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Mum and Dad are 'best teachers'

Teaching values – it's about how we live on a day-to-day basis, says Tan Chuan-jin

Pearl Lee

A parent can be a child's most important teacher and the home, the best school, said Acting Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-jin.

"We can talk about values all we want but it is about how we live on a day-to-day basis," he said. "As parents we are the foremost educators and have a big part to play."

Mr Tan, who was speaking at the Singapore Indian Development Association (Sinda) Excellence Awards yesterday, added that children learn by watching how their parents behave and interact at home every day.

"Oftentimes we talk about the system at large (and) this is not to say the system doesn't have respon-

sibilities, but what is our role in the overall scheme of things?" he said. "As parents, we know the easiest way to keep a child quiet is to give him an iPad or an Xbox... But we will shape the way they grow up."

That, he added, is why parents must think more about their role in their children's learning journey.

Mr Tan, a father of two, also pointed to how the social landscape here has changed considerably with globalisation, the influx of foreigners, and rapid technological advancements.

Hence, the education system must also prepare students for these changes and provide support for them to fulfil their potential, regardless of their background, he said.

"Our education system has evolved to create multiple pathways for success, and we should recognise the diverse abilities and interests of every student."

Yesterday, some 400 students received the Sinda Excellence Awards from Mr Tan, as well as Sinda chair-



PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

Former St Stephen's School pupil Azeem Aziz Merchant (centre), who was the second-highest scorer at last year's PSLE, was one of the recipients of this year's Sinda Excellence Awards. With him are (from left) his 11-year-old sister Farah; mother Reshma A. Merchant, 42; father Aziz Amirali Merchant, 48; and eight-year-old brother Raees at their house.

man Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, and Sinda president Senior Minister of State for Education and Law, Ms Indranee Rajah.

Among this year's recipients were former St. Stephen's School pupil Azeem Aziz Merchant, who was the second-highest scorer at last year's PSLE, and Singapore sprint queen Shanti Pereira.

The award was an early birthday present for the national sprinter, who turns 17 this week. It is the fifth time she has received the

award, which recognises her achievements in track and field.

The first-year Republic Polytechnic student said she is glad that students who have done well in sports are being recognised for their achievements, in a country that has traditionally emphasised academic achievements.

But while receiving the award was a bonus, the national record holder for the 100m sprint and joint-record holder for the 200m one said: "Participating in sports is not about recognition... You partici-

pate in sports because you have an interest."

The parents of 13-year-old Azeem, who scored 284 for his PSLE, have always believed in striking a balance between work and play. "A few months before his PSLE exams, we told him to stop studying and just relax, because when you feel relaxed, you tend to do better," said his father Aziz Amirali Merchant, a naval architect.

Azeem, who is now in Raffles Institution, said he enjoys reading and watching television pro-

grammes, even during the exam season, as it helps him to relax.

"If I'm not feeling relaxed, I'm worried that I may have a mental blackout during exams," said Azeem, who hopes to be a doctor like his mother, Dr Reshma A. Merchant.

"You can say I want to follow in my mother's footsteps," he said. "She takes me to her office sometimes and I can see the environment, and I'm interested in it."

leepearl@sph.com.sg