

RELATIONSHIP MATTERS

BUILDING A CONNECTION AND UNDERSTANDING EACH CHILD'S UNIQUE NEEDS NURTURES POSITIVE BEHAVIOURS, SAYS EARLY INTERVENTIONIST REUBEN CHENG.



Mr Cheng uses snack time to practise communication skills, as he guides a child in articulating "I want biscuits"

When it comes to nurturing positive behaviours in young children, establishing a relationship where children feel secure is one of the first things Mr Reuben Cheng does.

"I build a strong rapport and trust with children by engaging in their play or activities so that they get comfortable around me. I also give praise to reinforce positive behaviours," says the EIPIC (Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children) teacher at Fei Yue Wellington Circle. Mr Cheng won the Outstanding Early Intervention Professional Award at the 2022 ECDA Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Development.

Mdm Liew Kok Ing recounts how Mr Cheng spent months patiently building a relationship with her daughter Eva Tham, 5, who has developmental needs. "For the first four months, Eva refused to speak and mostly gestured for her needs. Teacher Reuben didn't rush her and over

time she preferred to do the activities together with him and even started verbalising more."

TAILORING TO NEEDS

Mr Cheng and his team — comprising an occupational therapist, a speech therapist, a psychologist and a social worker — work closely with parents to formulate the learning and developmental goals for the child.

Each child has an individual education plan (IEP) that is customised to his or her personality, likes and dislikes, routines and preferred way of learning. The IEP also accounts for the child's current abilities, needs and challenges, as well as the functional skills to be acquired. Mr Cheng monitors the child's progress, adjusts the activities accordingly and apprises parents of the child's development regularly.

PARTNERING PARENTS

Parents also receive videos of their child's activities in class. During home visits, Mr Cheng shows them how to apply the strategies, using items found at home. Mdm Liew shares, "Teacher Reuben took videos of how he used Playdoh to strengthen Eva's fine motor skills and encouraged me to do likewise at home. Her pencil grasp is improving, and now I can help her in writing the letters of the alphabet."



Discussing lesson plans, tasks and challenges with a co-teacher



IEP IN PRACTICE

Tips for developing an individual education plan.

- **Identify the skill and set specific goals.** For instance, the goal may be to encourage the child to initiate communication with peers. For a start, it could be a two- or three-word utterance such as "want to play".
- **Create opportunities to practise the skill.** Pair the child with peers. Facilitate conversations to familiarise the child with them. Join in and use descriptive words such as "Do you want to play with the blue car?".
- **Offer positive reinforcement and support.** Praise the child for the things he/she did well. Help him/her practise acquired skills and develop a plan to acquire new ones.

"Witnessing children's progress and seeing them graduate to the next level, as well as the look of joy on their parents' faces, is heart-warming. It makes me cherish the work I do at Fei Yue," says Mr Cheng. ●

Get more insights from Mr Cheng at go.gov.sg/2022ecdaawards-outstandingeipprofessional-reuben or scan here.

