



For Immediate Release

More fathers involved in their children's schooling journey post-pandemic

Incarcerated fathers take part in the Back to School with Dad initiative for the first time

Singapore, 28 December 2022 – Fathers from 200 pre-schools, primary and secondary schools as well as institutes of higher learning will be participating in the Back to School with Dad initiative for the next academic year in 2023. The dates for Back to School with Dad 2023 are 3 and 4 January 2023.

This represents an increase of nearly 67 percent increase from this year - boosted by the relaxed social distancing measures as Singapore entered the endemic phase. Fathers who have become more involved in their children's schooling journey during the pandemic also continue to do so.

The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) is helping incarcerated fathers strengthen their bonds with their children. For the first time, over 200 incarcerated fathers took part in this initiative. These fathers wrote notes of encouragement on Back to School with Dad cards which were then passed to their families so that their children can be surprised and motivated when school re-opens.

"Children of incarcerated fathers are unable to be present for them physically at the beginning of the new school year. Encouraging their children through these handwritten notes serves to strengthen father-child bonds despite their absence. This benefits not only the children, but the incarcerated fathers too, as it helps keep them motivated and focused on their rehabilitation journey," said Ms Charlene Chia, Senior Correctional Rehabilitation Specialist from SPS.

Back to School with Dad cards

In the years before COVID-19, only hard copy Back to School with Dad cards were disseminated to schools for fathers to pen notes for their children. Due to COVID-19 restrictions affecting logistics of cards distribution, Back to School with Dad 2022 went virtual.

For the 2023 academic year, due to the opening up post-pandemic, hard copy cards were provided to some schools. For fathers who do not have access to the hard copies, virtual cards are also available for download from the Back to School with Dad web page. This allows more fathers (and mothers) to access the card templates and share them with other parents in their community.

Using these templates, the parents can personalise a note of encouragement to be printed out and placed into lunchboxes or school bags so that their children can be pleasantly surprised during recess or sent to their children's mobile phones for the older children. Parents will also be provided with a Back to School with Dad toolkit with ideas on how they can prepare their children for the new school year.

“Being there for my children during times of transition such as a new school year helps them understand that Dad will always have their backs. It is also my way of forming precious memories with them in their growing up years – memories which we will always have even as they move on to other stages of life beyond school and into adulthood,” said Mr Bryan Tan, CEO, Centre for Fathering, DADs for Life and MUMs for Life. “We hope that many more fathers and schools will appreciate the importance of a father’s involvement in his child’s schooling journey and pledge their support towards the Back to School with Dad initiative.”

Families for Life Council Chairman Mr Ishak Ismail said, “‘Back to School with Dad’ is a meaningful initiative for fathers (and mothers) to put their love and commitment in action. As fathers become more involved in the key milestones of their children’s lives, it will help them to navigate these transitions and approach the new school year positively. We hope more fathers will make time to accompany their children to school on their first day and create memories that will be cherished for many years to come.”

About Back to School with Dad

Research¹ shows that when fathers are engaged in children’s education, their children perform better academically and are better able to adapt to their schooling journey emotionally and socially. They are also less likely to drop out and exhibit undesirable behaviour in school.

Underpinned by evidence of the importance a father’s role in his children’s academic journey, Centre for Fathering mooted the initiative in 2006 to encourage fathers to take time out from work to accompany their children to school at the start of the school year and send them notes of encouragement to ease them in.

Organised by Centre for Fathering, DADs for Life and MUMs for Life, in partnership with Families for Life and in support of Made For Families and Celebrating SG Families, Back to School with Dad aims to encourage fathers to play a more active role in their children’s schooling journey.

For more information about Back to School with Dad, go to www.fathers.com.sg/btsd. Download the Back to School with Dad card template and toolkit [here](#).

Fathers prepare children for school

Refer to ANNEX A for stories of how three fathers prepare their children for pre-school, primary and secondary school.

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About Centre for Fathering, DADs for Life and MUMs for Life

Centre for Fathering (CFF) is a non-profit organisation founded in 2000 to promote active and involved fathering and address issues caused by fatherlessness in Singapore. The organisation aims to turn the hearts of children towards their fathers by empowering more fathers to be better role models and an enduring inspiration to their children.

Since 2015, CFF has been the driving force behind Singapore's nation-wide fathering movement - DADs for Life which seeks to inspire and mobilise fathers to become more involved with and a good influence to their children... for life. Under the DADs for Life umbrella are initiatives such as Back to School with Dad, Eat With Your Family Day and Celebrating Fathers – to encourage fathers to spend time with their families and create a culture that promotes active fathering.

MUMs for Life celebrates a mum's unique identity as a woman and her irreplaceable roles as a daughter, wife and mother. When Mums are confident in their unique identity and multiple roles, they can better nurture our children and support DADs in building a stronger family in an increasingly complex world.

About Families for Life

The Families for Life (FFL) Movement aims to build strong and resilient families. The FFL Movement rallies like-minded individuals, families and organisations to strengthen family bonds through large-scale events, national celebrations and online digital campaigns.

FFL365 offers a suite of complementary evidence-based parenting and marriage programmes while FFL Parenting is an online repository of localised, research-backed parenting resources. FFL also runs Parent Support Groups, particularly for those with preschool children. FFL@Community brings all these offerings to local communities.

Visit <https://familiesforlife.sg> for tips, resources and interesting family activities as well as a wide range of meaningful volunteering opportunities as FFL volunteers.

About MSF's Alliance for Action

Led by Minister of State for Social and Family Development, Sun Xueling, Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) has launched the Alliance for Action (AfA) to strengthen marriages and family relationships in August 2021. We work with community partners on positive campaigns and narratives to create action and collectively develop initiatives to nurture strong and resilient marriages and families. We invite like-minded individuals and organisations to join the AfA to

support our efforts to strengthen marriages and family relationships. Those who wish to be involved can email MSF_AFA@msf.gov.sg.

CFF is Made For Families

CFF is proud to be part of the ecosystem supporting families in Singapore, and identify ourselves as an organisation that is Made For Families. Launched in June 2020, “Made For Families” is a brand mark that represents the different ways - big and small - that Singapore as a community supports families. An initiative by the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD) in the Strategy Group, Prime Minister’s Office, Made For Families aims to assure families in Singapore of support from the government and society at large. It invites more employers, as well as corporate and community partners to adopt the brand mark, and contribute collectively to building a conducive environment that supports families in Singapore. Together, we can build a society that is Made For Families. Visit go.gov.sg/MadeForFamilies for more information.

*Information extracted from <https://www.fatherhood.gov/for-dads/father-involvement-education>, <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2013/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-and-their-childrens-education/>

ANNEX A

<p>James Ong Adult Educator and Learning Facilitator</p> <p>James has four children who are 7 (Primary 1), 5 (Kindergarten), 2 and 2 months</p>	<p>With every transition to a new environment, my wife and I find it helpful to start conversations with our children early. It gives them time to adjust and prepare themselves for new experiences and minimises anxiety or fear about what they are about to go through.</p> <p>For our third child who is entering nursery in 2023, I think she'll have no problems with starting school as she's been socialised to the idea of going to school. She occasionally follows us to send her older siblings to school, often wanting to go in so that she can join them. There are days where she's even dressed up in her older sister's school uniform when sending them just so that she can feel like she's just like her older siblings. It also helps that her older siblings have been able to share with her what their school day is like and activities she can look forward to.</p> <p>For my eldest child, we drove him to his kindergarten before the start of the new school year to show him the surroundings, explain to him what it will be like on the first day, the kinds of activities he will enjoy in school and we'll be there to pick him up after his lessons.</p> <p>There are also books and short videos about pre-school experiences that enable our children to get a sense of what they'll be experiencing as they start the school year.</p>
<p>Eric Gwee Deputy Head, Customer Relations</p>	<p>It's important to help our children recognise their accomplishments, the moments they are proud of and the goals they have accomplished. This enables them to remember all the positive things that happened in 2022 and is a great way to appreciate all</p>

<p>Eric has three children who are 11 (P5), 8 (P2) and 4 (Nursery)</p>	<p>they have accomplished in the last 365 days and helps them realise how far they have come. The highs and lows are part of growing up, therefore a reflection is essential because learning from failure helps them to take steps towards a more positive course of action in the new school year.</p> <p>I will take the last two weeks of the holidays (before school reopens) to gradually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go through academic revisions with them, on what issues can be eliminated and improved. • Reflect on past accomplishments and failures with them and what/who they can be thankful for. • Guide them to list new goals, be it in their academic, co-curricular activities or personal developments. <p>They are children and we do not expect them to sit down like adults around a table to discuss them. I would take them on a run or cycling trip and discuss them while having a rest and thereafter, have them write it down when back home. Bringing them out for a treat and discussing them over the meal would be ideal too. At the end of the day, it's about creating a setting that have them open up for a fruitful conversation.</p>
<p>Ganesan Maniam Civil Servant</p> <p>Ganesan has two children who are 13 (Secondary 1) and 12 (Primary 6)</p>	<p>Back to school after a long break is always a big transition for the children. Jayashree will be in Secondary 2 and Kavi will be going to Secondary 1 in 2023.</p> <p>We talk with the children about what they can look forward to when school begins. Both my wife and I always give our children an opportunity to share and we listen actively to them. It can be frustrations and worries bothering them. We assure them and let them feel at ease, letting their worries fade off slowly.</p> <p>We reiterate to our children that they are not alone in this journey, but we will be there to guide them. We normalise any fears and reassure them that they will have fun and that school will be able to reach us if it is necessary. Our assurance to our children is we will make it a point to fetch them after school and talk over a meal all about their day at school. We strongly believe that by doing this, every time our children think about school, they will remember our reassurance to them.</p> <p>Kavi, who will be moving to a new school, will have to cope with a big adjustment. I can sense that there is already some excitement in him. A new school environment, new teachers, new schoolmates, and facing more academic demands with more subjects compared to a primary school.</p> <p>In our conversation with our children, we speak about similarities and differences between the secondary schools and primary school</p>

as well as expectations. Topics we talk about include school environment, facilities, class, teachers, peer relationships, classmates, making new friends, negative peer pressure, school rules, co-curriculum activities and most importantly, the increased academic demands.

We explored the school environment and practiced the route to school. We shared our own positive experiences with our children including saving extra pocket money after each day.

There is always anxiety in parents, too. Remember that children mirror the attitude of their parents. Have a relaxed and positive attitude towards the start of school. Encourage your children to be responsible and stand up on their own feet if facing any challenges.