

PARENTS' GUIDE

WORKING TOGETHER

It takes a community to raise a child



**Tiger mums put
in their place**

**Families that play
together.....**

**Some useful words
from the wise**

PARENTS' GUIDE

FEBRUARY 2014

EDITOR'S NOTE

The ties that bind

Parenting is a huge challenge, increasingly so in our globalised world. Rising expectations for children's education in a competitive environment complicate the scene even further.

While enlivening our lives, the rise of social media threatens to aggravate problems as teenagers fall prey to traps or undue influences.

This issue of *Parents Guide* reports on various channels that help ease the burden of parenthood. Home-school co-operation, in particular, is important. Being involved in their children's school life, staying in close touch with teachers, helps



parents discover any issues or adjustment problems their children may have. We also talk to parents who have new-found joy in raising children with special educational needs.

As noted by experts featured in this guide, nothing matters more than spending quality time with your children. Leave tutoring aside, enjoy a walk or picnic in the bracing outdoors. Weekend activities organised by environmental groups are another way of fostering ties. Families sometimes can forget to nurture the very ties that they hold dear.

Linda Yeung

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United approach

Parents are encouraged to be part of their child's development, **Kenneth Ko** reports



Logos principal Paul Cho fosters a co-operative approach to learning through the parent-teacher association. Photo: SCMP Pictures

As Hillary Clinton pointed out in a book she wrote in 1996 when she was US first lady, it takes a village to raise a child. It is a truism that most parents can relate to, probably even more so today.

We all love our kids, but it takes more than love to raise them in an appropriate and healthy way. In today's highly competitive environment, the pressure of parenthood is probably unprecedented as everyone tries to get that extra edge for their offspring. Luckily, the advent of technology offers a support system for people struggling to live up to their duties. Mobile phones and social media have become popular channels for parents to gain support and insights.

Angela Wong, whose 16-year-old daughter is at Mastery Stage 4 (equivalent to Form 6) at Logos Academy, Tseung Kwan O, communicates with fellow parents almost every day via Facebook and Whatsapp.

"These exchanges really help us and our children, allowing us to share views and

understand more about our children's learning environment," Wong says. "It was very different from 10 years ago when parents got together at McDonald's or some other place to talk."

Online forums like Baby Kingdom have emerged to be another popular channel of communication. According to operations director Rainer Sip, the platform now generates about five million page views a day. Parents are drawn to being able to share views anonymously with privacy protection.

"They may not know one another but

they share similar concerns, such as choosing playgroups and schools," Sip says. "Parents with kids from the same school also get together through the online forum for discussions."

Jao Ming, chairman of the Federation of Parent Teacher Associations of Eastern District, sees a strong urge among parents to release their pent-up pressure.

"Technology really helps," he says. "Parents find it easier and more comfortable getting in touch with one another through instant messaging."

Mobile phone instant messaging groups have been formed to address concerns ranging from coaching children for their homework and preparing for exams to strategies for getting into elite schools.

But Jao advises caution against relying too much on online sharing or posts.

"I have seen very subjective comments against schools or plain publicity materials for others," he warns. "Online platforms are

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If you separate them from their children's school life, they will become more worried

DR PAUL CHO HEE-CHUEN



Many parents are prepared to queue for hours to get their youngsters a spot at a coveted kindergarten. Photo: Sam Tsang

The chill factor

You don't have to be a tiger mum to ensure your child thrives, **Linda Yeung** reports

"Don't lose at the starting line." The phrase sums up the desire of many parents to send their children to top kindergartens and primary schools to ensure a successful future for them.

These so-called tiger parents – the label coined by Yale law professor Amy Chua, whose book advocates putting study and practice above all else – get three-year-olds to multi-skill, be it drumming, painting or even Japanese. This helps brush up their portfolios to maximise their chances of being accepted by popular kindergartens.

Children as young as six months old are being sent to playgroups where they do little more than stamp chops on a piece of paper, again thanks to parents determined to prepare them for top schools.

Such a pragmatic approach is hardly

surprising in today's Hong Kong. Yet there are always exceptions – parents who worry about exerting too much pressure on their children.

"It is your choice where you want the starting line to be," says Sun Cheung-wai, a former maths teacher in Hong Kong.

He retired in 2002 and moved his wife and three children to Milton Keynes, just north of London.

Sun's main motivation was the declining self-confidence of his older son, Clement, then in his early teens and slowly succumbing to the pressure of school in a competitive environment.

"He was having a tough time even if I was there to help him with his study," Sun recalls.

The family's move turned out to be very productive.

More than a decade later, his son is

working in the telecommunications sector in the UK, having graduated from York University with an electronic engineering degree.

His daughter, Regine, an Oxford graduate, is now working in Hong Kong as a management trainee. Sun's younger son, Canon, is a second-year physics major at Oxford.

Sun has no regrets about taking them abroad at a young age. He doesn't think his younger son is more talented than others but he was able to thrive in the more relaxed and less demanding UK curriculum.

"He tried his very best but I am sure many Hong Kong students are capable of achieving the same A-level results as he did," Sun says.

Now back in Hong Kong and spending his free time as a maths tutor, Sun is

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Bright sparks

Help is at hand for parents to nurture their talented offspring, **Linda Yeung** reports



May Tong and her family enjoyed the challenges of a 30-hour train trip to Xian last year. Photo: SCMP Pictures

When he was six, Dash Tong could identify the models of cars that sped by. At home, he easily beat his parents in a dice game that challenged players to recall the types, colours and number plates of cars just shown to them.

But despite his cognitive skills, Dash lagged behind his class in phonics.

To find out more about his capability, his mother, May, organised an IQ test. The result - 133, above the threshold for a gifted child. But it also exerted pressure on the family. May and her husband scrambled to find ways to develop Dash's rich potential.

"You don't know how much potential a

gifted child can have. I felt it was my responsibility to nurture him well," May says. For the next few years, she searched for the right courses for her son, who after realising his giftedness became more driven to learn. He also found a passion for taekwondo and won multiple awards for his prowess.

Now in Form One at an elite boys' school, in a recent essay Dash expressed gratitude for his mother for offering him many learning opportunities and teaching him to persevere.

Indeed, the family has two gifted sons - younger son Jack also has a high IQ.

The family has to work at maintaining

harmony amid sometimes conflicting emotions. Jack, with traits of perfectionism, once banged his head against the wall for not doing as well as his brother. But May says he has become better able to control his emotions.

Raising gifted children can be full of challenges, with a host of issues arising during the growing-up process.

Some children might mask their ability for fear of not being accepted by their peers. Others may see their social development lagging behind their intellectual growth. They might be highly critical of themselves or have trouble accepting failure.

Parents themselves might fear that they



You're never too young to socialise and impress mum and dad, as these bonny babies find out at a crawling contest. Photo: David Wong

The perils of parenting

There's nothing like joining a group programme to share some core values to enlist when it comes to bringing up junior, says **Sandra Tsang**



People with young children are excited but also anxious about parenthood. Such mixed feelings can present challenges that threaten the immediate and even long-term welfare of the family. Some parents get tips by attending talks by parent educators. But in the end, they are left alone to sort it all out.

Not surprisingly, many might find they are back to square one – “parenting is easier said than done”, “I’ve tried everything, and my child is still a monster”.

To help young parents better manage their new roles, researchers have been developing culturally sensitive, evidence-based group programmes aimed at sharing some core strengths.

Goal-driven:

These are tailored for children of a specific age so that performance expectations and case illustrations are appropriately pitched. The parents’ expected gains, be it less stress,



Parents who are keen to optimise their parenting efforts should consider joining these groups

improving parent-child relationships or improving their management competence, are clearly stated and addressed. This helps in programme evaluation.

Knowledge-led:

Clearly understanding child development is essential to setting realistic performance expectations so parents and children can enjoy success. Good programmes help parents understand the developmental characteristics of themselves and their children so they can match their interactions. Parents who realise they and their children mutually influence each other will more easily recognise that they, rather than their children, might be the source of tensions. Parent-initiated self-reflection and an adjustment in their parenting styles can foster harmonious parent-child relationships.

Practice-based:

To ensure parents develop the required skills,