

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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DR PAUL CHO HEE-CHUEN

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good channels for communications but you are likely to get more genuine sharing when meeting face to face. You can see their facial expressions and how they react to what you say."

To accommodate working parents, his association arranges talks and other gatherings at weekends. It also organises groups, particularly for fathers, providing them with an outlet to release work and family pressure.

"As breadwinners, some do not want to reveal their weaknesses before their family members," says Jao, who has two daughters and a son. He adds that more NGOs are now offering male-only support groups.

Iyad Matuk, co-principal of the secondary section of Yew Chung International School, agrees life is now more pressurised, especially for young parents.

"For one thing, parents are always worried and concerned about their child's future, particularly because of an unstable economy and unstable politics around the world," Matuk says. "Therefore they find it important to equip their child with the proper education and skills to have a good future.

"It is very difficult for some parents to decide on the best school or the best country to send their child to. Also, at what age is a child ready to live abroad on their own? I have seen children damaged emotionally because they were not equipped to live away from their families at such a young age."



Some men do not want to reveal their weaknesses before their family

JAO MING

Other challenges arise as children grow older and come under the influence of the internet and social media. "Using drugs and bad peer pressure are other serious concerns," Matuk adds.

Yew Chung's Home-School Co-operation Committee is another source of support, running sharing sessions and workshops on topics including "understanding teenager's cyberworld", "helping children realise their full potential", "sending pre-teens to study abroad" and "connecting with our kids - keys to progressive parenting wisdom".

Matuk sees much value in the home-school partnership. "It enhances communication and gives us a better understanding of the child's and family's needs," he says. "The parent will feel closer to the school and be able to offer opinions and feedback. The child will benefit from this relationship that is forged between family and school, which in turn makes him or her happier and feel safer and more secure in a caring school environment."

Yew Chung parents are involved in a host of activities, from school open days to fundraising events. Matuk says there is more parental involvement at international schools.

But some local schools have made many strides. At Logos, for example, a priority of its Parent-Teacher Association is to instil positive values in parents and students.

Principal Dr Paul Cho Hee-chuen supports opening up the campus to parents. "If you separate them from their children's school life, parents will become more worried about what they are up to," he says.

The school's daily morning assemblies are open to parents to let them experience a regular part of their children's school life.

Every day about 40 parents provide voluntary services such as library work and preparing lunch. Special tea gatherings are held in the evening to encourage exchanges among parents and teachers. The school also runs tailor-made parental education courses in partnership with Baptist University.

For the religious-minded, the Logos Academy Parents Fellowship, established in 2003, provides a channel for parents to share their faith, seek mutual support and pray for one another.

Cat Lee, the PTA vice-chairman and whose son is at Development Stage 1 at Logos, says home-school partnership is essential. "Some new parents ask why there is limited homework and we explain this is because of the school's policy to encourage happy learning."



Jin Shang-fung takes a parent-child reading workshop run by the Bring Me a Book charity. Photo: David Wong