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Parents get tips from couple whose children are geniuses

'Answer their questions and give them quality time'

By Salma Khalik

AS PARENTS went, the Hos, whose four children are geniuses, must have been pretty dim.

"We just didn't know what was expected of a child," said Dr Esther Ho.

Their son Sam was reading anything he could lay his hands on by the age of three. It was not till he went to kindergarten that they realised they had a genius on their hands.

It should have been easier to spot the other geniuses as they came along, right?

Not so, said Dr William Ho. When daughter Adina was one, she would sing herself to sleep. Her parents merely thought that she was a happy child.

At five, Susanna wrote up and stuck to a work schedule that, aside from study and playing the piano, also included time to play with her little brother.

But it was not till brother Sam went to university at 10, and the younger children were given IQ tests that they found the two younger girls were geniuses too.

By the time Sean came along, they knew what to expect.

The American Chinese couple from Seattle are in Singapore as part of a visit to Asia. While here, they will be talking to parents of children at the Kim Keat Church kindergarten.

They leave Singapore for Johor on Wednesday where they will be giving two talks.

The Hos like to help other parents cope with their clever children, because unless properly nurtured, the ge-



The Hos with their four children, from left, Sam, 23, Sean, 13, Adina, 20, and Susanna, 18.

niuses can go astray or with draw into themselves.

Dr William Ho said that studies have found that most gang leaders have above average intelligence — it is the way some clever children, who are not properly channelled, find acceptance by their peers.

This is why they always tell their children that there is nothing wrong with being different; that everyone is unique; and that they have the responsibility to develop the capabilities given to them.

Their pride in the children comes through very clearly — but the pride is not so much in their children's achievements as in their turning out to be caring and likeable people with strong family ties.

Their formula for bringing up geniuses is simple — spend lots of quality time with them.

The mother, a biochemist, left the fast track towards a professorship when Sam was

born, not from choice but because her husband was drafted and sent to Carolina. The university there did not have a biochemistry department.

It was when Sam reacted to everything she did, when she smiled or touched him, that she discovered "it was very important to be a mother".

Her advice: Never shut your child up or feel bothered by his questions. A mother's patience is very important.

"I always answered their questions, and when I did not know the answer, I would provide them with a way to find out. We would go to the library or look for an expert."

She tried to make learning fun. "I don't believe in making children recite the multiplication table. It's boring."

Instead, she taught her children to multiply with the use of blocks and two mirrors. Placed at 180 degrees, the block is multiplied by

two; at 90 degrees, by four, at 60 degrees, by six and so on.

That way, they picked up geometry at the same time.

The father, too, wanted time with his family. He said: "A lot of our doctor friends don't know their kids — or even their wives!"

To build up a strong father-children bond, Dr Ho would leave her husband alone with the children for half a day each week.

To limit outside demands on his time, he opted for a four-day work week: "I still worked a 70-hour week but I earned less."

They said that many parents do not realise that it is better to spend very little money, but a lot of contact time with their children.

"A bigger house, a new car, more clothes — these are not necessary. The children are more important. If it is economically possible, mothers should stay home to look after them."

SUPER-FAST TRACK TO DEGREES

■ **SAM, 23:** Went to the University of Washington at the age of 10. Graduated with a PhD in Computer Science at 22 from the University of Illinois.

He is now an Associate Professor doing research at the University of Washington.

■ **ADINA, 20:** Entered university at 14. Has degrees in Chemistry and Music. Presently pursuing her PhD in Genetics at the University of Washington.

■ **SUSANNA, 18:** Went to the University of Washington at 14 and graduated with three degrees — in

Biology, Chemistry and Biochemistry.

She is now doing a double PhD in Medicine and Biochemistry at the Harvard Medical School.

■ **SEAN, 13:** Will be entering the University of Washington in autumn.