

On Family Therapy – Introduction of Hei Hei’s Story

The Family Education Programme – “The Family Therapy Package” – which jointly produced by the Family Council and Family Institute of the University of Hong Kong adopts the family therapy approach to deal with family problems. The content of the package is based on segments from real life family therapy sessions which tell the story of a family with two children, beginning when the older boy was 8 years old to when he turned 14. It portrays a family’s journey through the many issues involved in family life, including raising children, working out couple differences, and finding solutions together to meet these challenges. The documentary contains many scenarios of couple interactions and dynamics that are humorous and enlightening to the general public.

Happiness is parents’ greatest gift to a child. The road to a happy family starts with cultivating personal and family relationship. Nurturing a strong family relationship takes optimism and persistence. People usually think that children are simple-minded. In fact, children pay a lot of attention to their parents’ moves and moods. They, especially young children, are not only like a mirror that reflects the atmosphere in the family, but also a sponge that absorbs the emotions the family projects.

If you look at a child’s behaviours in the context of his or her family, you would realise that undesirable behaviour of a child is always reflection of the family’s difficulties, especially conflicts between the parents. Even if the parents’ discontent is shown in silence, children are as sensitive to it as they are to open conflict. The purpose of family assessment is to figure out to what extent a child’s behaviour is affected by the parents’ relationship.

The story of Hei-Hei is a very good example. It tells us that a healthy parent-child relationship is not just the bond between parent and child but also between the parents. More importantly, it is about having a harmonious spousal relationship. It is important to realize that because of such bond, particularly the one between the mother and child, if the mother is not happy with her marriage, her anxiety will be easily absorbed by the child, who will also become anxious. To ensure the healthy development of a child, parents have to work out their differences. If the parents are not aligned, the child will go out of line, which makes disciplining very difficult. For a child to grow, the family must grow together.

If Hei-Hei's story gives you some insights into your family life, do invite your partner to watch the clip together and discuss the following:

1. Does your child pay particular attention to your every move? If there are existing tension between you and your partner, is your child the first to notice?
2. Like Hei-Hei's parents, are there times when you pay too much attention to your child's behaviour that you neglect your partner?
3. Are you willing to take this opportunity to explore with your partner on issues you have yet to agree on, such as parenting, family disputes and couple's differences? No matter whether you can reach consensus on the issues, it is important for you to create a platform for frank and sincere exchange of views.
4. The aim of such exchanges is not about convincing each other, but to learn to listen to each other's opinions and to respect different views. It is because when a couple stays together in harmony, their child will be able to focus on their own growth and thus grow healthily with peace of mind.