

# “Not too much, Not too little”

## *Managing Expectations and Stress - Finding the balance*

Your child needs your emotional support more than anything else during this period. By maintaining a balanced approach, you'll help them develop resilience and healthy study habits that will serve them well beyond PSLE.



# Canteen Chats Ep 8 | Am I good enough?

## – The hidden cost of an education arms race

A video podcast featuring open conversations with parents, educators and experts about the challenges families face today.

“Are you good enough? Is your child good enough? These questions haunt parents and children alike in Singapore’s competitive landscape. In this final episode of Canteen Chats, we dive into the hidden emotional costs of an education arms race. Every parent wants the best for their child. But what happens when our pursuit for ‘the best’ blinds us to what’s actually good for our child?”

Join actress and mum of 3 Lina Ng as she guides this honest conversation with guests who have walked this journey themselves:

- Dr Cheung Hoi Shan, Assistant Professor at NTU specialising in parenting research
- Mr Narasimman, who mentors youth at Impart
- Mr Ian Tan, dad of 2 and journalist -turned-lecturer at NTU

<https://youtu.be/fh01heAPVlo?si=L8REa9gNdbiqrm7G>

“They share deeply **personal stories** of **disappointment, discovery, and hope**. And reveal why a narrow definition of success is failing our children. More importantly, they share the **practical strategies** that have helped them to break free from the comparison trap.

This isn't just about grades. It's about **relationships, resilience**, and raising children who know they are **unconditionally loved.**”

# Why parenting in Singapore can feel overwhelming

Segment: 3:05 – 5:22

Duration: 2m 17s

“Am I feeling satisfied  
in this relationship?”  
- Dr Cheung Hoi Shan

”So, there’s this, comparison going on all the time, whether we like it or not, whether we are conscious about it or not, we’re always comparing something to something, ourselves to other people, our children to other people’s children. And, unfortunately, it’s human nature, I guess? And this creates, maybe jealousy, maybe hope, maybe inspiration, right, depending on the person. And that leads to the actions that we parents take.” – Mr Ian Tan

“And when they feel like that, sometimes, there is no parent that is imposing that. I’ve even heard parents who say it’s okay to fail. But when, when it’s told to the child, the child said, ‘Why do you say that? I want to pass. Give me the tuition. Give me this, give me that, so that I can do better than my friends.’ So when that becomes internalised, then what happens is that even the parents struggle with how to recalibrate the child’s expectation back to, maybe a bit more normal.” - Mr Narasimman

# The "Sweet Spot" of Stress

## - Finding the Right Balance

Think of stress like the strings of a guitar. Too loose, and you get no music. Too tight, and the strings snap. But just right, and you create beautiful music. This is known as "eustress" - the optimal level of stress that helps you perform at your best.



### Signs of Too Much Stress

- Constant worry and racing thoughts
- Physical symptoms like headaches or nausea
- Unable to relax or take breaks without guilt
- Perfectionist thinking that nothing is good enough
- Difficulty sleeping or eating



### Signs of Too Little Stress

- Feeling unmotivated or bored
- Procrastinating because there's "no pressure"
- Not taking preparation seriously
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Being too relaxed about deadlines

# Signs You're in the Sweet Spot

- You feel **challenged** but not overwhelmed
- You're **focused** and **alert**, but not anxious
- You can still **sleep well** and **eat normally**
- You're **motivated** to study but can still take breaks
- You **care about results** but don't feel **paralyzed** by them



# Practical Ways to Maintain Optimal Stress



- Set challenging but achievable daily goals
- Create a structured study plan with built-in flexibility
- Use practice tests to build confidence gradually
- Balance study with enjoyable activities
- Stay connected with friends while maintaining focus on goals




**Remember:**  
The goal isn't to eliminate stress completely, but to harness it as a tool for better performance.



# Supporting over - motivated child

While being motivated is good, an overly motivated child may experience anxiety and burnout.



## Possible Warning Signs

- Skipping meals or sleep to study
- Becoming overly anxious about small mistakes
- Isolating herself from family and friends
- Physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches from stress

## Practical Steps

- Set firm boundaries on study hours, including mandatory breaks
- Insist on regular mealtimes and a proper bedtime
- Schedule non-negotiable family time and recreational activities
- Help her understand that mistakes and imperfect scores are normal and valuable learning opportunities

## Conversation Strategies

- Instead of asking "What score did you get?", try "What did you learn today?"
- Share stories of successful people who faced setbacks
- Discuss different paths to success and various career options
- Emphasise that her worth isn't tied to her academic performance

# Child with Perfectionistic Tendencies

Perfectionism during PSLE preparation can be particularly challenging. Here's how to help a child with perfectionistic tendencies.



## Addressing Thought Patterns

- Help her understand that mistakes are normal and necessary for learning
- Challenge black-and-white thinking (e.g. "If I don't get AL1, I'm a failure")
- Share with her that successful people also make mistakes and learn from them
- Encourage her to view challenges as opportunities rather than threats



## Practical Management

- Set realistic time limits for homework and revision
- Practice "good enough" scenarios - when is something complete enough?
- Help her learn to prioritise tasks rather than trying to perfect everything
- Teach her to recognise when perfectionism is getting in the way
- Encourage breaks even when work isn't "perfect"



## Building Resilience

- Share your own experiences of overcoming mistakes
- Praise her effort and strategy rather than just results
- Help her develop self-compassion when things don't go as planned
- Focus on progress rather than perfection
- Celebrate small improvements and learning from errors

# Commentary: High -scoring PSLE students may struggle with imposter syndrome later in life

CNA Commentary | 02 DEC, 2024

“Pegging young learners for greatness can inflict them with a lingering sense of inadequacy that follows into adulthood”, says parent and former journalist Debbie Yong.

SINGAPORE: “Following the release of Singapore’s Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results, parents of students who achieved stellar scores are no doubt filled with pride and excitement.

However, the unspoken expectations that follow a child’s academic success are often overlooked. For high -performing children, being placed on a pedestal at a young age can take a psychological toll.

I was one of those children. Through my own journey - and conversations with high -achieving peers - I’ve realised that we, as parents and society, need to be mindful that pegging young learners for greatness can inflict them with a lingering sense of inadequacy that follows into adulthood.”

# Commentary: High -scoring PSLE students may struggle with imposter syndrome later in life

CNA Commentary | 02 DEC, 2024

**INTENSE  
PRESSURE TO  
PERFORM**

“High expectations, whether from demanding “tiger parents” or well-meaning teachers, create intense pressure to perform. When applied at such a formative age, this pressure can evolve into imposter syndrome and perfectionism, with individuals setting unattainable standards for themselves.

First observed by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in the 1970s, imposter syndrome is a phenomenon where high achievers don't internalise their own success.”

# Commentary: High -scoring PSLE students may struggle with imposter syndrome later in life

CNA Commentary | 02 DEC, 2024

“Despite attending the best schools, excelling in standardised testing and earning exceptional grades, those with imposter syndrome don’t feel like they deserve their achievements. As a result, they work harder than needed to overcome their self-perceived inadequacies, and are likely to experience depression and psychological distress.”


“High achievers often don’t speak out about this for fear of showing vulnerability in the hyper-competitive environments we grew up in. As a result, society doesn’t see the silent struggle of constantly trying to prove yourself at the top, nor the anxiety about failing to meet expectations.”



“Ultimately, we must emphasise to our children that the PSLE is not a predictor of success in life. Their potential is not defined by a test score, but by their curiosity, resilience, and ability to navigate setbacks - qualities that exams don't measure.


How you respond to your child's scores matters. If your child didn't do well, he or she should be supported. But if your child did well, be just as mindful of how you praise and reinforce that success. The expectations placed on high achievers can become a burden that follows them far beyond their school years.”





# Supporting unmotivated or under-motivated child

An unmotivated or under-motivated child may have complex feelings that she might not openly express.



## Understanding the Underlying Cause(s)

- Could be feeling overwhelmed by the workload
- Might have difficulty understanding certain subjects
- Might be struggling with low confidence from past experiences
- Might be distracted by other interests or facing peer pressure
- Could be experiencing anxiety that manifests as apparent disinterest

## Practical Approaches

- Break down subjects into smaller, manageable chunks
- Create short-term goals that feel achievable
- Use her interests to make learning more engaging (e.g., if she likes games, incorporate educational games)
- Establish a consistent but reasonable study routine
- Celebrate small improvements to build confidence

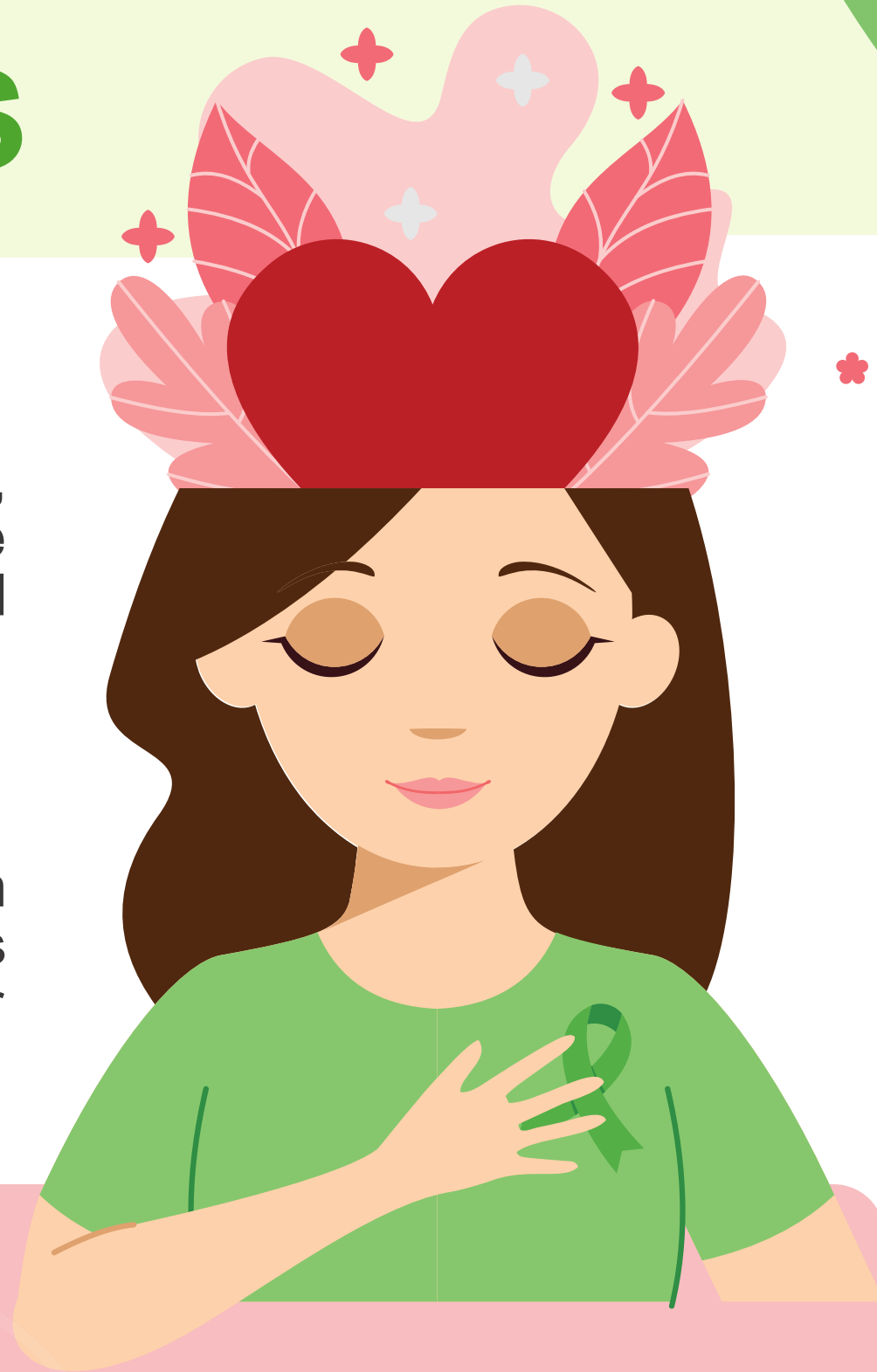
## Motivation Techniques

- Find out what naturally interests her and connect it to her studies
- Help her visualise her future goals and how PSLE fits into that picture
- Use positive reinforcement rather than punishment
- Acknowledge when she takes initiative
- Praise effort and strategy rather than just results


# Balanced Perspectives

## \* Academic Performance

- Remember that PSLE scores, while important, are just one measure of your child's abilities and potential. Many successful individuals have taken different educational paths.
- Focus on progress rather than perfect scores. If your child is showing improvement in her subjects, that's worth celebrating.



## \* Supporting Your Child

- Create a **supportive environment** where your child feels comfortable discussing her concerns and anxieties about the exams. 
- Help her **develop good study habits and time management skills.**
- Ensure she maintains a **healthy balance between studies and rest**, including proper sleep and exercise.

# Dealing with disappointments

## Hidden costs: What we're sacrificing for success

Segment:: 12:06 – 18:02

Duration: 5m 56s

“...we spend a lot of time on our devices, on small screens, and the smaller the screens, right, unfortunately, the smaller your worldview.” – Mr Ian Tan

“Sometimes we see some interest, or some talent, like art, or music, or whatever, then we want to bite on that, right? Because, hey, that’s good for DSA, Direct School Admission. They’re interested, I can afford the lessons, why not? But the interested thing is that, that happened with my own child, right? She self-taught ukelele, she went on YouTube, and then started, to strum and all those things. I was like, ‘Wow, excellent. Would you like to go for classes?’ And she said, ‘No, don’t touch this. Don’t touch this. No art class, no ukelele class, because once you do that, you take away all my interests.’ Yeah. So and I thought that was quite insightful, right? Because, yeah, then I was thinking, what would the lesson entail, right? It entails performance.” - Dr Cheung Hoi Shan

# How to normalise failure

## Do we love our kids unconditionally

Segment: 20:23 – 25:02

Duration: 4m 39s

“When you speak about your own failures, your kids understand what you’re thinking about, and that’s okay. But when you don’t talk about your failures, then when suddenly the child fails, how would they feel about it? Because you have never really demonstrated how it looks like when you fail. Right? So, then the child will become very reserved and feel like they are a burden, or they let down the parent. That’s one. Number two is, I think, having a collaborative approach with the young person. Like, I think the young person also has goals. And I think it’s about trying to put that up, and say, ‘Hey, you know, what do you want?’”

- Mr Narasimman


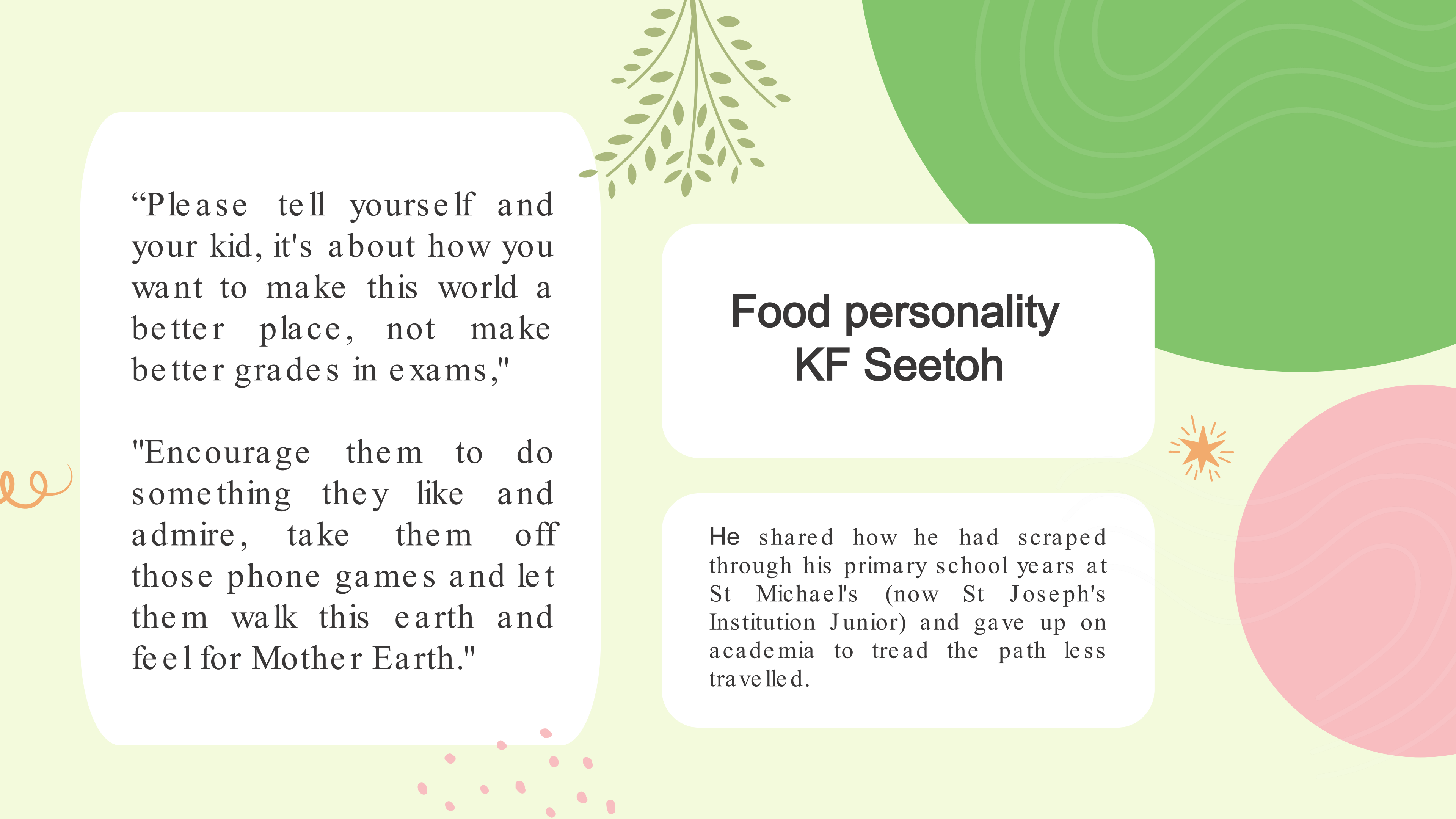
# Well -known Singaporeans to join in to encourage those who did not do well in their PSLE

THE STRAITS TIMES | NOV 30, 2015


Award-winning film director  
Royston Tan

PSLE score: 168


"One exam does not determine who you are as a person. Learning is a lifelong journey,"




“Please tell yourself and your kid, it's about how you want to make this world a better place, not make better grades in exams,”



"Encourage them to do something they like and admire, take them off those phone games and let them walk this earth and feel for Mother Earth."



## Food personality KF Seetoh



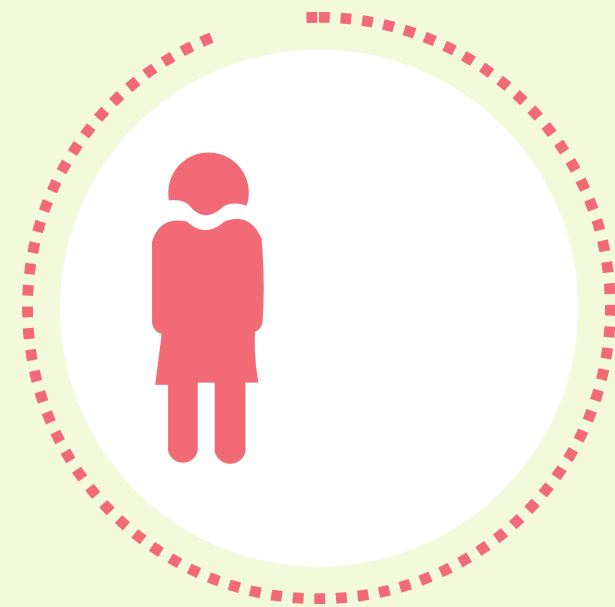
He shared how he had scraped through his primary school years at St Michael's (now St Joseph's Institution Junior) and gave up on academia to tread the path less travelled.

## Former entrepreneur Pamela Lim

Abandoned her high-flying career as a CEO to concentrate on taking care of her five children in 2004, shared a letter she wrote seven years ago - about her daughter receiving her PSLE results.

"Some people believe that to get good results and motivated children, we have to 'drive' them beyond their limits."



"On the contrary, I want my children to find their passion and limits by themselves, guided by my husband and I as their parents, not dictated by our preferences."





## Actors Ben Yeo and Irene Ang

"The learning journey is a lifelong process  
and some of us might develop and reach our  
full potential later in life," – Ms Ang





Mr Derrick Lee, 22, revealed how he had scored 174 for his PSLE a decade ago and chose to enrol in the Institute of Technical Education instead of progressing to Secondary 5.



Lawyer Josephus Tan, 36, had a similar message - that their score should not define them. He had scored 183 for his PSLE in 1991 but went on to bigger things despite enduring a chequered past.

# Self-Care for Parents

Journeying with a child during the PSLE period can be emotionally trying and mentally draining for some parents.

Here's a self-care guide:

## Emotional Well-Being

- Acknowledge your own anxieties and stress about the PSLE
- Remember that your child's PSLE results don't define your parenting

## Physical Well-Being

- Maintain your own sleep schedule
- Don't skip meals while managing your child's revision
- Schedule regular exercise, even if it's just a short walk
- Practice stress-relief activities



## Practical Approaches

- Delegate household responsibilities when needed
- Plan regular 'me-time' activities
- Keep up with your own interests and hobbies
- Set aside time for activities unrelated to PSLE

## Support Systems


- Share concerns with trusted family members
- Stay connected with friends who can offer emotional support

# Dear Parents,



As your child approaches the PSLE, your hearts may be filled with a mix of hope, worry, and pride. This journey isn't just your child's - it's yours too, and you're doing a wonderful job supporting them through it.

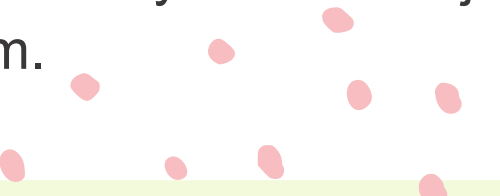
Remember that your child is **so much more** than their exam results. They're the one who makes you laugh with silly jokes, who shows kindness to others in small ways, who has dreams and talents that no exam can measure. These qualities will carry them far in life, regardless of their PSLE scores.



Right now, your **presence and unconditional love matter more** than any assessment book or tuition class. A warm hug, a listening ear, or simply being there while they study can make all the difference. When the pressure feels overwhelming, take a step back together. Go for a walk, share an ice cream, or just talk about nothing in particular.

Your child may not say it, but they **deeply value your support and understanding** during this time. They don't need you to be perfect - they just need you to be present. Trust in the foundation you've built over the years. You've already taught them the **most important lessons about character, effort and resilience**.

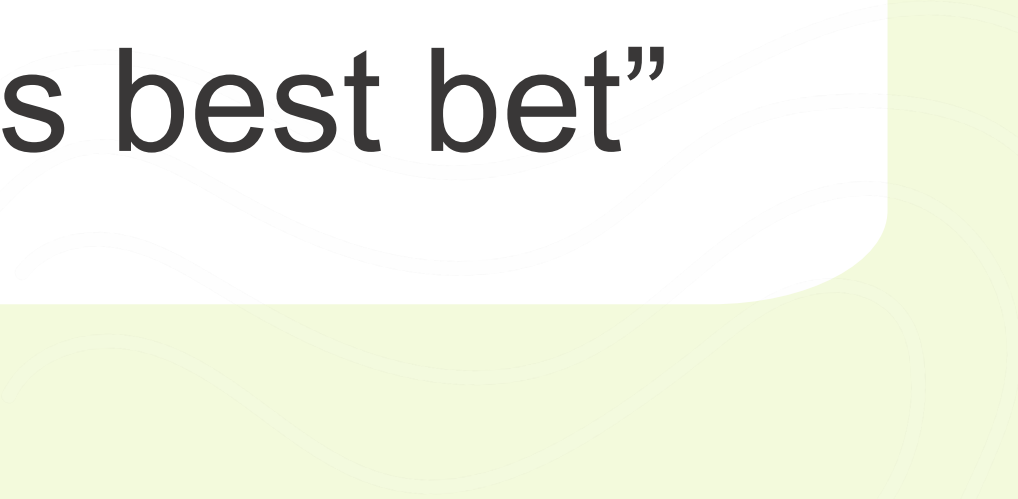
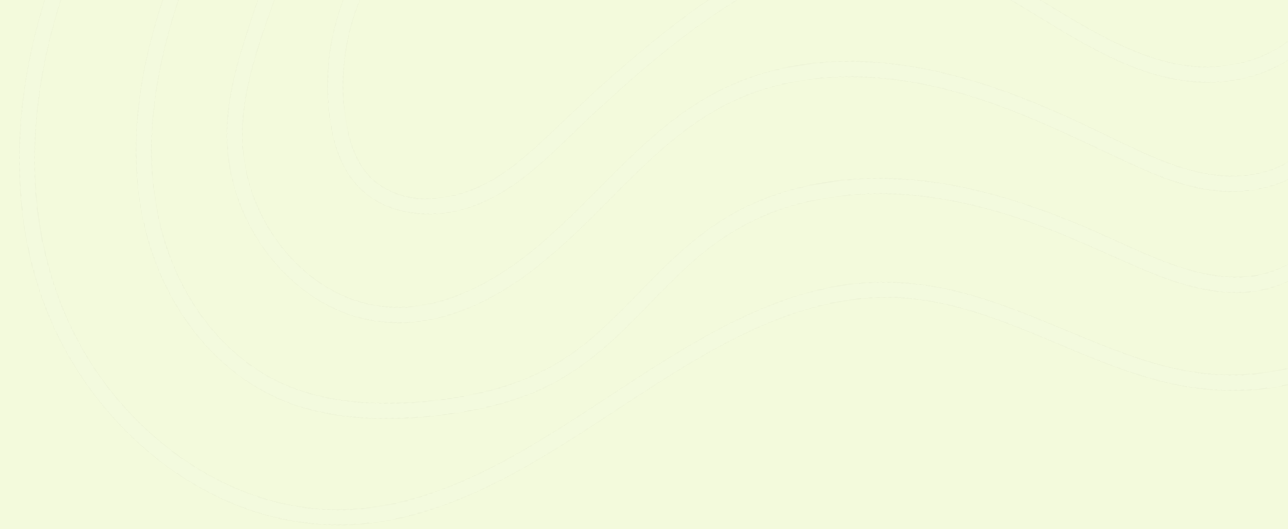
Whatever the outcome, know that this is just one milestone in your child's journey. The love, values, and life skills you've instilled in them will serve them far beyond any exam.





**Final wisdom:**  
“You are your child’s best bet”

**Segment:**  
35:24





# THANK YOU

*Remember, taking care of  
yourself isn't selfish - it enables  
you to better support your child  
through this period.*