

epworth moments

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Caring For A Child Who Had Experienced Trauma

Pg 3

Forming Meaningful Connections Online

Pg 6



ABOUT US

Epworth Community Services is a Social Service Agency (SSA) that helps at-risk children and youths from needy and disadvantaged families. We want to create a better world for them so that they can develop their potential. Our work focuses on promoting the mental well-being of children and youths by building strong families and imparting skills for resilient living.

VISION

Strong Families, Resilient Living,
Beautiful Minds.

MISSION

To reach out in Christian love, by providing quality programmes and services to all children, youths, parents and their families, of all language, race and religion, and nurturing each family member in body, mind and spirit.

EPWORTH MOMENTS

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p.11



p.14

CONTENTS

- 03 Caring For A Child Who Had Experienced Trauma**
- 06 Forming Meaningful Connections Online**
- 09 Beaming With Light**
- 11 Over The School Holidays**
- 12 Making The Most Of Our Time**



CARING FOR A CHILD WHO HAD EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

By Quek Li Koon, Manger of Epworth Foster Care

How would you react if you witnessed an angry outburst by a child?

Having to look after a child who had experienced trauma can be challenging. This is especially so for parents and caregivers who have their own set of bad experiences and issues to manage.

While self-care is paramount, having a good understanding of trauma, its impact and effects are just as crucial. Not only will it help the parent and caregiver to better manage expectations; it also gives them a better understanding of the child's misbehaviour before jumping to conclusions.

Trauma results from having experienced adverse and serious circumstances. These experiences can be physically, psychologically and emotionally harmful.

The impact of trauma on a child can cause several issues. For example, anxiety, insecurity, attention issues, sleeping and eating disorders, irritability, and inability to interpret social cues accurately.

When the child is unable to cope with his traumatic past experiences when triggered, he may exhibit behaviours such as aggression, anger and withdrawal.

Traumatic experiences can change a child's way of thinking, emotions and behaviours. Strategies that may have worked before may not work well on children who have experienced trauma.

Here, we share a few tips on caring for a child who had experienced trauma.

IMPACTS of Trauma



Scan here to learn more about the different types of trauma and the four common trauma responses.



Insecurity



Inability to interpret social cues



Irritability



Anxiety



Eating disorder



Attention issues

Helping the Child Feel Safe and Secure

It is important to create an environment that will help the child feel safe and secure. For example, leaving the lights on at night, giving the child a soft toy to cuddle, and preventing the child from seeing images that will trigger a traumatic memory. In order to give the child a sense of security, establish a set of structure and routine. It helps the child feel at ease when he knows what to expect.

Most importantly, spend time to connect with and understand the child. This builds trust and helps the child feel safe.

Manage Your Emotions

Instead of acting on negative emotions at the spur of a moment, stay calm and regulate those emotions. This provides more headspace and control over the situation instead of allowing it to spiral out of control. This is crucial as the child will be looking and learning from how the situation is being handled.

Understand and Be Curious

Instead of being quick to point out what is wrong with the child when he misbehaved, take a step back and seek to understand what has happened.

Understand the situation by probing and asking questions. For example, ask the child in a calm manner, "What made you overturn the table?". Nudge the child into sharing his feelings by guessing the intention behind his misbehaviour. "Did you overturn the table because you felt angry when your friend gave you a nickname?". This gives the child a sense of assurance that he is sought to be heard and understood, instead of being sought to get punished.

When the child is assured, he will be more receptive to share about his feelings and reason behind his misbehaviour.

Accept and Correct

Saying the right words such as "That must be difficult for you," will help the child feel understood. In situations where the child has done wrong, provide the assurance that he is still cared for and loved. Walk the child through his actions and the motivation behind them, then address any arising issues.

Correct the child whenever appropriate. For example, letting the child know that overturning the table is not right and that he should put it back to its rightful place.

Let's talk about stress...

What is stress?

Feeling stressed is a normal human reaction. It is the way the brain and body responds when presented with a threat.

Good stress VS Bad stress

Not all stress is bad! Stress in small doses can be beneficial. Good stress is usually short-term and it pushes you to accomplish goals and overcome challenges. However, too much stress can become bad, especially when it reaches to the point where it is beyond one's coping abilities.

What happens when I am stressed?

When stressed, the body reacts by releasing cortisol, also known to be the *stress hormone*. This leads to higher brain alert, tensed muscles and an increase in heart rate. After the threat has passed, cortisol level drops and this allows the body to calm down.

However, when someone experiences chronic stress — a prolonged and constant feeling of stress, the body stays on high alert even when threat is not present. This can negatively affect one's health and cause added pressure to the surrounding people. Some symptoms of excess stress include headaches, chest pain, insomnia, heart palpitation, irritability and social withdrawal.



FORMING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS ONLINE

By Joyce Gan, Literacy Intervention Teacher at Epworth Literacy



Open communication and active listening are vital for building rapport. Everyone wants to be heard; children are no exception.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit our shores, Epworth Literacy programmes moved en masse from bricks to clicks. Teaching and learning migrated from face-to-face interactions to a fully online environment. This transition brought about a new set of challenges for forming meaningful connections between teachers and students. These challenges are further compounded since most of the students had learning difficulties such as dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Everyone wants to be heard; students are no exception. In building rapport, it is important to listen. Doing so will allow students to know that

their thoughts and feelings are respected. Here, we gather some tips from Epworth Literacy Teachers on forming meaningful connections with students online.

Instead of going straight into the lesson, understand the state of the student by playing games. Starting off on a simple and light-hearted note serves as a gentle nudge to engage students. This can be a kick-start to a fruitful online lesson.

With the safety measures and restrictions in place, students may experience stress from being

"What is one thing that made you happy today?"

"How are you feeling right now?"

"What is the coolest thing you saw today?"

cooped up at home. When students get visibly distressed during online lessons, it will be helpful to prompt and ask them to share about their feelings.

For older students, being able to talk about their day can serve as a form of stress relief. Younger students who might not be able to communicate as effectively can use visual aids like emojis to indicate their mood. This gives a better gauge on the students' emotional state.



Checking in on students' wellness can be as simple as asking if they are okay, and if they need a short break. For students who are not able to verbalise their discomfort, prompting them to express themselves with a simple thumbs up or thumbs down would be helpful. Subsequent lesson activities can then be modified to account for their fatigue and tiredness.

The gap between online and physical lessons can be large. Predictably, students take a longer time to open up online. To bridge this physical barrier, take the time to understand the students' learning profiles, likes and dislikes, as well as strengths and weaknesses before the commencement of the first session. When students feel like they are understood and know that their needs are met, it eases them into opening up. Be patient, trust takes time to build.

One of the drawbacks of online lessons would be the teachers'

Most importantly, to ensure the smooth running of the lesson, teachers play the role of helping students to be comfortable and to be themselves.

lack of control over their students' learning environment.

During physical lessons at Epworth Literacy Centre, Teachers have the liberty to organise and set up the classroom based on the students' interest. The surrounding tools can be used to monitor a student's attention level, and is also often used to diffuse tension, alleviate anxiety and stress when necessary. However, when conducting online lessons, there will be a few factors that are beyond the teachers' control. For example, parents or siblings in the same room may be points of distraction or barriers to communication during the lesson.

There may also be students who do not feel comfortable with expressing themselves in the presence of their family members. In order to mitigate this, different components of the lesson can be switched to pique the students' interest.



LOOK OUT, REACH OUT.

Have you noticed a friend who does not seem to be himself lately? Rather than brushing it off as a "phase", check-in with your friend.

A conversation could go a long way. Keep in mind that your friend might not be ready to talk about what he is going through. You cannot force someone to open up immediately, or to seek help. Be there for your friend through his journey and be ready when he does open up.

Forming meaningful connections is ultimately a two-way street.



Teachers, parents and students must **participate actively** for authentic connections to be cultivated.

Finally, parental involvement and cooperation are crucial for teachers to form meaningful connections with students online. When the transition from physical to online lessons first took place, parents were skeptical; they had their doubts on the effectiveness of the lessons. In order to ensure the continuation of the students' literacy progress, it is important to dispel the parents' doubts and apprehension. This can be done by allowing parents to sit in actual online lessons for them to observe how the lesson is conducted online.

Parents are also constantly reminded that children need time to adapt to new learning arrangements. By addressing the parents' concerns and anxiety, they will be more receptive and cooperative in bringing the best online lesson experience possible

for their child. For example, teachers can work closely with parents to create a more conducive learning environment. This increases the likelihood of having a successful online lesson.

Teachers, parents and students must participate actively for an authentic connection to be cultivated. Although teachers will not always be able to relate to their students directly, universal aspects of emotions such as sadness and frustration transcends communication barriers. There is no perfect solution to blend online and physical lessons seamlessly.

As we move forward in this new hybrid landscape of online and physical learning, the tenets of Epworth Literacy's intervention programmes remain the same – to prioritise the students' mental well-being first.

SMILE!

Do you know that the physical act of smiling can activate pathways in your brain to influence your emotional state? Several studies have shown that your body releases endorphins, dopamine and serotonin when you smile. These feel-good neurotransmitters can elevate your mood, reduce stress and relax your body!

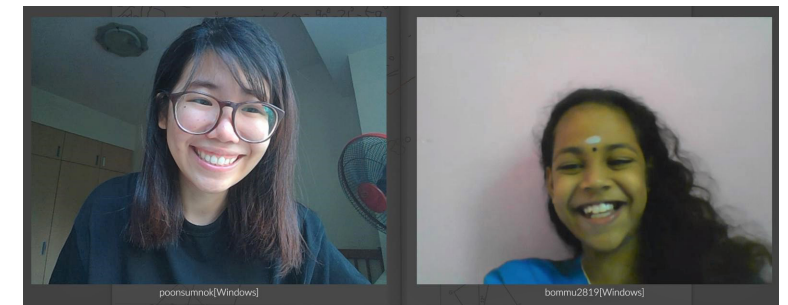
The benefits of smiling are not just limited to yourself;

your smile can influence others to feel happy too!

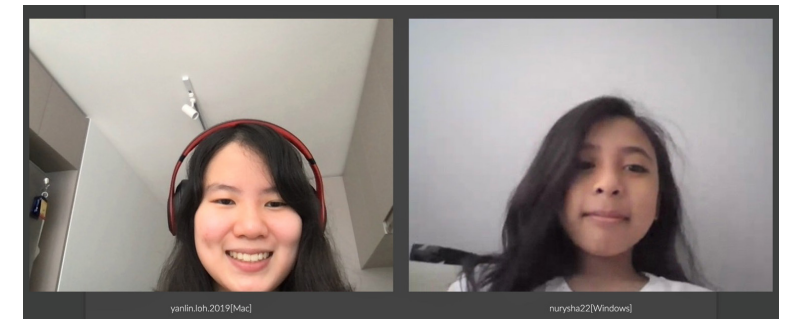


BEAMING WITH LIGHT

The unpredictable pandemic situation has led to several relaxing, and then, tightening of restrictions and safe management measures. We were in the midst of planning for a resumption of face-to-face Project Lightbulb session when the nation backstepped to Phase 2 Heightened Alert, again. Despite the change in arrangements, both our volunteers and students adapted quickly to the situation. Home-based learning in schools has made Project Lightbulb to be more needed than before. While our dedicated volunteers ensure that students can keep up with their school work, their well-being and holistic development remain as priority. We are thankful for our volunteers who kept the light at Project Lightbulb shining!

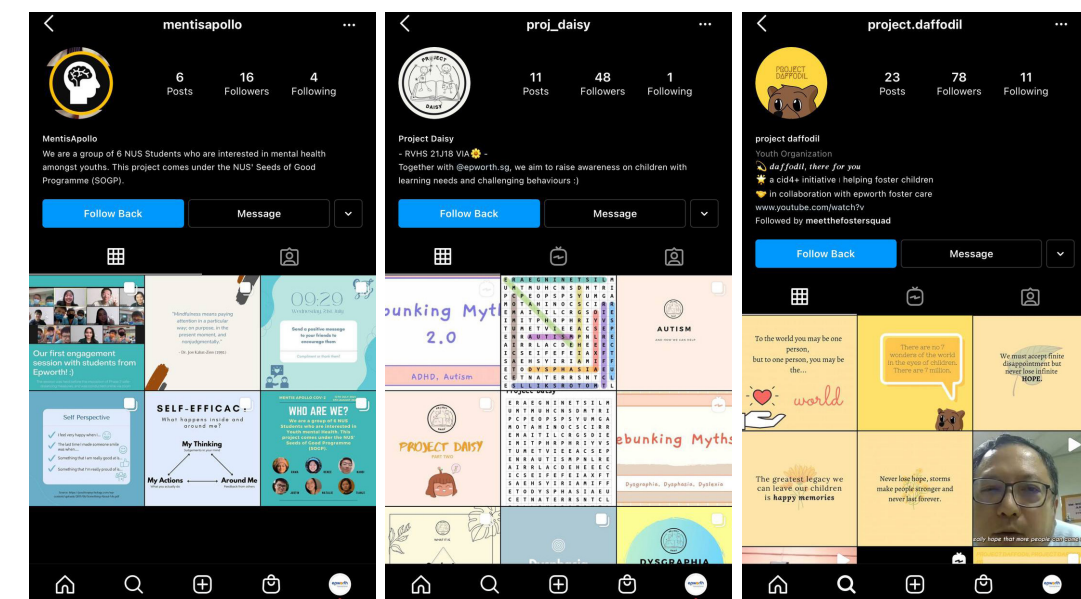


Volunteer Sum Nok and her student smiling brightly!



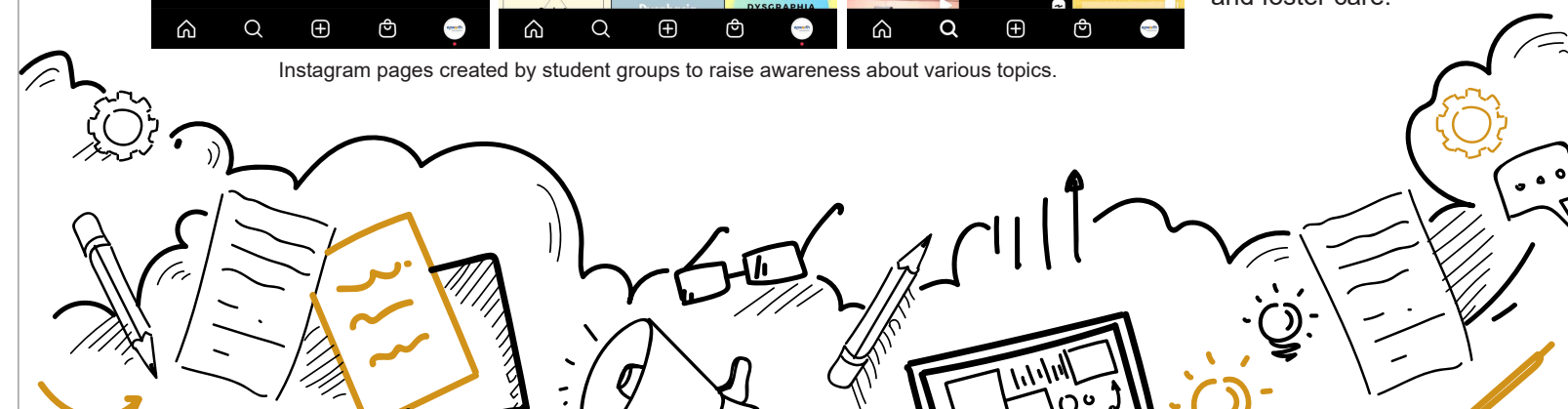
Volunteer Yan Lin and her student during the session.

Harnessing the power of social media



Instagram pages created by student groups to raise awareness about various topics.

Student groups from various schools stepped up to raise awareness on the work that Epworth does. They set up Instagram accounts and created content and resources from scratch to educate their peers and the public. They covered topics such as mental health, learning challenges, and foster care.



Fundraising for good

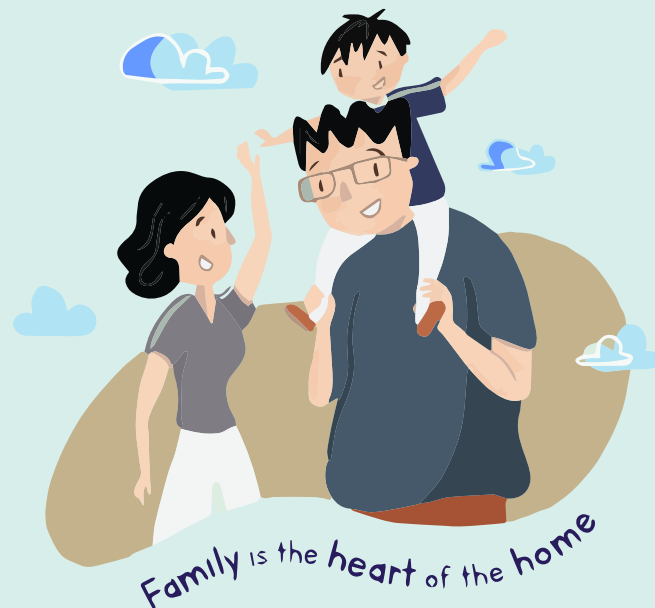
Over the past few months, a student group and a volunteer created their own campaign to fundraise for Epworth Community Services. Our volunteer, @mspebblesg, held a charity drive by putting up her artwork on sale. She received such overwhelming support that her artwork sold out within a day! Thank you for supporting our cause and for helping the disadvantaged children and youth in the community.



Scan this QR code to see the beautiful pebble pieces that our volunteer had done!



home away from home



Fostering a child is more than providing a comfortable bed and hearty meals. Catch a glimpse of what foster care is like through the eyes of a child!



Epworth Foster Care has launched their very own storybook, *Home Away From Home*, to help young children understand the concept of foster care in Singapore! You can grab a free copy of it at the library and at the following participating bookstores: Elm Tree Books, My Greatest Child, Times Bookstore and Kinokuniya Bookstore. You can also email to fostercare@epworth.sg or Whatsapp us at 9119 6248 to receive free copies of the book! Do state the number of copies and your mailing address.

OVER THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

By Stanley Quek, Supervisor of Epworth Student Care (ACSP)

The June school holiday at Epworth Student Care (ACSP) was a fun and fulfilling one. Despite the challenges and restrictions, our teachers took the effort to organise a series of educational programmes while ensuring the observance of safe management measures. They also took the opportunity to educate the students on being socially responsible.



Some of the enrichment programmes included the making of kaleidoscope, paper windmill, auto engineer, 3D wooden art & craft and a Father's Day gift. There were several positive responses from the students. One of them even said that it was the best school holiday programme that he had attended!

In this trying time, teachers had to go on shifts to make sure that programmes will continue while ensuring the safety of everyone. However, having witnessed how much the students have learnt and enjoyed themselves, it was all worthwhile.

This is one of the best school holiday programmes that I have attended!"



MAKING THE MOST OF OUR TIME

By Carol Aw, Assistant Supervisor of Epworth Student Care (ACSJ)

Taking a holiday is an important part of everyone's life, for working persons and students alike. The June school holiday offered a time for the students to relax, rest and step back. Although there were several restrictions in place, the teachers were determined to make the most out of this time for the students.

After much planning, the holiday programme was packed with meaningful activities and enriching programmes.



The students unleashing their creativity by painting their own drawstring bag!

Brothers posing with their new bags.

Wear your mask at all times and stay safe!

Our teachers educated the students on COVID-19 and on practising social responsibility. The students sprung into action after the programme by decorating their own masks with what they have learnt.



Various designs of masks.

"Stay Home, Stay Safe, Save Lives."



Can you guess what the students are making with play-dough?

Making the Internet-Viral Dalgona Cocoa Drink

Donning on their gloves, the students were thrilled to make the Internet-viral Dalgona chocolate drink. Despite their excitement, they followed the teachers' instructions carefully. Everyone wanted their drink to turn out well.

From adding, stirring to topping, the students made sure that every step was carried out correctly. Finally, they decorated their drink with colourful sprinkles and marshmallows, in the way they wanted it to look.

The students could not wait to taste it! Desserts always taste better when you make it yourself.

This activity is so simple you can make it at home together with your child! The perfect activity for a delicious treat which also beats the heat.



DALGONA CHOCOLATE

Recipe

INGREDIENTS:

- 1) 1 tablespoon of cocoa powder
- 2) 1 tablespoon of white sugar
- 3) 2 tablespoons of whipped cream
- 4) 1 cup of milk
- 5) Ice

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Mix the cocoa powder, white sugar and whipped cream together until it becomes thick and creamy.
- 2) Add ice into the cup of milk, then pour your whipped chocolate on it.
- 3) Decorate with your favourite toppings.

Have fun and enjoy!



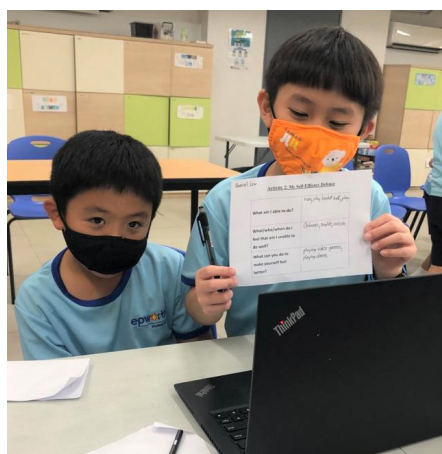


Mental Health Workshop with NUS Student Group

A student group from NUS volunteered to conduct a mental health workshop for the students at Epworth Student Care Centre (ACSSJ). The volunteers used various materials and activities to engage the students in a fun and meaningful manner. Although the workshop was conducted online, the students enjoyed themselves thoroughly!



Engrossed in the activity.



Presenting their answers to the volunteers.

Ways to cope with STRESS

Stick To A Daily Routine

Create a daily schedule that segregates your activities.

Cultivate Good Sleep Habits

Get at least 8 hours of rest every night and avoid digital devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.

Journal

Pen down your feelings, thoughts and reflections. Remind yourself of the things that you are thankful for each day..

Love Yourself

Practice mindfulness and take time off to do what you enjoy.

Stress, Stress, Go Away!

Everyone experiences stress from time to time. The teachers taught the students different ways of coping with stress, one of which was using a stress ball. Excitedly, the students started making and decorating their own!



Meet our former *Literacy* student,

CARYS

She could not even read during her lower primary school days.

Today, she is in the top three for her English class!



Teacher Jovian Wong (left).

I still remember those days when Carys could not even read. However, under the patient guidance of Teacher Jovian, I could see the tremendous improvement in her language skills. Today, she is in the top three for her English class!

Recently, I was informed by her school Teacher that they were considering to appoint Carys as a School Prefect. All these would not have been possible without the help of Teacher Jovian and the Literacy Team. Thank you!

Our committed Teachers at Epworth Literacy help children with learning challenges cope and remain in mainstream schools. They work closely with parents to inform, equip and empower them to take ownership of their children's educational development. Carys came to Epworth Literacy with literacy challenges when she was in Primary Three. Under the guidance of one of our Teachers, Jovian Wong, she has graduated and is now doing well in school. Her father even wrote in to us to provide an update on how Carys is doing now!





Community Services

How can I make a **DIFFERENCE?**



SUPPORT US

The important work of Epworth Community Services is funded primarily by generous well-wishers who strongly believe in our cause. We invite you to join us in making a difference in the lives of children and youths under Epworth Community Services.



VOLUNTEER WITH US

Volunteers play an important role in our programmes and services. Volunteers can choose to be engaged in ad-hoc, short- or long-term programmes and are matched to programmes according to their time and interests.

For donation or volunteering enquiries, visit www.epworth.sg or contact us at community.relations@epworth.sg or call **6562 2211**.

In order for us to keep you up to date with Epworth's happenings, contact us at admin@epworth.sg or call **6562 2211** to update your personal particulars.

STRONG FAMILIES, RESILIENT LIVING, BEAUTIFUL MINDS.