Parenthood is certainly one of the greatest joys of life, yet it presents some of the biggest challenges and unnerving experiences for us as well.

As parents, especially in the context of Hong Kong, our children and us have to go through the process of transitioning from Kindergarten to Primary school. We all understandably strive to seek for the best opportunity for our children, and “fight” for ways to prepare them for the most desirable school. More often than not, we overlook another important issue after our children are accepted by our school of choice: is he or she well prepared and ready to acclimatize to the Primary school life?

Readiness for Primary school, in my recent experience when my six-year old son was preparing for the transition from K3 to Primary One, can be reflected in a gamut of dimensions, including physical and health conditions, living habits, communication and social skill development, as well as cognitive aptitude. It is best to begin evaluating these qualities and gradually build our children up as soon as possible.

To begin with, and probably one of the most important areas, is to encourage your children to take part in more physical exercises to ensure that he or she is healthy. Primary school curriculum is significantly different than Kindergarten’s, and is much more engaging (often full time instead of half day). Therefore it is of paramount importance that our children are healthy so that they can cope with the vigor. For my case, we take our children to the outdoors as much as we can, and also enroll him in sports classes that he shows an interest in.

The Primary school that my son goes to operates on a full day schedule and classes begin as early as 7:45am. Each day there are nine different subject classes, with no nap times whatsoever in between. This presents a big challenge to the physique of the children. In my case, we started training our son to acclimatize to going to bed earlier, optimally before 9:30pm every day. Likewise, children must also learn to be able to eat their meals independently and neatly, for in full day Primary school, children will have their recess and lunch breaks in school. It is imperative that we train our kids to be able to eat properly by themselves and in preset time frames. I started training my son by simulating the school environment by timing his dinner to a preset duration, as well as encouraging him to recoup his energy by preparing him his favorite snacks for recess every day. In our son’s particular school, we also enjoy choosing together his daily favourite lunch menu!
A large portion of any successful education experience lies in the ability to read and to comprehend. It is very advantageous to build up a good reading regime for children on a daily basis, and in our family we encourage children (including our daughter who is currently enrolled in N class at St. Catherine’s) to read a book (any story book or song book to his or her liking will do) every day, supplemented by bedtime story reading by the mother or father. In our case, we also find this regime has the added benefit of building a stronger bond between parents and children.

Social and communications skills, apart from enrolling in specialized “playgroups” or educational institutes, can actually easily be developed and nurtured through daily activities. From a very young age, we involve our children to participate in different social gatherings amongst friends, peers and relatives, and this allows our children to learn how to communicate and interact with different types of people. Furthermore, we also enrolled our son in a nearby church’s Sunday School that provides a valuable opportunity for children to develop a new and healthy social circle with children of various age groups. The experience is not necessarily an academic one, but it certainly helps develop a child’s social and communication skills in a positive way.

For cognitive aptitude, the subject is much more academic and complex, therefore it is not my intention to explore this in great detail. Nonetheless, I shall definitely encourage all parents to focus on developing and equipping our children with the core aptitude in Chinese language, English language and Mathematics. In most, if not all Primary Schools in Hong Kong, these will be the main subjects that will be accounted for. Moreover, mastering these core subjects will enhance your children’s ability to learn other academic subjects effectively.

Writer: Richard Cheong
Charlotte Cheong (N Brown)