

Strengthening family ties

By **ALEXIUS CHEANG**

HOME: a place where most of us have spent much of our time over the past two years, no thanks to the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Yet, not all is doom and gloom, as this situation proved to be a golden opportunity for us to strengthen our family bonds.

Working from home, attending online classes and virtual meetings, getting food deliveries – these practices became an integral part of the new normal in our lives as we turned our houses into home bases for almost all of our daily routines.

Hence, it may seem natural to expect that our family bond would become stronger as more time is spent together at home.

Quantity doesn't mean quality

However, with all the tasks and roles that we needed to juggle, it may not have been as easy as we thought to find quality time with our family.

Here are five tips on how you can promote family bonding at home.



Spending one-on-one time with each of your children, as well as your spouse, is an important element in bonding with them. – Positive Parenting

your spouse too!

> **One-on-one time**

Try to find time to communicate one-on-one with each of your children, as well as your spouse.

Be in the present moment to listen and give them your undivided attention.

Some things can only be expressed when you are alone with them.

These deeper conversations develop stronger bonds and allow you to deal with any unaddressed issues.

You don't have to practise all these tips all the time to bond with your family.

A small, yet consistent effort is key.

The most important thing is to consciously make meaningful interactions and communications with them to create a positive atmosphere at home.

This will go a long way towards promoting a stronger family bond.

Quantity time does not equal to quality time.

Parents faced the new situation of having to balance their paid work with house chores, while simultaneously supervising children's remote learning, for prolonged periods of time.

Conflicts and clashes may have arisen with family members "locked in" under the same roof.

For instance, the lack of personal space for work or studies could have led to interference in day-to-day activities.

This is, in particular, a potential problem for households confined to smaller living spaces or with fewer rooms, and may have led to stress as family members are unable to focus on individual tasks or meetings.

Besides, the blurring of boundaries between work, family, as well as personal time and space, may not have necessarily made things better.

Yes, you may have had more flexibility in managing your schedule and less time was spent on commuting between home, school and

office. But this situation led to a work-life imbalance.

Work matters may have interfered with personal life, and conversely, one's home environment may also have impacted job performance.

These unprecedented times also presented a challenge for young children who were just starting out in kindergarten or school.

The lack of interactivity between pupils and teachers made it harder for them to pay attention.

Hence, parental supervision during lessons was often required.

Parents themselves needed to adapt to the added responsibilities they needed to manage during this extraordinary period.

Five strategies for bonding

So, how can these challenges be turned into opportunities for family bonding?

Here are some practical tips:

> **Sharing is caring**

Mums and dads need to complement each other to fulfil the multi-

ple roles at home.

Communicate and plan ahead to arrange work and house chore schedules, so that while one spouse manages the household, the other can attend and focus on their virtual meeting.

The whole family can also bond by doing chores like meal preparation or cleaning the house together.

Create a house chore schedule that involves your kids.

An efficient task management system is vital to reduce misunderstandings once all members of a household are clear about their duties and responsibilities of sharing the workload.

> **Allocate family time**

Set a specific time to spend with all family members.

The chosen time can be during dinner every night, a twice-a-week family game night, a weekly movie screening or other preferred joint activities.

During this time, all tasks related to work and school should be set aside.

Ideally, personal gadgets should be turned off or muted during family time.

> **Start a family project**

This can be a home improvement project that all family members can contribute to, e.g. setting up a small garden, painting the room or fence, reorganising the furniture or installing wallpaper in the room.

Creative art projects like family photography, scrap-booking or painting are also great ways to spend quality time together.

> **Small gestures, big impact**

Sometimes, the smallest gestures are the best.

Simply saying thank you after someone has helped out with chores or genuinely complimenting the cook of the home for a delicious meal can make the day for your family members.

You can also leave simple notes on your children's desk or bed to thank them for behaving nicely.

Even a hug or kiss counts.

By the way, this works great with

Like the American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) said: "A house is made with walls and beams; a home is built with love and dreams."

Alexius Cheang is a behavioural psychologist. This article is courtesy of the Malaysian Paediatric Association's Positive Parenting programme in collaboration with expert partners. For further information, please email starhealth@thestar.com.my. The information provided is for educational and communication purposes only, and it should not be construed as personal medical advice. Information published in this article is not intended to replace, supplant or augment a consultation with a health professional regarding the reader's own medical care. *The Star* does not give any warranty on accuracy, completeness, functionality, usefulness or other assurances as to the content appearing in this column. *The Star* disclaims all responsibility for any losses, damage to property or personal injury suffered directly or indirectly from reliance on such information.