care of at home.

- Mrs. Li: Is anything the matter? Today you haven't spoken a word. Normally you always tell me about what new dish you're preparing for the week. Today you have your head down all the time you're eating breakfast. You look very unhappy!
- Mrs. Chen: Nothing's the matter. Just a little tired.
- Mrs. Li: What happened to your hand? It's black and blue, and your face is swollen too.
- Mrs. Chen: (While trying to hide her hand) It's nothing. I just banged it.
- Mrs. Li: Your injury doesn't look like it's from an accident. Did something happen at home? You'll feel better talking about it.
- Mrs. Chen: You must not tell anybody. Family shame can't be made public!
- Mrs. Li: Don't worry. I won't tell about your situation. I just want to help you, as another person helping you figure out solutions and a way out.

Mrs. Chen: Three days ago, my husband scolded Xiao Cong because he didn't like him playing on the computer. At the beginning, he scolded Xiao Cong like he normally did, but later on he resorted to using foul language. Xiao Cong curled up in bed and let him rant. At the end, he hurled things at Xiao Cong like a lunatic. I was anxious to protect Xiao Cong, so I grabbed my husband in an attempt to stop him. Much to my surprise, he pushed me away, so forcefully that I landed in the corner of the room. That was how I banged myself. He also slapped me in the ear, saying that I hadn't taken good care of the family or taught the children properly, that it was me who caused Xiao Cong to turn into what he is today. I was so grieved that I started wailing. It was only then that he stopped, and ran out of the house.

Mrs. Li: Thanks for your trust in me, telling me so much about your family secrets. At the time, you must have been very frightened, very unsettled. How are you feeling now?

Mrs. Chen: I'm okay. My injury is much better now. At the time I felt terrified. It seemed like my husband had turned into another person. He was scolding Xiao Cong and throwing things non-stop like he had gone crazy. Now the children and I still feel very frightened. I'm afraid that when my husband comes home, he would hit Xiao Cong and me again.

### **Child Beaten by Father Bedwetting and Nightmares**

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Mrs. Li: How is Xiao Cong now?

Mrs Chen: Xiao Cong was not injured, but he was terrified. I discovered that recently Xiao Cong wets his bed and has nightmares. Also, he didn't go to school on Monday and Tuesday because of a headache. He stayed in bed all day, and refused to get up.

Mrs. Li: Xiao Cong appears to be very afraid. How about Xiao Ling?

Mrs. Chen: Xiao Ling is okay. That night she cried all night because she was frightened.

Mrs. Li: How is Mr. Chen now? Did he get mad and hit and scold you again?

Mrs. Chen: Not during these few days. It appears that he feels guilty that he hit me the other day. He said he only lost control because we made him so angry. He feels that Xiao Cong is disobedient and lacks ambition, that he must be stricter with Xiao Cong in order to make him a successful person. He even said that he was already very lenient with Xiao Cong. When he was little, he was treated the same way by his family: when he was disobedient, he would be beaten and scolded. Once in the winter, after getting a hiding and scolding from his father, he was locked in the coal room for two days, during which time he was only given a glass of water and a bun.

Mrs. Li: Even if he wants Xiao Cong to shape up, there's no need to scold and hit you people like crazy. His behaviour in Canada is considered domestic violence, a criminal offence. He runs the risk of getting into trouble with the law.

Mrs. Chen: Back home, hitting and scolding family members are just family matters. They won't get one into trouble with the law. Can you tell me more information about domestic violence?

Mrs. Li: In Canada, hitting and scolding family members is considered criminal offence. I just attended a seminar on domestic violence. That booklet is still in my handbag. Let's read it together. Here it says, "Domestic violence refers to the carrying out of behaviour that causes physical or emotional harm to family members. There are three main forms: physical abuse, sexual abuse and psychological abuse."

**Physical Abuse      Sexual Abuse**  
**Psychological Abuse**

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Physical abuse is behaviour that causes bodily harm, such as slapping, pushing, punching, kicking, attacking with an object / weapon, pouring boiling water, choking, burning, poisoning, pouring corrosive liquids or acids...and so on. Sexual abuse refers to forcing or seducing the other party against his / her will to engage in sex-related behaviour, such as forced intercourse, forced kissing, forced viewing of pornographic publications / films...etc. Psychological abuse refers to behaviour that causes the other party to be emotionally or psychologically upset, such as verbal attacks (using speech or tone to coerce or threaten, in an attempt to control the victim. Examples are scolding, yelling, insulting, mocking, frightening, threatening to harm the

victim or his/her family member, boasting about the use of violence....etc.); using body language to intimidate or threaten (pointing a weapon at the other party, threatening to commit suicide or kill others, hurling things, beating the other party's pet...etc.); economic abuse (controlling finances, personal resources, taking away material possessions...etc.) and other forms (controlling daily activities, stalking, confinement, coercion, harassment, imposing restrictions, requiring regular reporting of whereabouts...etc.).

Mrs. Chen: All of these are considered domestic violence? My husband can't go to jail. It must be my fault. I didn't teach Xiao Cong well, and my housework is no good. These make him unhappy. My husband is not normally like this, he is very gentle. It was only this one time that day when he seemed to have turned into a different person, as if he had lost his mind. In the past he didn't smoke or drink. Now he drinks once he comes home, and he reeks of smoke.

Mr. Li: Mrs. Chen, please don't blame yourself for this. It is not your fault. Whatever happens, hitting and scolding people should not be tolerated. If he does this to you again, what do you plan to do?

Mrs. Chen: I don't know. I have no idea what to do. I am very confused. I can't tell anybody. I am very worried, as well as angry about him hitting Xiao Cong and hurting me, but I don't know where to seek help. My English is not good.

Mrs. Li: Here's a booklet that teaches you what to do when violence takes place. Want to read it together?

Mrs. Chen: Okay. Here it says:

- 1) Let both sides cool off. Do not say anything further to agitate the other party;
- 2) Remove the victim from the scene of violence. Must not escape into the kitchen, washroom, balcony and such relatively dangerous places, to avoid increased risk of harm when conflict erupts;
- 3) When conflict erupts, protect one's head, face, neck, chest and abdomen;
- 4) Shout "Help!" so that neighbours and family members can come in time or dial 911 to call police. Let the police stop the abuser, and escort you to the hospital;

5) Go to a safe place for temporary stay, such as a free, short-term shelter.

### **Go to a Free Shelter for Temporary Stay**

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Mrs. Li: If next time Mr. Chen gets mad again, you could follow these methods to protect yourself and your children. Domestic violence is a serious behaviour. I feel you should consult professionals, such as doctors and social workers, to see what they can do to help you. Don't wait till some unhappy incident happens before you seek help!

## **Building a Harmonious Life Together - Article 3: How New Immigrants can Improve their Relationships with Youths in the face of Cultural Differences**

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(A new immigrant family's 360-degree case sharing, totalling six articles, published as a series between 2012-02-21 and 2012-03-02 in the Toronto edition of Ming Pao Daily News, a Chinese newspaper.)

The son of our case study's protagonist Mr. Chen mustered up the courage to write his father a letter as follows:

"Dear Dad,

How are you? You must be busy with your work and homework. Every time I see you at home, you are either very busy or very tired. There is not much time to have a proper conversation with you. I am writing you this letter, because I really can't stand your attitude. I have to tell you things that you have no time to listen to. I hope to rectify the misunderstanding you have against me.

## **Child is Dissatisfied with Mother and Younger Sister**

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I have a lot of misgivings about our current family! Little sister is a child. Although I think she is very lovely, I have mixed feelings of love and hatred towards her. When I help her with her homework, she always asks a lot of mindless questions. She often makes me play these stupid childish games with her, and frequently tells Mom about my secrets or complains to her about me.

I can't stand Mom any more. I feel that Mom favours my younger sister. She often takes her to places she likes, cooks her favourite foods, buys her the books and clothes she wants. However, she seldom cooks my favourite dishes. And then, every time I ask her to buy me a new phone or fashionable clothes that I want, she always turns me down. Not only that, but she constantly interferes with all areas of my life - how I eat, dress, live, play and learn. Mom has no respect for my privacy: She often enters my room without knocking, uses my computer without my consent, tidies up my room while I am not there...and so on. I'm already 15 years old! I'm grown up already! I know how to take care of myself, I need my own space! I have already told her not to care for me like a child, that she needs to respect my privacy; but she never listens. Once, because I saw her in my room going through my homework, I threw a temper tantrum at her. She then ran back into her room and cried. What she did was obviously wrong. How come it turned out that I was considered the one at fault?

## **Father Turned From Idol to Disappointment**

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As for you, Dad! I am now both disappointed at and afraid of you. I was very fond of Dad before. I looked up to Dad as my idol, and wished that when I grew up I would be an outstanding engineer just like him. What I enjoyed the most was Dad doing homework, playing ball, playing video games, and going on trips with me. When we first arrived in Toronto, I thought Dad would be spending time with me just like in the old days. Nowadays, I don't want to see Dad at home, and no longer feel that he is my idol anymore. The current you is always very busy or very tired. When at home, if you are not rebuking Mom for housework poorly done, then you would be scolding me for playing on the computer. I have to tell you, Mom is already working very hard on the household chores. You do not help with any housework at all, so you are not in a position to find fault with her.

I need to tell you, my grades have nothing to do with my playing on the computer. You always say that my grades dropped because I spend too much time playing on the computer. In fact, schools over here do not give out a lot of homework. There is still a lot of time left after finishing my homework. I play on the computer because I am too bored. There is nothing to do so I play on the computer to while away the time.

Other than this, you frequently criticize my playing on the computer as meaningless and mindless. I don't think you understand the world of computers at all. Your

views are fraught with misunderstanding and prejudice. I am not only playing internet games. I also chat with friends, listen to music and read the news. The computer world is full of excitement, fresh ideas and human touch. My friends on the internet are very different from classmates at school. I get along with them, we talk about everything under the sun, we have endless topics to talk about. I feel this is even better than the regular face-to-face communication with other people. We can talk freely without inhibition, I don't have to worry about them or other people mocking me, or telling other people about my affairs. My friends on the internet are very nice, I can chat with them anytime. When bored, I can find all sorts of internet friends at any time to chitchat, to kill time; when feeling down, internet friends are good, understanding listeners, allowing me to pour out my heart to them.

Furthermore, in the internet world, I can make friends with different people, I don't need to see people I don't like, and I can use my preferred language to chat with them. I don't have to worry about whether the things I use or the things I do are in style or not. I also don't have to be concerned about people laughing at me or rejecting me because I write English poorly, use the wrong vocabulary or have poor enunciation.

I got to know a lot of friends through internet games. Friends on the internet like playing with me. They often invite me to join their teams and play together. We help each other out, we don't leave our teammates behind, and if we lose we play again. This is unlike people at

school who, when they play basketball, only want to play with their own friends. They pass the ball only to their friends, but when they lose they blame other people.

Playing internet games gives me a great deal of satisfaction. Every time I win a game, I feel a sense of indescribable gratification. If I spend some time on the internet searching up "secret tips" or short-cuts, through continuous analysis and practice, I can then win the internet game. To me playing internet games is much more meaningful than doing homework that I can't understand and can never reach the required standard. That feeling is akin to the satisfaction I got when I used to represent my school in competitions and win.

Dad, I want to tell you, I am already grown up. I have plans for my own future, I am not a rebellious youth!

Respectfully yours,  
Xiao Cong

## **Understanding Son's Growth Requires Caring and Support**

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After reading his son's letter, Mr. Chen realized that Xiao Cong is facing issues associated with adolescence, that he is no longer a child! Adolescence occurs in youths aged 12 to 18, depending on the individual's growth rate. Adolescents during this period undergo many physiological and psychological changes. This is a period of huge change, their emotions go up and down like roller-coasters. Their moods are unpredictable: one minute they are friendly and cooperative, the next minute they become adversarial! Psychological changes during adolescence include: eager to break free of parental supervision, but at times still showing dependence; linking up with buddies to form small groups; unstable mood swings; being argumentative; building self-image; fear of having no friends; placing great emphasis on peer acceptance; dressing up; paying attention to outward appearance...etc. Faced with difficulties and troubles from different directions, adolescents are in dire need of parents' continuous care and support.

## **Parents to Set an Example and Share Parenting Responsibilities**

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For the sake of Xiao Cong, Mr. and Mrs. Chen decided that they needed to change their ways of interacting with and parenting Xiao Cong. The first thing they needed to do was to improve their own marital relationship, to recognize and manage their own anxieties and stress; to stay cheerful; to share parenting responsibilities; to set an example by walking the talk, placing equal emphasis on teaching by words and teaching by example. The most important thing was to learn to let go and let him mature, be independent, and be separated from themselves. They would use a gentle tone to patiently communicate with and guide their child; actively share their feelings with their child; teach Xiao Cong self-discipline; cultivate an atmosphere for trusting, open and sincere communication on an equal footing; help Xiao Cong regain his self-confidence and teach him not to give up; spend more leisure time with Xiao Cong and boost understanding...and so on.

# **Building a Harmonious Life Together - Article 4: Harmony in the Workplace**

(A new immigrant family's 360-degree case sharing, totalling six articles, published as a series between 2012-02-21 and 2012-03-02 in the Toronto edition of Ming Pao Daily News, a Chinese newspaper.)

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Today Mr Chen got into an argument with a colleague at work over work allocation issues. Their argument caught the attention of the Department Head. The Department Head warned them that he was only giving them a verbal warning this time since it was a first offence. He told them to use a civilized way to resolve conflicts, that they could not be arguing and being boisterous in the workplace. If this were to happen again, he would fire both of them. Mr. Chen did not want to lose his job, so all he could do was to stop arguing, but he felt indignant, and was upset for the whole day.

After work, when Mr. Chen went jogging with his friend Mr. Zhang, he talked about the incident. Mr. Zhang commented that workplace conflict is a phenomenon of disunity or incompatibility. This phenomenon is prevalent and inevitable.

Some reasons why conflicts arise are: differences in viewpoints; unfair allocation of resources; unmet expectations; communication barriers and differences in goals...etc. Each person reacts differently to conflicts.

Behaviours commonly include withdrawal, giving up, attacks against the other party, attempts to convince the other party, and problem resolution discussions.

## **Workplace Conflicts - Seek to Reduce Conflict**

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Whatever reactions or behaviours people may have, the most important thing about workplace conflict is to minimize it. Avoid letting conflicts affect the overall working relationship, decrease work efficiency and productivity, and impact morale. The key to workplace conflicts is to make suitable compromises. You must allow the other party some leeway because, after the argument, the two parties still have to work together in the same workplace, unlike outsiders or strangers on the street where you never have to see each other again. The ultimate objective is to successfully achieve work objectives or goals. Do not seek victory at all costs.

In dealing with conflicts at work, Mr. Zhang suggested adopting an approach similar to that used in managing many health issues:

1) Prevention - reduce conflicts; 2) Treatment - deal with the conflict; 3) Recovery - heal oneself from the conflict.

Prevention refers to taking certain preventive measures to minimize the risk of conflict. Some of these methods are: respecting others; showing appreciation for your colleagues; focusing on objective facts, taking aim at the task not the person; keeping your cool and controlling your anger; expressing your ideas clearly; managing your own stress; not allowing problems to pile up...etc.

Treatment means that when conflicts arise, deal with it in a mature manner. Methods include: not treating other people's opinions as personal attacks; actively listening, expressing your views; standing in your colleague's shoes to view things from his/her perspective; being flexible, accommodating others' ideas without insisting on your own, making compromises; and showing empathy...etc.

Recovery refers to healing oneself from the conflict in order to minimize its negative impact. Some ways of going about it are: adopting positive thinking and attitude to accept and cope with the situation; being optimistic about all things; living a healthy lifestyle...etc. If you can successfully dissipate conflicts with colleagues at the workplace, then everybody should be able to achieve a more harmonious working relationship.

### **Express Anger Carefully    Understand Reasons for Anger**

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Mr. Zhang also recommended ways for Mr. Chen to deal with his anger. Mr. Zhang said that anger is mainly an emotional reaction that arises in response to other people's negative behaviour or in opposition to unexpected behaviour. Especially when one feels that one's self worth, dignity, reputation, property, marriage, family, or physical and psychological well being is seriously threatened, emotional reaction is at its strongest. How a certain person chooses to express his anger depends on the effectiveness of his past expressions of anger. Anger is a natural emotional

reaction. An appropriate level of anger expression is sometimes beneficial (e.g. punching a sandbag, yelling in open space...etc., to allow for an avenue to release one's emotions...); but when anger is expressed inappropriately, it can hurt oneself or other people (e.g. hitting, scolding, talking back to elders, despair...). Therefore you need to be careful how you express anger, as well as to understand why you are angry. This aspect is very important.

There are many ways of coping with anger. One of these would be the seven highly effective anger management techniques that Tafrate and Kassinove pointed out in their "Anger Episodes Analysis Model": Avoid and Escape; Find New Solutions to Problems; Positive Thinking; Forgiveness; Relaxation; Changing Internal Anger Experiences; and Effective Anger Expression.

#### 1) Avoid and Escape

In most cases, it is definitely not the best time to resolve problems when you are at your angriest. If you can, in an effective manner, withdraw yourself purposefully from people or situations that make you angry, thereby reducing the risk of anger and breaking free from angry emotions for the time being, postpone resolution till the anger period has drawn out. This way you can have more time to find a better way to respond.

#### 2) Find New Solutions to Problems

Understand the different consequences that different emotions bring about, which consequences are beneficial

to you, and which consequences are harmful to you. You should also accept that the lack of absolute fairness is a constant in life. Do not be manipulated by people, things or situations beyond your control, complaining all day that life is unfair or feeling defeated, thereby giving up the pursuit of your ambitions.

There are four steps to finding new solutions to problems: Step 1 - Identify the situation clearly in order to come up with solutions; Step 2 - Assess the long and short term repercussions of each solution; Step 3 - Select the response method with the best long term effects; Step 4 - Implement and assess solution, i.e., observe the effects of your response on other people. This way you learn how to use different solutions to resolve anger problems.

### 3) Positive Thinking

There are four steps that, through changing our thought process, can help us be more rational: pay attention to your own thoughts; be clear as to why you are angry; change to another way of thinking when you are angry; try out new ways of thinking in your daily life.

### 4) Forgiveness

This is a state of being and way of thinking. Forgiveness can make you accept reality and find liberation through the act of forgiving. Then you can actively move on to a blissful life.

## 5) Relaxation

The authors pointed out eight ways that help with relaxation:

- a) progressive muscle relaxation
- b) words to calm yourself
- c) yoga or exercise
- d) abdominal breathing
- e) prayer and recitation
- f) positive meditation
- g) closeness with nature
- h) massage

## 6) Changing Internal Anger Experiences

Changing internal anger experiences involves training yourself to change your habit of reacting in anger in the face of problems, allowing yourself instead to relax or think more rationally.

## 7) Effective Anger Expression

Use reason, etiquette, facts, skills and appropriate ways to express your anger. This generally comprises three steps: Step 1 - Express your feelings clearly but in a mild-mannered way. This way the other party will be willing to discuss further. Step 2 - Use specific language that is precise, clear, and understood by both parties to clarify what you think is inappropriate behaviour on the part of the other party. Step 3 - Express your desired state. Either provide a solution or invite the other party to explore in depth together.

Mr. Zhang pointed out that ways of coping with conflicts and anger, apart from being useful in the workplace, can also be applied to different situations in one's daily life. If you could use these methods well, your relationship with others will be more harmonious.

## **Building a Harmonious Life Together - Article 5: How New Immigrants Cope with Stress**

(A new immigrant family's 360-degree case sharing, totalling six articles, published as a series between 2012-02-21 and 2012-03-02 in the Toronto edition of Ming Pao Daily News, a Chinese newspaper.)

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Mr. Chen felt uneasy about having lost control of himself towards his wife and son the other time. Of late he felt tired and irritable, did not sleep well, and had no appetite. He had never experienced this kind of discomfort before. On his stroll back to the factory after lunch, he saw that the community centre was holding a seminar on mental stress and stress reduction methods. He took the initiative to register for it.

### **Stress can Cause Deterioration in Physical and Psychological Well-Being**

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He realized that he was under much stress. Stress had brought about changes in his physical, emotional and psychological condition. He felt like he had turned into another person. Now he was worried that his own family had lost harmony because of him. He drew up the following stress reduction methods to ease his tension:

## **1) Manage Stress**

Mr. Chen knew that he had to first identify the sources of stress before he could reduce unnecessary stress and draw up a suitable stress reduction plan. He compiled a log of his stress, recording the stress he encountered each day, how he dealt with it, and the benefits. He discovered that the sources of his stress came from family, work, worries about unemployment, finances, changes to his daily routine, competition with others, insomnia, piling up of unresolved tasks and issues...and so forth.

### **Systematic Management can Reduce Stress**

Then he put together a stress reduction plan that suited his lifestyle and capability, set up rules, and implemented it gradually. He decided to reduce the number of classes in order to increase his personal and family time. When he was able to adhere to plan, he would give himself some reward. He even wrote his plan on his calendar or diary to give himself reminders, so that he could systematically manage his stress.

## **2) Pay Attention to Diet**

In the past, Mr. Chen used to eat fast food for lunch. Now he requested his wife to arrange for a balanced diet for him, which means intake of suitable portions of protein, carbohydrates, fat, minerals, vitamins and fluids. There are some foods in your daily life that can help reduce stress, such as vitamin C, high quality protein, dark green vegetables, fish...etc. When the body is

stressed or tired, the need for vitamin C increases, because vitamin C can promote the strengthening of brain cell structures as well as maintain brain cells in a state of balance. Adequate vitamin C can cause the cerebrum to be active and alert. Strawberries, kiwis, papayas, kumquats, guavas, spinach, green tea...etc. are all good choices. There needs to be enough energy in diets. Carbohydrates is an important source of energy. It can increase glycogen storage in the liver, which is good for protecting the heart and brain cells, increasing work efficiency, and reducing the level of fatigue.

Mr. Chen would also reduce intake of certain foods that cause stress, such as tea, coffee, cola, chocolate, and foods with caffeine. He would refrain from smoking excessively upon stress, or drinking to numb himself. This is because smoking and drinking would not reduce his stress, but instead would negatively impact his physical and mental health, thereby affecting work, life and interpersonal relationships. He needed to quit smoking.

### **3) Maintain Exercise Routine and Cultivate Interests**

Mr. Chen needed to revive his interest in running, and set up a schedule for running in the neighbourhood three times a week. He understood that, not only could suitable and regular exercise promote a healthy body, it was also a good way of reducing stress. He found out that, after tiring labour or when his mind felt troubled, upon a suitable level of exercise and sweating, his fatigue instantly eased off. He had no time to think

about his troubles while exercising. Also, after exercising, his body felt tired, and he slept better at night. He found that running gave his mind something to think about, and it alleviated the stress.

#### **4) Deal with Problems with a Positive Attitude**

One should be more optimistic, not pessimistic. Handle everything calmly; it is not worth pursuing things beyond one's reach. Perhaps he set expectations that were too high or unrealistic for himself and his family. That added to his feeling of defeatism. He placed the responsibility on his family members, demanding them to change in order to make him happy. When they did not change, he would feel helpless and a loss of control.

He needed to put a stop to his negative attitude - pessimism, avoidance of problems, obsessive dwelling on problems, stubbornness, smoking, excessive drinking, despair in the face of failure. He had to keep thinking positively, or try to view things from a different perspective.

#### **5) Plan and Organize Work Well**

Mr. Chen observed that he had too many things to tackle at one time, too much work and course work. Often times he felt pressured, because he did not know how to prioritize his daily activities, or was not able to judge the importance or urgency of tasks. This caused him to be running around all day, but still could not get things done. If he could plan his work properly, get organized, then he could reduce the chance of getting himself stuck

in stressful situations. The pressure coming from work would naturally decrease as well.

## **6) Self- Relaxation**

Mr. Chen would do some relaxation exercises to reduce stress. He felt that relaxation exercises could allow his wound up body, emotions, thoughts and pace of life to slow down. The way to do relaxation exercises is to intentionally designate a time slot, put everything aside, relax the body muscles, put aside worries, put away the things that occupy your mind, sit down quietly and focus on some simple things, such as breathing, movement, sound, image...etc. This way a sense of relaxation will follow. Even though this method appears simple, only through persistent practice will it allow us to reach a state of calm, and learn to deal with everything without agitation. In addition, meditation, tai chi, chi gong and the like, are all effective ways for helping with relaxation.

## **7) Seek Help**

Mr. Chen understood that he need not face stress all alone, that he should confide in trusted family members, and discuss with them solutions to problems. The feeling of being accepted, loved and needed can lessen the negative effects of stress on a person. He needed to maintain good communication with family and friends, expand his social circle, and accept different opinions. If the feeling of unhappiness persisted, he should seek help from a professional, such as a psychologist, doctor or social worker.

After a period of time, Mr. Chen discovered that he was much happier than before. He was able to work more efficiently, have better memory and decision making ability, think more clearly, enjoy better health and family relationships.

## **Building a Harmonious Life Together - Article 6: Spousal Harmony - Journeying through Life Hand in Hand**

(A new immigrant family's 360-degree case sharing, totalling six articles, published as a series between 2012-02-21 and 2012-03-02 in the Toronto edition of Ming Pao Daily News, a Chinese newspaper.)

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Mr. Chen, the protagonist of our case study, recounted as follows:

Since I learned some stress reduction methods from the community centre, I feel less uneasy and irritable than before. However, I still feel that my relationship with family members is not very harmonious. At home, since the last time I threw a temper, my family members have been afraid of me. Each day when I come home, I sense this really awkward atmosphere at home: my son is still hiding in his room playing on the computer, my daughter is still reading her books, my wife is still going about her household chores, but they no longer chat happily about different topics as in the past. I am not in a cold war with my wife, she is polite towards me, but we do not have much opportunity to talk. Every time I go near her, she would intentionally walk away quickly. At night, she goes to bed early. Today I learned a lot about the art of spousal interaction. During dinner, I did not know why, but I felt angry just because the dinner my wife made was not to my taste. I did not want to commit the same

mistake as last time, so I ran to the neighbourhood park in one breath to cool myself down.

When my emotions settled down, I thought, "I've been married to my wife for over a decade already. Why is it that a lot of times I feel like I don't know her too well? Especially after coming to Canada, I feel she has become more of a stranger than before. I don't understand her thoughts or behaviour. A lot of things she does don't correspond with what I expect. For example, I am of the view that a man should work outside the home, whereas a woman's place is in the home. The husband is the head of the family. He has to strive hard outside to earn money to support the family, and protect family members; the wife should prepare a warm nest at home, take care of the housework, cook delicious meals, and take good care of the children. Back home, since we had a domestic helper to take care of the housework and look after the children, I felt that as long as the housework was taken care of, it wasn't a problem if my wife went to work. Here things are so different. In a situation where we have no helper, my wife should stay home and take good care of the family. Nevertheless, my wife never does her job properly. The house is not tidy enough, her cooking is never tasty, and the children are always disobedient. She frequently has to seek my opinion, and wants me to help her with this and that. I am already exhausted from working outside. All she does is stay home and do housework. Why does she still have to get me to help with matters at home? From morn till night, all she wants to do is to get involved with things that she doesn't need to bother herself with. I've already told her

not to worry about other family matters. As soon as she gets upset, she enters into a cold war with me. There was a time when for two weeks she did not speak or pay any attention to me. This really makes me angry."

While I was lost in my thoughts, my wedding ring accidentally slipped off my finger onto the grass. Since it was already dark, and the lighting at the park was poor, it was very difficult to find the small ring on the pitch-dark lawn. I couldn't tell why, but at that moment, I was so afraid that I would lose the ring that symbolized our marriage, and so afraid that I would lose my marriage altogether! Recently, many friends have announced their divorce. The main reason for divorce was that their affection for each other had faded, and the couple was not able to communicate well. The two were originally very loving towards each other, but slowly a rift developed in the relationship. When that rift in their relationship became unbridgeable, it signalled that divorce was the only avenue left for them. I don't want to divorce my wife, not to say lose this family. While I was searching for my ring, I remembered my promises of love to my wife, and the happy memories that I had with her. I treasure those days when my wife and I were fond of each other. I don't want a divorce, I need to take the initiative to improve the relationship with my wife. After a hard time searching for the ring, when I finally found it, I ran home in one breath. I felt that I had wasted a lot of time with my loved one, I needed to take the initiative to mend the relationship with my wife.

When I got home, the children were in their bedrooms. I saw my wife picking up the broken pieces of the shattered bowl from the floor. She had accidentally cut her finger, and lost a lot of blood. I immediately ran over to the kitchen to bring my wife over to the living room, and performed first aid to stop her bleeding. While I was working on the bandaging, my wife tried to withdraw her hand, but I held it fast. For a moment, she seemed like she had a lot to say to me but, before she could utter a word, streams of tears flowed from her eyes.

### **Husband Realized that Wife was Mistreated**

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Wiping away her tears, she poured out her dissatisfaction. She said she had already tried her best to do the housework and the cooking. She couldn't help it if the housework and cooking were not up to standard. The fact that I threw tantrums at her hurt her very much. I was a very chauvinistic man. Each day all I thought about were things that I wanted. I wanted my wife to listen to me, to do everything, but refused to help out with any housework. She never had to do housework before, and had no idea how to go about it. Now, because of the family, she sacrificed a career that she enjoyed, and learned to be a homemaker from scratch. She had a part-time job. Having to look after the children and take good care of the home at the same time was no easy task. Every day when I came home, if I wasn't finding fault with this, I'd be complaining about that. I did not have a single word of appreciation, taking for granted that the home should be upkept perfectly. On top of that, she told me that she felt as if I was no longer

a part of the family, that I no longer loved or cared about them. Every time there was a problem in the family, I considered it her problem, leaving her to figure out a solution herself. If she did not handle the problem well, then I would make sarcastic comments. In recent days she knew that I was unhappy. She wanted to talk to me about it, to show that she cared, but I merely told her coldly that all she needed to concern herself with was to get the housework done and nothing else. She had thought that being tolerant would solve the problem, but she could not bear it any longer. She was very disappointed with me, and sometimes regretted immigrating and marrying me. She wanted very much for me to spend time with them, and reminisced about the happy old days. She said that as a family, we should be together through good and bad times. We should be open with each other and solve problems together, not burying worries in our hearts.

After listening to what my wife said, I was speechless. I always had this image of a gentle wife in my mind. Now it seemed like she had turned into a different person. Since we immigrated here, I had never heard her complain. Suddenly, I woke up from my dream. I understood my wife's sense of helplessness. All this time I only thought about what I wanted, but I had never viewed things from her perspective. My wife had also sacrificed a lot for this family. From a high school teacher who used to be waited on by domestic helpers, she had now turned into a passable homemaker. She had to face a lot of hardship. Not only did I not thank her, often times I would find fault with her. Last time, I even

hit her because I got angry. Whatever happens, it is not right for a man to hit a woman. Since the time I lost control and hit her, she has been afraid of me. Seeing me unhappy or in a temper is enough to get her frightened. I could only embrace her, apologize to her; I should not be throwing tantrums at her. That night, we talked about a lot of things. She pointed out to me many things that I had not paid attention to, and I also shared with her my views and worries. It seemed like we had returned to the old days. Today the lesson I learned is how to have good communication with my wife:

### **Husband and Wife Should Communicate Frankly and Calmly**

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- Do not suppress yourself. If you are dissatisfied with something, tell the other party frankly, in a way that is not hurtful to the other party.
- Begin your sentences with "I feel...", "I think..." and the like that point to sharing; avoid blurting out accusations such as "You should...", "You have no reason to...".
- Spend more time with the other party
- Listen intently
- Be more accommodating, patient, appreciative; criticize and complain less
- Take more initiative in sharing your own feelings and stress, and care about the other party
- Do not fight over trivial matters
- Trust and accommodate each other

- Share family responsibilities with wife (e.g. parenting, household expenses)
- Face problems with a positive attitude, voice your opinions in a frank and calm manner
- Before you get mad at the other party, first reflect on whether you bear some responsibility as well
- Even when you are angry, bear in mind that the objective is to find a solution to the problem. It is definitely not to derive satisfaction from shaming the other party. You have to give yourself and the other party an opportunity to save face.
- Be ready to forgive the other party. Do not keep bringing up past grudges. Forgiveness needs to be consistent inside and out.

Hold your spouse's hand and grow old together! This is the wish of many people. However, in order to make this wish come true, both sides need to learn to be accommodating and understanding!

## **2. How to Achieve Inner Peace and Harmony**

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People seek happiness as their goal in life. Living in the metropolitan city of Toronto, amidst the hustle and bustle, do you feel happy? For many people, it seems that true, lasting happiness and harmony in life are by no means within easy reach!

In fact, there are three basic, essential elements to a harmonious life: the individual's physical and mental health, a harmonious family, and good communication and interpersonal relationships. The first thing to aim for is inner peace and harmony, because a person's health and longevity are dependent on whether his state of mind is at peace and at ease, calm and composed.

### **How to Maintain a Harmonious State of Mind**

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To maintain a harmonious state of mind, the most important is to remember the Five Rules of Constancy -- constant thanksgiving, constant forgiveness, constant optimism, constant discovery, constant love.

#### 1) Constant Thanksgiving

The Chinese often say, "The person who knows to be content is always happy". It means having a thankful heart towards nice things that happened in

the past, not taking them for granted. Starting now, if you change your attitude from being critical to paying more attention to things worthy of gratitude, you will find it easier to feel contented. This will give way to a sense of peace and satisfaction, with stress and complaints decreasing correspondingly.

## 2) Constant Forgiveness

If we can let go of our stubbornness and learn to accommodate, focus on how to improve the situation regardless of who is right or who is wrong, appreciate and praise other people more, always take a step back to recognize that the situation is no big deal, learn not to put the blame on other people, then we will be able to attain a state of living that is calm, blissful, peaceful and comfortable.

## 3) Constant Optimism

Optimism is embracing a positive attitude towards things in the future, believing that good things will happen; optimists will view experiences of failure as temporary setbacks, believing that with perseverance and diligence, success is achievable. We have to keep confident, believing that one has the ability and the opportunity to turn around a bad situation. This way our state of mind will naturally become more cheerful.

#### 4) Constant Discovery

Each person has his strengths and characteristics. If you can use your skills on meaningful causes, life becomes more beautiful. Always try to discover your own strengths. This can actually help us counter the feelings of depression brought about by stress, leading to a calm state of mind.

#### 5) Constant Love

If we are willing to put aside our ego, and try to care about people around us, or even be willing to contribute our time and energy to help those in need, we would find it easier to come out of our own prison and forget our own troubles. When we see others benefit from our efforts, that kind of satisfaction and joy is indescribable. This type of "shift in perspective" can shrink one's stress and troubles, and is very beneficial towards alleviating one's anxieties.

Harmony originates from our innermost being. There is no need to seek for it externally. Let go of your past troubles, do not worry about the future, try to live in the present. You will naturally experience inner peace and harmony. True happiness will then follow.

### **3. Recognize Your Emotions, Master Your Own Emotions**

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If you casually flip through the News Section of the newspaper, you will find that similar episodes take place almost every day: A small argument over parking leads to a physical fight, even the use of weapons; suspicions about a girlfriend's change of heart lead to the use of violence, even homicide; a young student chooses to take his own valuable life because he felt his school performance was unsatisfactory.... Such kinds of behaviour that inflict harm on oneself or on others reflect underlying emotional problems, and illustrate that the majority of people are actually not too clear about how to address their own emotions properly. Nonetheless, emotions are closely tied to our daily lives, and have wide implications on our physical and psychological health, school performance, work results, interpersonal relationships and other areas. If we can regulate and manage our emotions well, we can reduce unnecessary interpersonal conflict, as well as raise our abilities and performance in various areas.

How do we manage our emotions? We can start by learning from the following few points:

## 1. Recognize your True Emotion

Always remind yourself to pay attention to "What is my emotion now? What am I feeling? ". No matter what kind of emotion you are experiencing, you should first extract yourself out of the situation and take a breather for a while, withdraw your attention from the people, matter and objects in the external environment, and be attentive to your inner feeling of the moment.

## 2. Accept your Own Emotion

Have you ever thought, "I can't be angry. Being angry means I have no ability to control my emotions"; or "I can't be anxious. Being anxious will only worsen my performance...", and then tried to repress or admonish yourself for having such emotions? In fact it is normal and natural for emotions to take place. There is no right or wrong, good or bad, to emotions per se. Every occurrence of emotion has its own unique meaning. It reflects our real feeling. We need to accept, understand, and learn how to co-exist with it peacefully.

## 3. Understand the Reason behind the Emotion

Where do our emotional reactions come from? Why do we feel this way? If we analyze carefully, we can discover that between an incident and the ensuing emotional reaction there exist layers of awareness, thoughts and perspectives. So no wonder when faced

with a similar incident of falling out of love, some people can cope with a positive attitude, while others do not want to live. Maybe this is caused by the former thinking "The next woman I meet will be better", whereas the latter is stuck with the thought "Without you, I can't live". You can only tackle the problem after you find out what triggered the emotion.

#### 4. Use Appropriate Ways to Ease the Emotion

When our emotion is too worked up, we cannot calm down and think clearly. To avoid being consumed by emotion and committing irrational acts, we can use some methods to help ease or relieve our emotion. Crying aloud, finding somebody to chat and vent, drawing and writing are ways to release emotional energy; alternatively, sitting still, meditating, performing relaxation exercises, listening to music and other such activities can also be used to calm one's mood.

#### 5. Transform your Thinking, Change your Mood

The fundamental way of regulating emotions lies in totally transforming our negative thoughts and feelings about the incident. Practise actively interrupting negative thoughts that bother you; try to look at problems from a different angle; think in more optimistic, positive ways; and nurture yourself with reasonable, flexible beliefs and value systems. If you can accomplish these few things, you will

surely be able to rid yourself of emotional distress, and be on your way to a beautiful mood and a harmonious life.

If you feel that, no matter how hard you try, you still cannot cleanse your heart of troubles, or transform your emotions, it is time to consult a professional psychotherapist or social work counsellor. We believe this would be of benefit to the management of your emotions and anxieties.

## **4. Learn to Control your Emotions, Do Not be a Slave to Anger**

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"You have arranged to go on an overseas trip with your family during the holidays, to relax and enjoy. Little did you expect, while waiting at the airport to board a plane, to learn that the travel agency you booked with had folded, and responsible staff was nowhere to be found. You can no longer go on your trip, nor do you know whether you would receive compensation for your hefty tour fees."

If you encounter the above situation, will you be angry?

In our emotional experience, anger may naturally arise following unhappy incidents. It is common and normal, but is also most harmful.

The expression of anger can be very simple: a yell, a fist held tight, or an angry look can release one's anger. However, anger is in fact a complicated emotional state. Its occurrence commonly includes many other feelings and thoughts associated with other negative states, such as disdain, defeatism or hatred...etc.; it can lead to violent behaviour or crime, and is further associated with the occurrence of unhappy situations, such as poverty, sickness, job dissatisfaction, poor family relationships...etc. All these can be causes for anger. We could be the protagonist in the midst of anger, or the target towards whom anger is released. If we do not want to be a slave to anger, we must try to understand it,

thereby grasping and reducing the effects of anger on us.

It could be the other person who incites you to anger, or it could be your own thoughts, but to let anger burn incessantly or increase in intensity is surely not a good thing for either yourself or those around you! Therefore we need to learn how to control unnecessary and excessive anger, so as to avoid prolonged anger that fails to dissipate.

The reason for each person's anger is different. The most important thing is to address the source of anger, grasp and manage the effects on us when anger occurs. The Institute of Mental Health Initiatives in the United States uses the "RETHINK" method to guide people to learn the seven skills of properly dealing with anger:

**R - Recognize your emotion**

Remind yourself that you first have to use rational thinking to keep your cool.

**E - Empathize with the other persons & Express your feelings**

For example, tell yourself, "I need to keep calm now. The problem is not unsolvable. Let me first leave this place.". If need be, use appropriate relief measures to help you reduce the stress caused by your anger - deep breathing, relaxation exercises and physical exercises...etc. can all help you relieve anger and desensitize you to the incident.

- T - Think about your thinking**  
Ask yourself:  
What is it about the other person's behaviour that upset you?  
Reflect on your angry emotions. Is it triggered by your inflexible thinking?  
What are the negative effects on everybody after you unleashed your anger?
- H - Hear the other person**  
Find a person you trust, or find a professional, such as a counsellor or social worker, etc. to help you cope with your difficult situation. Professional counselling may help you sort out your issues, as well as offer different ways of resolving problems, thus dealing with the pent up anger within.
- I - Integrate what others feel and think into yours**  
Gather views from multiple perspectives, so as to avoid being fixated on only one view.
- N - Notice your physiological responses**  
Every time you think of people or things that make you angry, you still get red in the face, your heart palpitates, burning anger makes you want to let it out by yelling and screaming, you even feel the urge to use violence to resolve issues. This indicates that you need to cool down. It also tells you not to focus solely on things that bother you.

**K - Keep on the topics to look for solutions**

After dealing with your angry emotions, and upon return to a relatively rational frame of mind, you should try to search for other feasible solutions.

Anger is a double-edged sword that hurts others and yourself. We hope that you can all work hard to control your emotions. Use appropriate methods to release negative emotions, or even transform anger into positive energy, and build a harmonious life for yourself and other people!

## **5. Recognize Stress, Grow through Stress**

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In our daily lives, mental stress is inevitable. A certain degree of stress can allow us to be well prepared to face upcoming challenges, so it is not necessarily a bad thing. However, too much stress or prolonged stress can weaken a person's immune system, causing the body to be under attack by all sorts of diseases, with the occurrence of psychosomatic disorders and such illnesses of modern city dwellers. In addition, prolonged mental stress will also severely threaten an individual's mental and psychological health.

### **What is Stress?**

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Stress can refer generally to any interference that causes physiological or psychological abnormalities, but commonly refers to mental stress. Mental stress refers to stress that is hard to bear and which causes worry and unease.

### **Causes of Mental Stress**

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There are many causes of mental stress. Many things or "life events" can induce stress. Common causes include:

- stress brought about by job duties or unemployment
- family conflicts or breakdown of relationships
- financial worries

- health condition
- substance overdose e.g. caffeine, alcohol, tobacco and such substances
- poor living environment, such as small living quarters, traffic jams, or proximity to sources of pollution

The reasons that constitute stress usually comprise a combination of factors. They may be due to unrealistically high expectations coming from oneself or other people, or a feeling of inadequacy, or simply uncertainty.

Due to various reasons, stress is especially severe for modern men, possibly because contemporary society is changing too fast: a small change every three years, a big change every five years. Add to this the economic downturn in recent years, an environment that requires us to increase competitiveness or add value to our resources, the pressure is greater than ever. Middle-aged people have to catch up with technology that is developing at a very fast pace. It is very hard on them. On top of this, there is significant social pressure. For some people, the expectation is too high; not everyone can cope with this even if they tried. Furthermore, the value system that society puts on money, the standards of success, the goals in life...everything is problematic! As for students, starting from kindergarten, stress is already prevalent everywhere: homework, examinations, work, family... and other areas.

## How to Grow from Stress

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Relaxing and enjoying life, loving idleness and disliking work - this laziness is part of human nature.

Nevertheless, how can there be absolutely no failure or difficult circumstances in our life journey? As long as you are old enough to know the world around you, all kinds of stress follow you through life like a shadow. The more you try to avoid stress, the more it appears, and the more severe it is. You recoil an inch, it advances a foot. In the end stress will consume and destroy you! Since we cannot escape stress' evil grasp, why don't we face it with courage, and take up the challenge? Transform barriers into empowerment; turn crises into opportunities.

Based on historical experience, for those famous scientists, artists, literary writers, entertainers, businessmen...the periods during which they were under intense stress always coincided with the peak periods of their observation power, creativity and personal achievement. It has been said that many writers' articles were a result of pressure from their editors; many people also completed difficult tasks under pressure; were not most student assignments completed under threats and incentives from the teachers?

If we say that stress is the spice of life, and suitable amounts of sourness, sweetness, bitterness, and heat (stress) can actually increase life's lustre, then a suitable

degree of stress can allow a person to grow and improve. In life everywhere is a battleground. Be a warrior, not a deserter. You must have a fighting spirit, accept any challenge, confront ruthless circumstances with a positive attitude, arouse your potential, resolve problems!

As an example: Why is it that the bean sprouts that we grow at home are small and thin, whereas those grown by professional farmers are fat and strong? This is because we do not cover the bean sprouts with anything, while professional planting requires putting a cover on top. When the bean sprout grows, it touches the heavy cover above. In order to force its way through, it needs to thicken up and toughen up. Therefore the growth of this bean sprout is stimulated through its experience of the pressure of heavy material. Another story is about the Japanese who like eating fish from Siberia, which is the best ingredient for making sushi. However, every time 40% of the fish died by the time they reached Japan because they lacked activity during shipment. How was the death rate for these fish reduced? In each fish tank they put a crab, fish's natural enemy. Living with the stress of life and death, the fish were roused with the will to survive, and swam hard to escape the attacks of the crab. The death rate plunged from 40% to 5%! This is a wonderful transformation of stress into empowerment.

Even if a person does not have long-term worries, he is bound to have short-term woes. Competition is keen in contemporary society. Stress follows us around like a shadow. How do we increase our resistance to stress?

1. Do not put too much weight on success or failure. Reduce overly high expectations and excessive needs. Cultivate a broad-minded, positive outlook of life, resist gloomy thoughts, reject negative emotions, avoid being together with friends with negative and depressing outlook of life. Perhaps you can read books on Taoism (a Chinese school of philosophy that emphasizes living in harmony with the source of existence), or take time to go pray in a church or worship in a temple, seek strength from religious beliefs, and build up self-confidence.

2. When you encounter problems that you cannot solve and feel stressed, know how to make use of resources. Do not be ashamed to ask for help. Seek help from fellow students and teachers at school; humbly consult experienced colleagues at your workplace. Maybe you will receive help this way. Do not force yourself to go it alone.

3. "Prepare for the worst", "Be psychologically prepared to go back to square one anytime". Events in life can be unpredictable, things may not happen according to plan. Sometimes when you encounter results being in an inverse relationship to efforts, control yourself amidst the pressure. Do not continually question, "Why is this possible?", "How can I be so unfortunate?". Conversely, you should face failure head on, immediately consider ways of remediation, review what went wrong, and with a humble attitude continue to learn.

4. To be able to do things flawlessly, the best way is to, on a regular basis, practise more, do more preparation, work on the basics, and accumulate solid skills. For example, when it comes to delivering a speech or making an announcement on stage, most people would experience stage fright, nervousness, and fear of making mistakes. It requires ample practice and rehearsals prior to the event to alleviate the stress.

5. Always remember that "Life is unpredictable". When stress arrives, and you feel irritable, recite in your mind, "Oh! How unpredictable life is!" Understand that life is very fragile. When you recall that countless lives and assets were annihilated within a few tens of seconds of the tsunami in Japan, how important can your worries be? If you know to think this way, your stress level will drop significantly in an instant, and the troubled knots in your heart will feel relief. When your heart is worry-free, you will not be nervous and apprehensive. This way you can deal with difficult tasks effectively.

In conclusion, we need to utilize stress to our benefit, transform barriers to empowerment, and stimulate a new fighting spirit and power of survival.

## 6. How to Increase Personal Adaptability

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The lyrics of a song go like this, "It's not that I don't understand. The world is changing too fast.". In fact, every day there are changes, be they big or small, many or few, happening in our lives. A small change could be that the coffee shop that starts with the letter "T" at the end of the street has relocated, but this in itself is enough to cause you angst about getting that cup of coffee that wakes you up in the morning. A big change could be a work move, a change of residence, not to say leaving your home country behind. The life of an immigrant requires a long period of adjustment before he can slowly settle down. From this we can see that a relatively strong adaptability is a necessary requirement of modern man, otherwise life will be easily troubled by one change or another, and it will be even harder to cope with the myriad of changes that occur in work situations.

So how do you increase personal adaptability? There is a saying from an ancient philosopher, "If the mountain doesn't come here, then I will go there!".

This famous saying originated from a classic story: One day, someone found a wizard who could move mountains, and begged him to perform in front of an audience. The wizard sat in front of a mountain for a while, then got up and ran to the other side of the mountain. After that, he declared that the performance was over, leaving the audience totally puzzled. The wizard said, "In this world there is actually no magic to

move mountains. The only way to move a mountain is that if the mountain does not come over here, I will go over there."

In real life there are too many things that are like a "mountain", things that we cannot change, or at least cannot change for the time being. The saying "If the mountain doesn't come here, then I will go there" is enough to shake up a person. It puts to shame people who complain all day long that they are out of luck, that the world is unfair, and that nobody appreciates their potential.

If you cannot change others, try changing yourself. If you cannot change how things are, then change your attitude towards them. Otherwise you will belong to the category of people who are at odds with themselves, people who are not very bright.

A photographer took group photos for people year after year. These groups ranged from a few tens to a hundred people. However, there was one problem that always troubled him: the photos always showed some people with their eyes closed. In order to coordinate the pace, the photographer followed the usual method, shouting, "Everybody, please pay attention! I will call out 'one, two, three'; at the sound of 'three' I will press the shutter, make sure you don't close your eyes!". Notwithstanding how much he emphasized this, when the click sounded, inevitably there were people who closed their eyes. Subsequently, this photographer changed his approach and achieved much success. He asked all the participants

in the photo-taking to close their eyes and listen to his instructions. He still called out "one, two, three", but at the sound of "three", everybody was to open their eyes together. As expected, when the photo was developed, not even one person's eyes were closed. Everybody looked alert and lively, and all were happy with the results.

Every person hopes to live a happier and more satisfying life in this world. The smart way to go about it is to change oneself, not to change the external world. To adapt oneself in response to the ever-changing external environment is a much wiser alternative than unilaterally letting out an egotistical cry and waiting for the return of an echo.

A philosopher said it well: "If you cannot be a road, then be a path; if you cannot be the sun, then be a star.". Life is your own drawing board. You need to colour it yourself. Do not just use one colour to cover everything. Only by learning to change will you be able to paint a colourful picture of your life.

## 7. How to Maintain Family Harmony

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In the last issue we talked about the three essential elements of a harmonious life: the individual's physical and psychological health in terms of harmony with oneself, family harmony, and good interpersonal communication and relationships. Today we want to explore with you a topic that is closely related to our lives - that of family harmony. The bliss and happiness of a family is dependent on family members getting along with each other and giving each other support. As the (Chinese) saying goes, "With a peaceful household, everything prospers". Wise people know that the family should be a place that values affection above reason. To foster a warm atmosphere, you have to master the art of giving in. The principles of "Three More, Three Less" introduced below may be able to help you.

### **Less Change, More Adaptability**

After starting a family, many people gradually discover flaws in the other party in the course of their daily living. For example, a wife may be dissatisfied that the husband and son throw their socks all over the place; the husband may not like the wife spending money on frivolous things. A lot of people hope that through gentle guidance they can change the other party. Unfortunately, the result is that, despite a lot of effort on one's part, the other party still acts as he/she pleases, causing one to be more and more infuriated. In fact, there are certain personality traits and behaviour that are very hard to change. Trying to remodel other people's habits may not only arouse

instinctual antipathy, it may even give rise to a psychology of opposition. Even when you are right, it becomes very difficult for the other party to listen. Therefore, when forming a family, not only do you have to accept the good qualities of family members, you also need to learn to live with their "weaknesses" peacefully. So, where these flaws are concerned, instead of being eager to change them, it is better to slowly adapt to them.

### **Less Contracting, More Sharing**

Some families like contracting responsibilities for household chores to specific individuals: you do the laundry, I mop the floors...etc. This kind of clear responsibility demarcation is okay. However, some people, after the assignments have been allocated, would keenly watch the speed and quality with which the other party does the housework and, once the chores are not done properly, would criticize and admonish, thus creating a tense atmosphere in the household. In fact, slacking off once in a while is understandable. In the case of housework, there is no need to force family members to do it immediately. Instead of distributing work by contracting to individuals, it is better for family members to share the tasks: one person clears the table, the other follows up by wiping the table. This way you can relish the joy of cooperation and warmth.

### **Fewer Demands, More Respect**

Some parents, after they have children, would conscientiously nurture their children. They would put a

lot of demands on the children based on their own expectations, such as bedtime schedules, things they are required to learn...etc. Some wives would also try to mould their husbands in the same way, for example, requesting the husband to socialize with certain members at the leadership level...etc. In fact, both adults and children possess the wisdom to choose to do what is right. What family members can do is to make fewer demands, but give more respect. The more a person is respected, the less his ability and wisdom will be suppressed, the more he can exercise his personal power.

### **The Importance of Family Harmony to Men**

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Family harmony is important to everyone, especially to men. A man who possesses family harmony will have: love and care from his wife, respect from his children, caring from family members, mental alertness, stable moods, enough physical and mental energy to cope with work, a feeling of happiness and satisfaction.

In a modern day family, the man is one of the core members of the family, and plays an important role: husband and father. In order to cope with various layers of roles and responsibilities, there are some techniques and tips on how to be a good husband and father that men should not ignore.

Furthermore, the ability to successfully maintain a good relationship with other family members also contributes to overall family harmony. Set a good example for your

children - take good care of your parents and maintain a good relationship with them, so that the children can learn from it how to relate to you; maintaining a good relationship with your in-laws may win you strong support from your other half. If you can take a gentle approach, add to it understanding and some wisdom, being a good son or good son-in-law is in fact not as difficult as you might think.

## **8. The Art of Spousal Communication**

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The art of spousal interaction is by no means an easy topic. Some scholars divide marriage into several stages based on how long the couple has been married.

Different stages have different needs, and require both parties to harmonize their interaction with each other to achieve satisfaction.

The initial two years of marriage is somewhat of a "Fresh Love" stage. The most important thing is to harmonize two individuals of different personalities, backgrounds, and genders into getting along in a relationship of unity. Both sides have to find a balance between preserving individual uniqueness and joining together as one. Learn to respect that the other party is different from yourself. At the same time, work hard to establish a lifestyle that would satisfy both parties.

Three to ten years into the marriage is the "Realistic Love" stage. Having experienced the challenges of life's reality, the couple is faced with the crisis of fading love, including what is popularly called "the Seven Years' Itch". During this period, there is a need for honest communication of feelings towards each other. Making plans to do something fun and to please each other can help refresh the marital relationship. Moreover, if faced with the arrival of children, it is even more important for husband and wife to balance the roles of being a parent and spouse, so as to avoid neglecting the spouse's need because of the children.

Eleven to twenty-five years into the marriage is the "Warm Love" stage. The marriage enters a stage of mature, long-time partnership. The couple needs to support each other in order to be able to face the inevitable hurts in life, such as loss of youthfulness, death of relatives and friends...etc. When interacting with each other, mutual affirmation and a willingness to listen will help the other party get over crises.

Over twenty-six years of marriage is the "Renewing and Transcending Love" stage. The spouse plays a very significant role in helping the other party face retirement and empty nest situations. The attraction that the couple has for each other lies in mutual understanding and companionship. The feelings of closeness and intimacy in walking together help fill one's sense of emptiness.

In fact, marriage is a lifetime commitment. The key to spousal interaction is a willingness to make sacrifices and shoulder the burden of the other party's ups and downs in life, to become the lifelong companion in the other party's life journey, as per the (Chinese) saying, "I hold your hand, and we grow old together!". For a marriage to be satisfying, good communication between husband and wife is indispensable. To achieve this goal, both sides need to learn. For a start, try working on the several areas below:

### **1) Increase Communication Time**

Do not just communicate with regard to everyday tasks, but seize opportunities for extra communication time.

For example, no matter how busy life may be, the couple should still spend some time alone with each other, from as brief as having breakfast together, to making arrangements for weekend activities. This will provide both parties with relaxation for the body and soul, as well as improve their feelings for each other.

### **2) Talk More about Affection, Less about Reason**

If a couple talks more about affection and love, each party will find it easier during communication to consider and understand things from the other's perspective. If the talk is about reason, each party tends to see things only from his/her angle and insist on his / her own views. This can also easily lead to criticism of the other party's behaviour.

### **3) Use Less Negative Language, Make More Specific Requests**

Do not complain about small things or say hurtful things just because you want to get back at the other party.

Express your own wishes using specific and direct ways of expression. For example:

Do not say, "You come home so late every night. Have you ever loved me?"

What you should say is, "I would like you to be home by 11:00 p.m. every night, because I want to spend more time with you."

#### **4) Understand Each Other's Feelings**

To achieve mutual understanding, listen more to the other party when he/she voices his/her feelings; you should also express your own feelings in an honest and frank manner. Do not try to second guess each other.

#### **5) Accept your Spouse, Accommodate Each Other**

Do not be fixated upon the other party's failure to correct long time habitual behaviour. Appreciate the efforts he/she has made instead of focusing on the results. Be accepting of the other party. As for decisions that you could not arrive at a consensus, you should be understanding. At the end of the day, accommodation is an important element of maintaining a marriage.

There is no harm trying out the above methods. If only husband and wife can be understanding, forgiving and loving towards each other, they are bound to enjoy a more satisfying and blissful marital life.

## **9. How to Establish Good Interpersonal Communication**

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Do all of you still remember the three essential elements of a harmonious life that I mentioned before? They are: physical and mental health, a harmonious family, and good interpersonal relationships and communication. Today let us explore the important topic of how to establish good interpersonal communication channels.

Interpersonal communication is the process of relaying messages between people and the search for mutual understanding. Even more, it is the foundation of interpersonal relationships. Man is a social animal. The need for being together and in contact with others is as important as the need for water and food for sustenance. Even a mere regular conversation or casual chat can make us feel happy and supported, as well as satisfy our need for human contact.

We understand others through communication, which allows for relationships to develop, change, or continue. Communication also assists us in our self-exploration, and can help us develop a deeper, closer understanding and knowledge of ourselves and other people.

Communication is a form of interaction with other people, sometimes by means of speech, sometimes by means of body language, and more often via a combination of the two. For example, exchanging a look or a gesture with a fellow student in class, talking over

the phone with a good friend, chatting with friends over MSN...etc., are all manifestations of interpersonal communication.

The following are basic interpersonal communication skills:

### **1. Attentive Listening**

Listening, which implies commitment and respect, makes the other party feel valued. It encourages the other party's willingness to talk.

### **2. Pick the Right Time**

If you want your communication to yield results, you need to consider the other party's time, mood, location, and work on hand, in order to pick a suitable opportunity for dialogue.

### **3. Pay Attention to Body Language**

A person's posture, breathing, facial expressions, and the distance during conversation may indicate what the message really is or that there is more to the content.

#### **4. Effective Expression**

Use direct, immediate, clear, and consistent ways to convey messages. This can avoid misunderstandings and pent up emotions, and promote genuine emotional sharing with other people.

#### **5. Respect Individual Differences**

A trivial joke could be perceived as a major insult; similarly, people may interpret praise as mockery, view caring as intervention. Understanding and respect are the driving forces behind continuous communication.

#### **6. Criticism and Correction**

If there is a need for criticism, it is best to first praise and then gently criticize; if there is a need to correct somebody else's mistake, it is appropriate to focus on the matter itself and avoid personal attacks.

Please remember: Treating other people genuinely and sincerely, living up to your promises, and respecting others' privacy are forever the cornerstone for good communication.

## **10. Secret Tips for Expanding Connections and Building Good Relationships**

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Carnegie, the American steel king, once said, "The part that professional knowledge plays in a person's success is only 15%. The rest of the 85% depends on interpersonal relationships."

People connections is a person's ticket to wealth and success. Examining the track records of successful personalities in the world of politics and business, you will discover that they all owed their brilliant achievement to their possession of a weighty "People Connections Passbook".

The Chinese philosopher Xun Tzu (a student of Confucius) once said, "A gentleman is not born any different. It is because he knows how to make use of resources.". This means that it is not enough for a man to rely solely on his own efforts for his career; he needs to be good at counting on others. If you want to be accepted, then you need to build an extensive relationship network.

If you want relationship with others to be your capital for a personal future with infinite potential, the key is in "liking others first". If you like people, people will like you - this is without doubt the truth. When interacting with people, we have to establish the idea that interpersonal relationships constitute assets, then we can

deal with all kinds of interpersonal relationships coming from all different directions appropriately and harmoniously. Through our smiles, our speech, our ability to touch other people's hearts, and such tactics, we can attract people to us and win them over with good rapport.

To foster good interpersonal relationships, we must possess the capabilities of caring about others, understanding others, winning others' trust, being observant and sensitive, and being able to engage people in in-depth conversations. This way we can expand our exposure, establish an extensive network of working relationships, and naturally enjoy good personal relationships. Skilful management of all kinds of relationships around us allows us to boost our power of influence. We must be aware that, in carrying oneself and interacting with others, the person who builds extensive personal relationships and wins people's hearts wins the world.

Having said that, in the area of interpersonal relationships, there are special tips on how to build rapport with people. If you are able to do the following, you are bound to win people over.

#### 1) Be Good at Appreciating and Liking Others

Appreciating someone implies raising the other party's worth. In a Chinese legend, a talented musician by the name of Bai Ya Yu played his instrument daily at an outdoor location. While nobody else showed interest, a gentleman named Zi Qi Zhong would come by every

day to listen to him, showering him with much praise and appreciation. After Zhong died, Yu destroyed his musical instrument as a tribute to Zhong. The reason why Yu did that was because Zhong was the only one who appreciated his talent, and there was no point playing after that as nobody else recognized his worth.

At the same time, you have to like other people, because liking other people is the prerequisite to other people liking you. Only when you like people, would you receive other people's goodwill and willingness to be close to you.

### 2) Learn to Identify with Others

This is acknowledging that the other party is reasonable. The more the divergence, the more you need to work hard to find common grounds, accept the other party, and narrow the psychological gap. Only under such premises would it be possible for all conflicts or differences to be re-channelled towards a common direction.

### 3) Learn to Praise

Everybody likes to hear good things about themselves. As parents, giving your children more encouragement and praise will make them smarter and lovelier. The children will also learn from you to give praise to other people. Hearing nice words coming out of your own mouth often enough will naturally make you more beautiful too. Aside from children, any person needs praise and encouragement, otherwise he or she would lose self-confidence.

When interacting with others, you need to consciously discover things about the other party that is praiseworthy, and say it out loud in a timely manner. Do not ignore even a remark well said, or a suitably matched accessory. It has been said, "Presenting a rose to the living is much better than sending a fancy wreath to the dead". This saying is really humorous. It pinpoints the importance of giving praise, not to say that when giving someone a rose, your hand is left with a fragrant smell! Praise is definitely something that benefits both the recipient and yourself!

#### 4) Respect and Empower Yourself

This is the basis of respecting others and being respected. If you simply practise flattery, you will only cause people to detest and look down upon you. Be neither arrogant nor self-effacing. Being broad minded, generous and poised would be the most appropriate way of carrying yourself in social interactions.

In an international metropolis like today's Toronto, if you can be good at building rapport with people, and in grasping the intricacies of personal relationships, you will win people's hearts. Your career development will be smooth sailing and, wherever you go, you will be successful.

## **Service Case Sharing #1:**

(The following presentation of a true story was originally published in Sing Tao Daily (Toronto) on November 13, 2010)

### **United Way Inspires Spirit of Resilience: The Story of a New Immigrant Joining the Navy**

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In life, unhappy events occur eight or nine times out of ten. What is valuable is the ability to stand up again amidst adverse circumstances. United Way Toronto does exactly that - helping countless people who are in distress get a new lease on life. The true experience of W proves that United Way can help people achieve "Mission Impossible".

Ten years ago W immigrated to Toronto from China. Like the majority of new immigrants, his job search was not satisfactory. From hotel attendant to restaurant chef to delivery truck driver, he held unstable jobs. This gave rise to family conflicts, with his wife leaving him soon after. Prolonged emotional repression, coupled with the impact of being let go, finally forced him to the extreme.

A year ago, W, unemployed, was caught stealing perfume in a large shopping mall in the city centre. However, due to his abnormal psychological condition, he was required under court coordination to receive formal psychological counselling. He thus took part in SEAS Centre's "Leading a Harmonious Life - Reaching New Heights" program, a mental health counselling

program funded by United Way. Through group sharing, expert counselling and such activities, W felt a new hope in life. He made friends with a group of new immigrants going through similar difficult situations, vented his long repressed frustration, and found relief for his mental stress. His whole life changed to one with drive and determination. Since he was a child, W's biggest aspiration had been to join the navy. With the help of SEAS Centre and other resources, he used his experience as chef to apply to join the Royal Canadian Navy. His wish finally came true this summer - he joined the navy's training camp. This is a somewhat miraculous story, but it was truly United Way's resources that allowed a helpless person to realize his dream.

W never thought that a disaster could bring him an opportunity for a new life. He is genuinely thankful for the mental health counselling program which let him learn how to understand others and himself, how to communicate with others under difficult circumstances, how to resolve family conflicts and combat personal mental depression. Now he welcomes his next challenge - life in the military - with a smile on his face and gladness in his heart.

## **Helping Men Reach New Heights**

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In view of the increasingly serious situation of immigrants facing family life crises, SEAS Centre launched psychological counselling activities in the community a while back. Also, six years ago, with full funding from United Way Toronto, it systematically developed a men's program "Leading a Harmonious Life - Reaching New Heights". Combining interactive groups and expert counselling, the program strengthens life skills training and recreational activities to promote personal growth and family harmony.

Rebecca Lee, Executive Director at SEAS Centre, indicated that in the past society paid little attention to the issue of psychological health of male new immigrants. However, due to the loss of their previous profession and status, these men typically suffer even greater emotional turmoil and anxiety after immigration, giving rise to many family problems. Therefore SEAS Centre set up this program, which lasts for six weeks. The male participants form a peer support group, with professional social workers and volunteers conducting specific psychological counselling, talking about how to deal with family disputes, how to manage interpersonal relationships, how to get rid of troubles...etc. Male newcomers are generally more reserved, and tend not to confide in others. Notwithstanding, within a peer support group setting, participants gradually feel free to talk, discussing commonly-faced difficulties. Because of this, they become friends with whom they can communicate and de-stress. A lot of participants experience a big

change in their mood and facial expressions after one week into the program, with many sporting smiles on their faces.

Psychological counselling lends itself to the wonderful state of self-liberation and increase in self-worth. This is exactly the essence of what United Way does to help distressed new immigrants - to lay down their burden, re-integrate into the new community, and reach new heights.

## **Service Case Sharing #2: Message from a Family Service User**

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I was an abused young mother, a woman with a child not yet three years of age, with nobody to help with his care. His dad was prone to violence, and never concerned himself with anything about me or the child. Not only was he uncaring, he even depended on others to take care of his basic needs. He relied on his mother (my mother-in-law!) for everything - whether it be shelter, meals, or other physical needs.

The grandparents claimed that they loved their grandchild, but since the date the child came out of my womb, they had not lived up to one bit of responsibility towards his love and care. Living in their home, I had no personal freedom, not to say room for expressing my opinions. When I felt burdened or frustrated, I could only confide in the four walls; the days were unbearably miserable! You could say that both my body and mind had been seriously battered and hurt. This had gone on for so long that slowly my heart was filled with despair and fear. I could not see light or hope in my life. Every day, I lived like a zombie.

Just when I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, I incidentally met a good-hearted Christian. She was also a young mother. We met each other at the park when we took our children there to play. Not long after knowing her, we started talking, and I more or less told her about some of the difficult circumstances in my life. This

good-hearted sister suggested that I seek help from SEAS Centre. Since then my fate started slowly to turn around! I no longer walked alone. Beside me were staff members from SEAS Centre helping me along. All of a sudden, I seemed to have found hope in life, and was no longer extremely depressed!

I am genuinely grateful to all the staff members of the Centre, especially the intake social worker who accepted me. She not only worked with dedication, she was also very kind and approachable every time she received clients and people who sought help, making each lady who received help from her feel that her needs were attentively met. From the bottom of my heart, I thank all the staff members of SEAS Centre for their help and care. At the same time, I wish that women who have suffered hurt like me, with the help of staff members from the Centre, will transform their grief into strength, and stand up again. Tomorrow will be better, I wish that all of you will live each day happily. Thank You!

## **Service Case Sharing #3: Voice of a Lady Client who Received Help**

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My name is Ten---, a single mother. I have three children, two of whom suffer from autism.

For many years, with the help of staff from SEAS Centre, my days have been happy and fulfilling. My heart is filled with peace and joy. I thank the Lord for leading me into SEAS Centre not long after arriving in Canada, this is a blessing that God has given me.

I remember when I first came to Canada, I was unfamiliar with both the place and the people, and did not know English. Feeling uneasy and helpless about the future, I went into SEAS Centre and talked to a staff member about my condition. The staff member patiently explained to me about the new environment, and gave me advice so that I knew what was needed to cope with this new life and new situation. They further encouraged me to learn, and even helped and supported me in my daily living. The most important thing was that they comforted my spirit.

Under the help of SEAS Centre staff, I smoothly overcame one difficulty after another, especially when, after becoming a single mother, I was further told that my children had been diagnosed as autistic. At that time, the mental stress I underwent, and the physical and emotional pain I experienced, were indescribable. Fortunately, I believed that SEAS Centre could help me. With the assistance of the Centre's Women's Group staff, I received emotional comfort and help. Due to the problem of having

two autistic children, at the time I really had no idea what to do, how to teach them, how to bring them up. The term autism was foreign to me. In the past I only knew some people had an introspective personality, but had never heard of the term autism. Now, suddenly faced with so many problems, I just could not take it. It was SEAS Centre that helped and supported me, allowing me to go through life's journey step by step with a fighting spirit. They took my children to the doctor for physical examination, even helped them find a special needs day care centre, and also followed up and made arrangements with the Board of Education to resolve the issue of their schooling. I was an ignorant mother, but with tireless effort they delivered me from my worries and problems, connected my children with Autism Centre to apply for training, and arranged for me to attend seminars to learn how to take care of autistic children.

Under the help of SEAS Centre, I received both physical and mental relief, allowing me to regain confidence about life. I thank SEAS Centre's help for all this. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to each staff member of SEAS. If it were not for your support, I probably would not have been able to stand on my own, not to say take care of three children. Only with your love and help, can I enjoy today's happiness and fulfillment. I thank you. Even more, I hope to tell all our friends who need help out there: SEAS Centre is trustworthy, reliable; you can, like me, get the best help from them. I wish our friends with difficulties be a smart person like me, and come to SEAS Centre to seek

relief. This is a cup of blessing that God has prepared for us, and in this cup there is love, strength, confidence and also fulfillment! Please come and partake! Thank God for his gift! Thanks to SEAS Centre!

## **Epilogue: About SEAS Centre**

Since the 1980's, there has been a continuous influx of immigrants and refugees from various South East Asian countries into Canada, seeking to work and settle here in stability. Upon arrival in a new environment, they encounter problems adjusting to the differences in language, culture, climate, employment, and social interaction, and definitely have need for some external assistance. Support Enhance Access Service Centre (SEAS Centre), formerly South East Asian Service Centre, was founded to cater to this social need.

Since its establishment, SEAS Centre has entered its 26th year of service. During this period it has been providing social services of a personal nature to residents in the Regent Park and vicinity area who are of South East Asian descent, as well as to people from other ethnic groups. Initially we had only one office. By now we have expanded to five offices in the Greater Toronto Area (please refer to the last page for addresses). Our service area spans the whole of GTA and communities of various ethnic backgrounds.

SEAS Centre's range of services covers many areas of social needs. Immigration information services include: providing information and counselling for new immigrants, form filling, language interpretation, escort, language training courses, employment information and referral. Family services include: providing individual or family counselling, home visits, personal growth and family life education, domestic violence prevention education,

women's group and tea gatherings, men's peer support group and Reaching New Heights program, children's services, family fun activities, compilation and publication of educational information...etc. Senior services include: educational and health seminars, friendly visits, social and recreational activities, information services...etc.

Community development includes: youth leadership and life skills training, promotion of racial harmony, translation of information, volunteer recruitment and training, and festival celebration activities...etc.

Ten years ago, with sponsorship from Royal Bank of Canada, SEAS Centre was able to publish the book "The Road to Bliss -- You, Me and Him/Her" for free distribution to our newcomer friends. This resulted in exceptionally enthusiastic and positive responses and feedback. All of society wanted us to meet the needs of new immigrants by continuing to publish this type of reference guides for newcomers, so that new immigrants can settle and integrate into Canadian society quickly. A decade later, today we thank Royal Bank of Canada once again for its generous sponsorship, making it possible for us to publish the "Leading a Harmonious Life" booklet.

So much has changed within a decade. During these ten years, the number of new immigrants in Canada, especially in the City of Toronto, has increased at an alarming rate. The social problems that this gives rise to, such as social adjustment, life stress, family problems and so on have become increasingly severe. SEAS Centre has all along taken a comprehensive, people-based approach in serving our newcomer friends; changing with the times, actively

developing services that cater for the community's needs. In the area of domestic violence prevention, we work hard to tackle the root of the problem by targeting family education. Apart from services that provide attentive care to abused women and children, we also focus on the regulation and care of men's emotional, physical and mental health. Our results in this area have been recognized by all areas of society.

This booklet contains some typical cases of new immigrant families, with their stories of blood, sweat and tears. It also includes materials shared by the Counselling Team. We sincerely hope that this information will be of help to readers. We further appeal to friends who are now feeling lost and dejected, please do not lose heart. All you have to do is to take the first step to seek help -- contact us. For service enquiries, please call 416-362-1375. Remember: "SEAS Centre and You... For a Better Tomorrow!"

**Head Office**

603 Whiteside Place,  
Toronto, ON M5A 1Y7  
Tel: 416-362-1375  
Fax: 416-362-4881

**North York Office**

3907 Don Mills Road  
Toronto, ON M2H 2S7  
Tel: 416-490-6491  
Fax: 416-490-9986

**East Chinatown Centre**

606 Gerrard Street East  
Toronto, ON M4M 1Y3  
Tel: 416-466-8842  
Fax: 416-645-0128

**Markham Centre**

4981 Highway 7 E, Unit 4  
Markham, ON L3R 1N1  
Tel: 905-305-1808  
Fax: 905-305-1885

**Scarborough Resource Ctr**

4675 Steeles Avenue East  
Unit 1K5, Ontario M1V 4S5  
Tel: 416-490-6491



*S.E.A.S. and You....For A Better Tomorrow*

[www.seascentre.org](http://www.seascentre.org)



# SEAS S.E.A.S. CENTRE

## 協群社區服務中心

Support Enhance Access Service (S.E.A.S.) Centre is a not-for-profit social service agency that promotes individual well-being, enhances family harmony, and encourages community involvement of all walks of life through diverse programs, volunteer opportunities, and community activities.

### Office Address:

#### Head Office

603 Whiteside Place  
Toronto, ON M5A 1Y7  
(416) 362-1375

#### North York Centre

3907 Don Mills Road,  
Toronto, ON M2H 2S7  
(416) 490-6491

#### East Chinatown Centre

606 Gerrard Street East  
Toronto, ON M4M 1Y3  
(416) 466-8842

#### Markham Centre

4981 Hwy 7 E, Unit 4  
Markham, ON L3R 1N1  
(905) 305-1808

#### Scarborough Resource Centre

4675 Steeles Ave. E.  
Unit 1K5, Scarborough  
ON M1V 4S5  
(416) 490-6491

### Web-site:

[www.seascentre.org](http://www.seascentre.org)

### E-mail:

[info@seascentre.org](mailto:info@seascentre.org)



United Way  
Toronto

A United Way member agency

### Family Service:

- Crisis intervention
- Individual & family counselling
- Family life education
- Men support group
- Men's mental health education
- Women support group
- Family resource centre
- Parent and child drop-in
- Early childhood education
- Prenatal classes
- Children nutrition classes
- Women drop-in
- Mental health education
- After four program

### Neighbourhood & Newcomer Service:

- Supportive counselling
- Information & referral
- Forms filling
- Support network
- Interpretation
- Newcomer orientation
- Employment support
- Social welfare application
- Social housing application

### Youth & Senior Service:

- Youth leadership training
- Youth life skills training
- Youth anti-racism education
- Senior drop-in
- Recreation activities

### Community Development:

- Volunteer recruitment & training
- Community outreach
- Networking & partnership
- Cultural & festival celebrations
- Live-in caregiver & labour rights advocacy
- Monthly police information session
- Community Access Program
- Basic computer skills training

*S.E.A.S. and You....For A Better Tomorrow*

