

FAMILY

FULL ESTEEM AHEAD

Counselors traditionally treat problems such as anxiety or depression as they arise. But instead of focusing on the condition, a positive psychology movement led by pioneers such as Dr Martin Seligman believe helping people change their habits of negative thinking can improve how they feel, too.

Justine Campbell is an avid advocate of this idea. That's why she set up Mindquest Group, an emotional well-being centre in Kennedy Town that adopts this approach to take youngsters and adults "from being just OK to living life to its fullest".

"People think when you're practising positive psychology, you are happy and carefree, and live without anger and frustration all the time. But ... if you have negative emotions, it means you are alive and normal," Campbell says.

"Whole-person education is critical to equip individuals with the resources to be able to ride the inevitable waves of life. We do not know what the future holds for our children, but we can prepare them by empowering them with the necessary tools like resilience, self-efficacy, optimism, collaboration skills and mindfulness."

A former marketing executive, Campbell began exploring positive psychology to help her oldest son, then four years old, when he was struggling to fit into his new environment after the family relocated to Hong Kong in 2007.

For almost a year, she took monthly trips to Australia to train with a neuro-psychologist specialising in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

Since the skills helped her son, Campbell decided they would benefit other children and adults, too. So she pursued a master's degree in counselling, became certified as a neuro-linguistic programming practitioner, and set up her centre.

"I hope that through the work that I am doing in empowering parents, I can alleviate some of the struggles that I had at the time," says Campbell.

Rather than single out an individual or group, she believes everybody can benefit. Among her centre's most sought-after

Positive psychology workshops are helping dispirited children deal with the trials of life, writes Joyee Chan



The Kissing Hand, a technique of the Mindquest Kids workshop, uses heart tattoos as symbols of a child's connection to their family.

programmes is Mindquest Kids, a 12-week series of workshops organised in conjunction with the Jadis Blurton Family Development Centre for children aged eight to 10. The programme is based on the principles of CBT but also incorporates elements of positive psychology. And as much as children need coaching, parents do, too. That's why the programme includes debriefings and sessions for parents. This helps children realise that "this is a team effort and they have the support of their parents", Campbell says.

The Mindquest Kids workshops came in handy for an expatriate mother when her child experienced enormous meltdowns after the family moved to Hong Kong three years ago. Although a "gorgeous, bright child" in her eyes, her youngster lacked self-confidence.

"Social emotional skills come more naturally to some than others," the mother

says. "As a parent, you do everything you can to help your children reach their potential. It was time to get some help."

Through a series of games and educational material, she saw her child "become more comfortable in her own skin, throw fewer tantrums, show increased empathy, navigate relationships with friends more easily, and take charge of her feelings, especially how to react if things don't go her way".

The lesson on the importance of differentiating between "green light" (positive) from "red light" (negative) thoughts was particularly constructive. "My child recognised that her thinking differed from facts and learned not to let them overcome her," the mother says.

Perhaps the most evident change was that her daughter wasn't afraid to stand up to a bully. "Through a combination of working with Justine and growing up, she realised on her own that the way things were going wasn't healthy, she got the confidence to ... make things better," the mother says.

Because of frequent work with teenage girls grappling with self-worth, body image and friendships, Campbell decided two years ago to introduce REA girl, an empowerment programme developed by Anea Bogue, a

California-based specialist on self-esteem for women.

The programme helps girls, aged nine to 15, to navigate the ups and downs of teen angst and societal expectations.

Over three months, participants explore, for example, gender values by rewriting classic fairy tales to create independent and courageous female characters;

smarter, prettier and more accomplished. We don't compare ourselves with others who are less fortunate," she says. "Therefore, we come up feeling that we are not good enough."

Instead, what we should consider is our own path, Campbell says: where was I and where am I now? Have I moved forward?

It has made family life less stressful for one mother who signed up her two daughters, aged 11 and 14, for the REA girl workshops. "I was trying to anticipate a lot of issues that will come up in their adolescence," the mother says.

She wanted her daughters to find the confidence to let them stand up for their own beliefs and values if things become difficult in their teenage years. And the workshops, she figured, provided a neutral, non-threatening and anonymous setting where her girls could share their fears and triumphs with peers who were going through the same issues, under Campbell's guidance.

It took a lot of persuasion to get her daughters to attend the programme, the mother says. But their perceptions changed after the first session, and they have gained a sense of empowerment and some understanding of her responsibilities as a parent.

"The programme opens up their minds and helps them appreciate why their mum is doing things this way," Campbell says.

"They might not agree with all my messages, but they understand that my objective and ultimate goal is to help them on this path of growth," she says.

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LEGAL EYE

A billionaire's inspired vision

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As a trust and charity lawyer in Hong Kong, I work with clients to organise and preserve their wealth. Commonly, this is the wealth that was created by one or more generations. Through this work, I have gained insights into the dynamics and objectives of these families, besides the management and growth of their businesses.

In recent years, I have noticed that more families are turning their focus to charity foundations. For some, a family foundation keeps the multiple generations together through philanthropy. The joy of helping the less fortunate becomes a passion and provides a common interest among the family.

One example is of a Chinese billionaire entrepreneur, so influenced by his philanthropic beliefs that he announced in 2010 that his entire fortune would be donated to charity. He is believed to be the first, and probably still, the only, person to make such a promise. He stated: "If my children are more capable than I, then it is not necessary to leave them a lot of money. If they are incompetent, a lot of money will only be harmful to them."

The grandson of this Chinese millionaire, Mr P, in his 40s, joined the family business after he graduated from a Canadian university. He works with his grandfather in the business and the family foundation. During this time he learned about his grandfather's work ethic.

A prevailing belief in Chinese culture is that older generations should be a role model for their families and inspire younger generations to give back to society. The Confucian interpretation of this obligation extends to the social level,

where successful members of the community are supposed to help the unfortunate.

In Hong Kong, about 500 charities with tax exemption are set up every year with wide-ranging causes, from providing after-school tutorial classes to helping foreign maids cope with unexpected pregnancies (there are reportedly about 1,000 of these cases a year). There is bound to be something that touches these families' hearts.

As Mr P suffered from cataracts, his grandfather knew the pain, fear and helplessness one suffers in the dark. If the cataract patient happens to be a poor villager, the whole family suffers as they cannot work and must rely on others to help. For more than 10 years, Mr P joined his grandfather in a massive project to help restore the vision of more than 400,000 people from more than 20 provinces across China.

They stayed at the poorest of the villages for seven days at a time, and were touched to experience first hand the changes the project made in patients' lives.

The effectiveness of a charity is not easily measured, so how do you choose which candidates should receive benefits? Both family charity foundations and corporations need professional help in the process. In Hong Kong, philanthropy counselors such as WiseGiving Advisors offer this service to help donors to plan and search for a suitable project. I asked Mr P: "You will be left without a penny; do you blame your grandfather for his pledge to donate his fortune?"

Mr P replied with a smile and fire in his eyes. "No, this was his wish and we must honour him. It was a role model for our family. We have great plans for some grand projects."

May his grandfather's legacy live on.

Michelle Chow is a consultant with international law firm Withers



Teenage girls create more empowered female characters (far left) at workshops run by Justine Campbell (left).

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Power of tweeting mums

Lisa Richwine

Wendy Wright is a home-schooling mother of two, a prolific blogger and a self-described "Disney nut". Her cats are named Mickey and Minnie, and her blog is filled with advice for visiting Disneyland, tips for holding Disney-themed parties and reviews of Disney movies.

Wright's enthusiasm for all things Disney eventually drew the attention of the Walt Disney Company, which invited her to join a carefully vetted group of about 1,300 Disney Social Media Mums. The group of mothers - and a few fathers - are part of a Disney effort to incorporate the enthusiasm and influence of parents into its marketing efforts.

Wright isn't sure why she was picked, but guesses her online postings about Disney helped. "There's been a lot on social media about our trips to Disney," says Wright, who writes about technology, entertainment and other subjects from her home in Phoenix, Arizona. "It's very obvious we are a Disney family."

Disney mums are not paid, but they receive perks from the company for their efforts, including - for some - deeply discounted, four-day family trips to Walt Disney World for its Social Media Mums Celebration, an event that is part holiday and part educational conference. Disney does not tell the

mothers what to write or tweet about, and it doesn't require them to post. Still, this year's social media mums event in May generated 28,500 tweets, 4,900 Instagram photos and 88 blog posts full of ride reviews and videos of children meeting Disney characters. And the mums' postings are overwhelmingly positive.

The theory is that mothers with a large online presence have the ability to influence travel and entertainment planning of other mothers.

"For a big part of our guests, it's the mums who are making decisions," says Tom Staggs, Disney's chief operating officer. The mothers say they like having a connection to Disney - as well as the possibility of scoring a spot at the Social Media Mums Celebration, which was first held in 2010. Each year, the theme parks division emails invitations to 175 to 200 people.

This year, the mums made #DisneyMMC a trending Twitter topic on the day the invitations went out. "A very magical invite with pixie dust arrived!" Wright tweeted on March 21.

In the run-up to the celebration, the invites posted on Pinterest the Frozen-inspired outfits and Mickey Mouse-adorned handbags they planned to bring to the event.

Exactly how Disney chooses its social media mums is a mystery, stoking online speculation about the secret formula. One blog post that offered advice on how to get picked was shared 1,600 times.

Disney executives will only say they look for mums who fit its family-friendly brand, use multiple social media platforms and are active in their communities offline.

The mums include bloggers and book authors as well as radio, TV and YouTube

influencers. They also pay for their own transport. Overall, mums spend US\$3.2 million annually in the US economy, says Yachi Bailely, a consultant who advises Disney on its social media effort.

"I have clients who call and say 'I want to do what Disney is doing,'" Bailely says. "Companies want to capture the mum market."

Reuters

personality. Only a minority are superfans who write primarily about the company's products and theme parks. This year's celebration attendees had a combined Twitter following of five million followers, or about 27,000 each.

Rachel Pitzel, a mother of two in Los Angeles, applied for, and was accepted to, a social media event the company held in Arizona last June. This year she was invited to the celebration in Orlando, Florida. "You feel like a kid again," she says.

But the celebration doesn't come free. Attendees get deep discounts, but they still pay for their packages, which include three nights at Disney's Yacht Club Resort, theme park tickets, fast passes to skip queues and a beach-themed party. They also pay for their own transport.

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Rachel Pitzel works from her home in Los Angeles. Photo: Reuters