



**IN FOCUS**  
**Keep her safe on high floors**

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FEATURE

FACT FILE

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 **A note from MOM**

Today many families employ foreign domestic workers (FDWs) to help care for our elderly and our young, and relieve us from daily household chores.

Employing an FDW involves providing for, managing and supervising the FDW living with your family.

We are pleased to introduce e-News—a bi-annual online newsletter for FDW employers.

Besides updating you on the latest policies and regulations, eNews will also highlight stories of how others have successfully managed a harmonious work relationship with their FDWs.

In every issue, we will also feature key language and cultural tips to help you communicate better with your FDW.

We hope you will enjoy your read and remember to watch out for our next issue in March 2008.

## ► IN FOCUS

# Keep her safe on high floors

How can you ensure your FDW is working safely in your high-rise apartment? eNews explains.

It was her first time away from home. She has never lived on the high floors. Now she has to hang laundry and clean windows from the 12th storey of the apartment. Many FDWs would have similar anecdotes to tell. Arriving from villages where high-rise living is unfamiliar to them, they depend largely on their employers to educate and supervise them on performing their chores safely.

"When my FDW first arrived, I demonstrated the safe way to clean windows and hang laundry before getting her to do them together with me. When she seemed more certain, I allowed her to try them on her own but only when I am around to watch her," shared Ms Oringa Vathanasin, an FDW employer for 10 years.

Rather than taking for granted that her FDW would know what to do because she had prior experience, Ms Oringa believed



Ms Oringa Vathanasin believes that the employer is responsible for the safety of their FDWs.

that it is important to closely supervise her FDW during the initial three months of her employment. "Every household is different and every employer has different expectations. So it is important to orientate her to ensure that she can perform household chores without compromising her own safety," Ms Oringa said.

Furthermore, Ms Oringa found it useful to maintain an open communication with her FDW. She would encourage her FDW to clarify any doubts with her so that she would seek her advice before attempting to perform any task that could be risky.

Ms Oringa added, "When hanging laundry, I would tell her that it is okay to let go of the bamboo pole if she feels that the weight of the laundry is pulling her over the edge. I would not want her to jeopardise her life."

Find out what errant employers have to face if they compromise the safety of their FDWs in **Reality Bites** on page 3.

Though it may require some efforts and patience to supervise your FDW, your efforts will ultimately help prevent unpleasant episodes from happening in your home. After all, as an employer, you have a moral obligation for the safety and welfare of your employee.

### What other employers say?

"I bought my FDW a window cleaner that has an extended handle, so she does not have to stand on a stool to clean the higher parts of the window."

Ms Wong Lee Ngor,  
FDW employer for 14 years

"Her life is definitely more important than our clothes and our windows. If there is heavy laundry like bed sheets to be hung, my wife and I will be there to help."

Mr Derek Yeo,  
FDW employer for 10 years

## Safety Checklist

Here are some tips you can go through with your FDW:

### Hanging Laundry

#### DOs:

- Hang heavier clothes closer to the bracket and light clothes at the far end of the pole.
- Be extra careful during windy or rainy days as the strong winds will make the clothes more difficult to handle.

#### DON'Ts:

- Overload the clothes pole as it may get too heavy.
- Retrieve objects that have fallen out onto the window ledge or platform.

### Cleaning Windows

#### DOs:

- Lock window grilles before cleaning the windows.
- Use safe cleaning tools such as those with extended handles or a magnetic cleaner.

#### DON'Ts:

- Stand on chairs, stools or raised platforms.
- Climb or lean out of the window.

## ► FEATURE

# Her employer and family are her stress-reliever

Bejo overcame her homesickness with help from her understanding employer.

Bejo Suparman, 40, left her family in Indonesia over 15 years ago to work as an FDW in Singapore. It was especially difficult for her to part with her youngest daughter who was only two years old when she left. Adding to her homesickness, she found it a big challenge to adapt to the new environment. Struggling with thoughts of giving up, she was seriously considering returning to Indonesia.

Thankfully, her new employer, the Loh family, was welcoming and ready to help her deal with her anxieties. Much of her loneliness was alleviated because the family was always willing to spend time talking and listening to her. They would also find out from her how she was coping with her work.

The family further supported Bejo by ensuring her daily workload was reasonable. She shared, "My employers would



Having cared for her since she was a child, Ms Loh Wei Juan (the third child of the Loh family) is like a daughter to Bejo.

tell me what I should do and what was expected of me. They were very reassuring. They didn't want me to worry unnecessarily."

Bejo is not expected to work all day as long as she completes her tasks. She is often included in the family's daily activities such as dining and watching television. Bejo feels accepted into the family and this motivates her to manage the household better. In addition, Bejo is able to

channel her longing for her own children towards caring for the two youngest siblings of the Loh family.

Today, Bejo has been with the Loh family for more than 10 years and has just renewed her contract. She said, "I am happy working here. Although it can be tiring at times, I don't mind it at all because they are like my second family. Here, I miss my family in Indonesia, but whenever I go back, I'll miss my family here!"

## How does stress affect my FDW?

Stress is present in any employment relationship. While most of us can leave the office when we are stressed, your FDW has nowhere to turn to. Stress management is therefore more complex for her.

Dr Daniel Kwek, Head/Senior Consultant of Psychological Medicine at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, elaborated, "There are a lot of adjustments FDWs have to make. Employers only have to adjust to one FDW, but the

FDW has to adjust to everyone in the family."

Besides providing basic needs such as food and shelter, Dr Kwek added that any absence of security and acceptance is likely to trigger stress in FDWs and lead to depression.

### ► What to look out for?

Some symptoms of stress include a lack of concentration, decreased productivity, physical

pains, and sudden changes in sleep patterns and appetite. In more severe cases, stress may result in violence and suicide.

### ► What can I do?

The best way to help your FDW is by building a good rapport with her and being aware of how she is coping. Your simple act of concern will make her feel accepted as part of your family and hence be more willing to take care of your family.

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### Reality Bites

# Safety starts at home

As an employer, you have to provide a safe working environment for your FDW.

This is part of the Work Permit conditions under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act.

A negligent employer may be fined up to \$5,000 and/or jailed up to six months. An employment ban may also be imposed.

Here are two case stories illustrating the penalties suffered by errant employers.

#### Employer fined \$3,500

In September 2006, an FDW was seen climbing out of an 18th floor apartment window to clean the window exterior. Although she was unhurt, her life was clearly placed at risk. As a result, her employer was fined \$3,500 for failing to take responsibility in ensuring the safety of her FDW.

#### Employer jailed

In December 2003, an FDW fell to her death when she climbed out of the window to hang laundry. Her employer alleged that it was her mother-in-law who gave the instructions. Her claim was rejected as she was ultimately responsible for her FDW's safety. Besides being jailed for two weeks, she would also have to endure the guilt of the life lost due to her negligence.

### Do You Know?

# Medical insurance now a must

Employing a new FDW or renewing your FDW's work permit next year? Do not forget her medical insurance.

Purchase of medical insurance for your FDW will be a prerequisite for all applications and renewals of Work Permits beginning from 1 January 2008. With the withdrawal of healthcare subsidies for foreigners, the new condition will help you manage the medical bills of your FDW.

The insurance must be purchased and maintained by the employer.

It must cover at least \$5,000 a year for your FDW's inpatient care and day surgery.

The following plans are available:

- Medical Insurance Scheme for FDWs, by NTUC Income Insurance Co-operative Ltd

\$ From \$120 per 26 month policy period  
☎ 6332 1133 (24hr hotline)  
✉ gh@income.com.sg

- OAC Maid Supreme, by Overseas Assurance Corporation Ltd

\$ From \$110 per 26 month policy period  
☎ 6248 2608 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)  
✉ general@oac.com.sg

Do note the scope of these plans may be wider than the minimum requirement set by MOM. You may contact the respective agencies for more information or you may choose to speak to other insurers.



► F.Y.I

# FAST skills



Thanks to the Basic Healthy Culinary Course, Mdm Lim Lee Ping and her family have been enjoying healthier dishes prepared by her FDW, Endang Prihatin.

Not only did Endang learn how to select healthier ingredients and prepare popular local dishes, it also helped her to feel more confident about herself.

“Compared to my sister’s domestic helper, I can tell that Endang is using much less salt and oil in her cooking!” says Mdm Lim.

Besides the culinary course, FAST also offers a variety of other courses such as child and elderly care to better meet the needs of your family. These courses are subsidised by FAST.

For more information or to sign up your FDW for courses, call FAST at 6735 7687 or visit its website at [www.fast.org.sg](http://www.fast.org.sg).

Endang, who joined the Lim family two months ago, had no prior experience in preparing Singaporean cuisine. Mdm Lim decided to send Endang to the culinary course organised by FAST (Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Skills Training).

## FAST courses

### Basic healthy culinary course FREE

Pick up tips on healthy food choices and food preparation

☎ Nation Employment 6665 8199

### Chinese cooking class \$5

Learn to prepare two popular Chinese dishes

☎ FAST 6735 7687

### Elementary baby care and elderly care \$10 \$15

Be equipped with skills to perform caregiver duties

☎ Sunlove Home 6386 0274

### Computer course \$42.50

Get trained in IT on various Microsoft software

☎ AIMS 6227 5464

## Cultural Matters

Most FDWs in Singapore come from a different culture and background. It is important to be aware of the cultural nuances as this will help to promote a better working relationship between you and your FDW. In this issue, here is a tip for you if you have an Indonesian FDW.

**Tip**

In Singapore, you may give a light pat on someone’s head affectionately to say “Good Job!” but this is unacceptable with Indonesians. Despite your good intentions, it would upset your Indonesian FDW because the head is considered sacred in their culture. Alternatively, you can praise your FDW by saying “Bagus!” and a smile which is universally welcomed.

## Say it Right!

Communicating with your FDW can be quite daunting and confusing at times. Here are some useful phrases you can use with your Indonesian FDW.

You have done a good job	<i> KERJA kamu bagus</i>
What you did was wrong	<i> Yang kamu lakukan itu salah</i>
Be Careful	<i> Hati-hati</i>
That was dangerous	<i> Itu bahaya</i>
Lock the windows	<i> Kunci jendela</i>
Don't fall	<i> Jangan jatuh</i>
Tidy up	<i> Rapikan</i>
Throw away	<i> Buang</i>
Clean	<i> Bersihkan</i>
Wipe	<i> Lap</i>
Sweep	<i> Sapu</i>
Mop	<i> Pel</i>
Wash	<i> Cuci</i>

## Useful Contacts

Ministry of Manpower Call Centre  
☎ 6438 5122

### Accreditation Bodies

Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE)  
☎ 6461 1800

Association of Employment Agencies (Singapore)  
☎ 6836 2618

### Embassies

Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia  
☎ 6737 7422

Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines  
☎ 6835 3780

Embassy of the Union of Myanmar  
☎ 6735 0209

High Commission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka  
☎ 6254 4595

High Commission of India  
☎ 6737 6777

High Commission for the People’s Republic of Bangladesh  
☎ 6255 1579

Royal Thai Embassy  
☎ 6224 1797