

Pre-school teachers to get new resources to support kids

Ho Yoon Sim

Pre-school teachers will get more support to manage children with different learning and developmental needs, with a new set of resources developed by NTUC First Campus (NFC).

The Inclusion Toolkit, launched on May 22, comprises a handbook of practical strategies, along with three kinds of fidget toys and visual cue cards.

It aims to equip teachers with knowledge to manage children's behaviour and respond to a range of needs, while helping them with emotional regulation.

The handbook contains information on behaviours a child might be displaying, from throwing a tantrum to being restless. Teachers can match what they observe in the classroom to the specific scenarios and apply the suggested steps.

Every approach starts with "Keep CALM", a strategy developed by NFC. It stands for "coming down to the child's level, acknowledging their feelings, listening without interrupting, and modelling the calm behaviour".

The materials were developed by NFC's own team of curriculum and child support specialists, with input from more than 50 educators across 12 pre-schools.

Mr Justin Ang, chief executive of NFC, said the toolkit is part of a "broader journey" to strengthen inclusive practices across its centres and contribute to a more inclusive pre-school sector.

"In many ways, these are simply good early childhood practices. Because, when inclusion is embedded into daily interaction and learning, it strengthens the learning experience for every child in the classroom," he said at NFC's Development Day, an annual event for educators to exchange best practices and participate in upskilling workshops.

The event, attended by 7,000 educators and staff members, was held at Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre.

NFC will gradually roll out the toolkit across 186 centres under its pre-school brands, including My First Skool.

A spokesperson for NFC said its funding partner, NTUC Community Fund, will share the resources with the wider early childhood sector from 2027.

Ms Jalena Tay, a 26-year-old English language teacher at My First Skool at Waterway Point, described an instance of a child being overwhelmed and throwing toys. Childcare specialists had previously shared strategies to manage such behaviour.

"I remembered to stay very calm, and gave him his own space. When I saw a de-escalation, I gently held his hand and told him, 'Let's pack together.' I also tried to redirect his attention by asking questions."

Senior early interventionist Corrine Elizabeth Peters, 41, who was involved in the development of the toolkit, said that fidget toys divert a child's hands away from other movements, like pushing their friend.

Other strategies recommended in the guide include using a timer to help children take turns, and pointing at visual cue cards with instructions instead of giving verbal reminders.

Teachers will be trained to use the resources. The number of toolkits allocated to each centre will depend on its size.

Another item teachers can find within the package is a deck of affirmation cards with words of motivation for them.

"To build an inclusive classroom, the teacher herself needs to be emotionally regulated and confident in what she's doing," said Ms Peters.

Speaking at the event, Minister of State for Social and Family Development Goh Pei Ming said that NFC's toolkit is in line with the Quality Preschools 2030 plan, which aims to improve pre-schools' capabilities, their curricula and skills of educators, among other areas.

"We have to be a lot more intentional about how lessons are conducted, the environments in which learning takes place, and how activities are (designed)," he said.

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