

Learning together in 2007

After the festive season, we begin another year with new hopes and expectations. Our intervention team has been busy preparing for the new term, studying the curriculum, writing lesson plans, and developing strategies and learning activities to work effectively with your child.



But working with your child is not the only thing on our minds...

working with you and your family is just as important!

Research suggests that families who understand their child and learn to adapt to enjoy and appreciate their child with autism have the best outcomes.

Supporting and guiding families can take many forms. In WeCAN EIP we collaborate with parents during IEP meetings, classroom participation, regular communication practices and in structured training workshops.

However, working together is more than just providing services...it is the **creation of a partnership**. Gone are the days of the traditional *professional-directed, child focused* orientation to intervention practices. These often directed families but did not involve them as fellow learners.



Creating a partnership between families and the early intervention team is based on good communication and mutual learning. In such a partnership we both have different roles, Coach and Learner.



Our teachers and therapists have specific knowledge of child development and autism, and as such aim to take on a coaching role.

As **coaches**, they aim to develop skills to support you in:

- Understanding your child's own learning profile and preferences
- Selecting strategies that promote growth in the key thinking, social and communication learning areas
- Implementing strategies to assist your child to be more calm, 'available to learn', and successful



The **learners** in this partnership are most often the mothers, fathers, grandparents, and maid carers. Learners are people who work closely with the coaches to:

- Understand your child's learning style and the affects of autism in daily interactions
- Acquire new knowledge and skills that will help your child participate more successfully in real-life situations at home, in school and in the community

So here we are. As coaches and learners we are participating in a relationship where **we each can learn from each other**. Sounds like the ideal ...but in practice it takes a lot of effort to achieve.

I would like to share my 3 golden guidelines to growing and learning together...

1. Take responsibility for your own learning

People will help you, but you need to help yourself too!

2. Ask questions when you do not understand

Often our fears and anxieties can be helped through knowledge, understanding, and sharing with people who CARE.

3. Give feedback

Feedback is a combination of listening, problem-solving, and responding. We all need feedback to grow and change. And this can best be achieved through having regular conversations and communication with key members of your team.



On my part, I am working together with our coaching team to monitor what is being taught and how. We are determined to develop a world class early intervention programme in Singapore.

Most importantly, we have three main programme goals for our early intervention team and family carers:

1. To be more knowledgeable in autism
2. To have basic satisfaction with components of our WeCAN EIP program
3. To focus on the intensive teaching of skills that will help our young children with autism to be more successful and self determined as they grow older

Throughout 2007, we will be actively reviewing these goals through a planned accreditation process with the National Autism Society (UK) throughout 2007.

As a final reflection, I would like to share this piece of information with you ...which never ceases to remind me of the absolute importance of working together:

Why Coach Family members and Caregivers?

- Calculate the number of hours a pre-school child is typically awake per day and multiply by 7 days. This figure (12 hours per day x 7 days = 84 hours) represents the available time for parents and other caregivers to take advantage of opportunities for helping a child practice and generalise emerging skills within a meaningful context
- Now compare this figure (84 hours) with the number of hours per week (1-6 hours) available to your early intervention team to take advantage of the same opportunities through 1:1 or small group learning sessions with your child.
- The conclusion? When early childhood practitioners coach family members and other caregivers, they dramatically increase the number of learning opportunities for young children to practice and generalize their skills within meaningful contexts

Hanft. B et al 'Coaching Families and Colleagues in Early Childhood' 2004

On behalf of our intervention team I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a happy, safe and joyous New year in 2007.

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