

**OPENING REMARKS BY SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE
PROFESSOR MUHAMMAD FAISHAL IBRAHIM AT THE CENTRE FOR
FATHERING'S PARENTING SEMINAR ON SATURDAY 16
SEPTEMBER 2017, AT THE CROWNE PLAZA CHANGI AIRPORT**

Introduction

Good morning everyone. It is my privilege to be here with you this morning at the Centre for Fathering's second Parenting Seminar organised in collaboration with the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) and Berita Harian (BH). I would like to start off by giving an overview of today's seminar in Malay.

2 Saya amat gembira untuk menghadiri Seminar Keibubapaan Melayu Islam bersama anda pagi ini. Kami amat mengalu-alukan anjuran Centre for Fathering dan Angkatan Karyawan Islam (AMP) dan disokong oleh Berita Harian buat kali kedua. Matlamat seminar ini adalah untuk menggalakan dan meningkatkan kesedaran antara golongan bapa di kalangan masyarakat Melayu/Islam untuk menjadi bapa-bapa yang lebih proaktif semasa mereka membesarkan anak-anak. Seorang bapa memainkan peranan yang amat penting dalam pembangunan anak-anak mereka. Melalui kerjasama strategik dengan rakan-rakan masyarakat seperti CFF, AMP dan Berita Harian, kita boleh melengkapkan para ibu-bapa dengan kemahiran untuk membesarkan anak-anak yang berdaya

tahan, yakin dan membina keluarga yang lebih kukuh. Saya harap agar semua bapa-bapa yang hadir pada seminar hari ini dapat meraih pengajaran dan tip-tip berguna.

3 Today, I am encouraged to see over 250 parents at this seminar. This shows that there is a growing interest and commitment among parents, and fathers in our community particularly, to be more involved and to play a more active role in their children's lives.

Strong marriages are the foundation of a strong family and builds resilient children

4 The foundation of a strong family and consequently, resilient children, is a strong marriage. One of the best things that couples can do for each other, as well as for their children, is to build and nurture a strong marriage. A healthy marriage will have positive impact on our children and society as a whole. Research¹ has shown that on average, children who come from dual-parent families experience better educational, cognitive, social, and behavioural outcomes than other children.

5 Children learn best through observation. When children observe their parents getting along and supporting each other, they are also more likely to get along with others. Similarly, when they see both father and

¹“The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation” (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16158731>)

mother working through your differences in a constructive manner, putting in the effort to resolve your issues in a respectful manner, they are also more likely to be able to resolve their relationship challenges in the same way. Thus, it is vital to maintain and nurture a healthy relationship with your spouse as a happy marriage really makes for happier, more resilient children.

6 However, I can understand that marriages do break down despite our best efforts. In divorce, parental conflict has a direct negative impact on the children's well-being. Some important factors to reduce the adverse impact of divorce on children include, involving both parents in the lives of children, good parental adjustment to divorce and quality parenting . Seek professional help early if needed, especially for those with young children. There are many community resources such as family service centres for you to tap on to ensure that the impact on the children is minimised,.

Parent Education

7 I think we can all agree that parenting is a learning journey and parents need to equip themselves with the relevant skills to nurture their children at their different stages in life. The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) recognises this and have been actively supporting parenting efforts by introducing two evidence-based parenting programmes, i) the Positive Parenting Programme otherwise known as

Triple P, and ii) Signposts for Building Better Behaviour. These programmes have proved to be effective in reducing children's challenging behaviours and reducing parenting stress, as they equip parents with practical and easy tools to promote their children's psychological, social and emotional competence.

8 As at end-2016, some 14,000 parents have participated in these programmes since its inception in 2014 and we now offer it in 149 schools. In addition, these programmes were offered to three Self-Help Groups since last year and a total of about 140 Mendaki beneficiaries have participated in the programmes. I hope that more of you will sign up for these parenting programmes to learn what it takes to build a close, warm and strong relationship with your children that will help them become secure and confident.

Parenting is teamwork – Partnership Parenting

9 MSF recently found that the proportion of dual income families rose by almost 20% between 2005 and 2015². In spite of having more mothers in the workforce, however, traditional gender roles prevail among married working couples. Married working women still contribute more to care-

² Family and Work Report 2017 (<https://www.msf.gov.sg/research-and-data/Research-and-Data-Series/Documents/Family%20and%20Work%20Report.pdf>)

giving and household chores, while married working men continue to contribute more to the household finances.

10 This means that while almost 1 in 5 mothers are now spending more time outside the home helping to contribute to the family finances, they still bear most of the nurturing role at home, making sure the beds are made and the children are fed. This also means that more mothers now bear the additional stress of holding a full-time job while still having to manage the running of the household, and also a full-time job.

11 In the latest Marriage and Parenthood Survey 2016 conducted by the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD), 95% of married respondents agreed that both parents should share the responsibilities of the home equally.³ Parenting is a collaborative effort and requires teamwork from both mom and dad. In the same survey conducted by NPTD, 99% of married respondents agreed that fathers and mothers are equally important as caregivers for their children.⁴

12 One of the ways in which we can parent effectively is by adopting a partnership parenting approach. Partnership parenting occurs when parents respect each other's different styles of parenting and come

³ Marriage and Parenthood Survey 2016 (<https://www.nptd.gov.sg/portals/0/homepage/highlights/20170707-media-release-on-marriage-and-parenthood-survey-2016.pdf>)

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together to offer their child an experience where both their individual and parental partnership roles combine, support and enhance each other for their child's benefit. I am glad to see that Singaporeans are slowly beginning to change their mind sets towards their parenting roles in the home. In this regard, the Centre for Fathering and the Dads for Life movement have done a good job encouraging fathers to be present, to be more active, and more hands-on in their fatherhood role.

Importance of Father-Child bonds

13 Active father involvement at home and in school, for example through joining Fathers Groups or the parent support groups in schools also have positive effects on our children and ourselves. When fathers are more active in day-to-day parenting and household chores, they enjoy greater family life satisfaction and better child outcomes. Both boys and girls need a positive male role model in their lives and fathers should step up to be that role model that they can emulate. Studies⁵ have also shown that children with an involved and loving father who is there for them physically and emotionally have better social skills, do better academically, have better self-esteem and have fewer behavioral issues.

⁵ "The Effects of Father Involvement: An Updated Research Summary of the Evidence"
(Fira.ca/cms/documents/29/Effects_of_Father_Involvement.pdf)

14 Children learn by modelling behaviour. For girls, if their fathers are kind, loving and gentle, they will look for those characteristics in their future spouse. Boys, on the other hand, model themselves after their dads. They would look for their father's approval in the things they do, and mimic the behaviours which they recognise to be "successful" or "familiar"⁶. It is through the way dads model values and beliefs that our children learn best to be morally upright and resilient members of our society. And we can only achieve this through spending time with our children. Whether it is simple things like having breakfast together, or sharing how our day went before bed, I cannot emphasise more, the importance of being available for our children.

Conclusion

15 I am heartened to note that apart from organising this seminar, AMP and CFF have also collaborated with Berita Harian to publish a book entitled '10 Inspirational Fathers', which they will be launching today. I understand that our very own Mufti is also featured in this book. I hope this book, together with today's seminar, will help us all gain valuable

⁶ www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-gail-gross/the-important-role-of-dad_b_5489093

knowledge on how we can be better husbands and fathers to our spouses
and children.

16 Thank you.