

INFOCUS



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KINDNESS
is the movement

HAVE YOU ENSURED
YOUR FDW HAS
**ENOUGH
TO EAT?**

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SAFETY OF FOREIGN
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HAVE YOU ENSURED YOUR FDW HAS *Enough to Eat?*



We all have our three meals everyday. For some of us who do not have a desk-bound job, lunch is often the most important meal of the day as it gives us the energy to do our work. Your FDW is no different. She often has to help you with the household chores, and she needs the energy to do that and take care of your family. It is important that you ensure she has enough food everyday.

SO, HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

There were some media reports in October of two FDWs who claimed they did not have

enough to eat. In the reports, the FDWs shared that they had lost weight due to lack of food and they were too scared to ask their employers for more food.

MOM takes a serious view of any form of ill-treatment of FDWs, including the provision of inadequate food. We would like to remind employers of your responsibility to look after the well-being of your FDW. While many Singaporeans prefer light meals or a healthier diet, we must remember that FDWs could need more substantive meals.

WE HAVE THE FOLLOWING ADVICE FOR EMPLOYERS:

Provide your FDW with three full meals a day – breakfast, lunch and dinner.

If your FDW is used to eating only rice, she could need more servings if the meal is porridge or noodles.

Some FDWs are afraid to raise issues directly with their employers for fear of being scolded, or they could be shy. Be generous. Ask your FDW if she has enough. Or, if she approaches you to ask for more, allow her to cook more food for herself or to help herself to food items in the house.

SETTING THE HOUSE RULES

Every family has its house rules which we expect to apply to our FDWs. But too often, we expect FDWs to know exactly what to do without us first spelling out the rules.

Employers must always set important ground rules when your FDW is first deployed to your home. Inform her what she can freely do, or what she must first seek permission before she can do, such as inviting her friends or relatives to the house. FDWs may assume that it is reasonable for a friend to come over if it is convenient, or when no one is around.

As employers, we must therefore communicate clearly the house rules to our FDWs from the very start. Laying down the house rules and making them clear will help remove stumbling blocks to a better working relationship between you and your FDW!



Stress No More

For most of us, stress is something we go through every day. While stress can motivate us to do more and do better, it can also be very damaging if gone unnoticed and left unmanaged. As an employer with an FDW under your care, it is essential that you look out for her and help her manage her stress. We suggest four ways you can help her:



Ensure that she has enough privacy

It can be exhausting to be in the presence of others all the time. While FDWs are expected to take care of household needs, they also need their space and time for themselves. Give her privacy at the end of the day and allow her some alone time to de-stress.



Communicate

Communication is always important. Allow your FDW time to communicate with loved ones or friends from back home to ease her loneliness and stress. Sometimes, FDWs might not want to share their problems with employers. So, if you suspect that your FDW is stressed, do observe her before talking to her and encouraging her to share her problems. Learn to identify signs of stress such as the inability to concentrate, unexplained weight loss or gain, nervous twitching, dizziness or crying often. You can help her to identify issues that are within her control that she can try to resolve. If your FDW is stressed as she cannot cope with her workload, work with her and guide her how she can manage the workload better. Sometimes, FDWs just need a listening ear.



Show appreciation for her work

This helps your FDW to feel valued. In turn, she will feel a sense of purpose in her job and be more motivated in completing her daily tasks. Be generous with words of encouragement and gestures of appreciation.



Provide her with a sense of belonging

An FDW can be understandably lonely after having left her family behind to come to Singapore to earn money. FDWs are easily susceptible to overwhelming homesickness especially in the initial stage of employment. They have to manage this emotional stress quietly on their own, and so it is important that employers understand this and try to help them, by making the FDW feel like a member of the family, and including her in meals and outings. Importantly, let her know that she can still keep in contact with her family and teach her how she can do this.

The Essential Employer's Checklist

You've decided to hire an FDW. You've browsed online forums and talked to family and friends. You have even contacted an employment agency (EA) and discussed at length about the hiring of an FDW and set a date to head down to the agency to select a potential candidate.

But are you interested in the application process, the expenses involved, your responsibilities and obligations as an employer?

Many prospective employers have pondered over these questions, and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) has now put together the answers in a checklist to keep employers informed of all the important things they need to know before they decide to hire an FDW.

The Employer's Checklist will guide prospective employers in the FDW hiring and placement process. It is in the form of a brochure, and is available in four languages (English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil). The brochure can be downloaded from the MOM website at www.mom.gov.sg.



With extensive pre-employment information readily available, prospective employers can now better understand what it entails to be an employer **before** hiring an FDW.

YOU HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY TOO!

Aside from consulting the checklist, it is important that you understand your role in the hiring process. While EAs can recommend a potential FDW based on your needs, you must conduct proper interviews with the FDW before deciding if she matches your needs. A face-to-face interview is a great opportunity to get to know the FDW and gauge her comprehension skills. Often, a breakdown in communication can lead to frustrations in the employment relationship.





KINDNESS *is the Movement*

Caught up in the stress of daily life, we get irritable and impatient with people. We forget to show compassion and kindness to the people around us, least of all our FDWs who could sometimes bear the brunt of our frustrations after a long day. To share the meaning of kindness in action, we chat with Dr William Wan, the General Secretary of the Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM).

With a firm belief that kindness breeds kindness, Dr Wan is active in community-based work, even prior to being General Secretary of SKM, when he practiced law and managed a psychometric company. An inspiration to all and a go-getter at heart, he won the Active Ager Award (Council for Third Age) in 2011. Dr Wan currently writes regularly on his blog, "Wan of a Kind", about Singapore society and social issues, peppered with personal experiences of a life lived through kindness.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS IN WHICH EMPLOYERS CAN HELP THEIR FDW ADAPT TO LIVING AND WORKING IN SINGAPORE?

We never personally engaged FDWs in my household. But we have lived as long-term house guests of friends with FDWs on several occasions when we were staying abroad and spending three to six months in Singapore. We were very impressed with the way our hosts related to their FDWs and helped them to adapt to life here in Singapore. I'll list some observations:

- The children address them as aunties – there is respect shown to them.
- They are given good accommodation, meaning that their rooms are adequately furnished.
- They have a television set and they watch local news and other programmes during rest or lull periods.
- They are encouraged to read local papers.

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Do to others what you want others to do to you! When we care for FDWs genuinely with kindness, most will reciprocate with loyalty, with joy in service and trustworthiness

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- They are given a day off and encouraged to explore Singapore.
- When they eat out, the FDWs often join them, like family members.

Once employers treat FDWs with dignity and respect, providing for them will come naturally, for instance, providing proper accommodation and permitting proper rest time. Giving FDWs a sense of belonging and purpose helps them to adapt to living and working in Singapore.

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS MAINTAIN A PRODUCTIVE AND HARMONIOUS WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR FDW?

Firstly, employers should always show respect and acceptance towards FDWs. It sends the message that they are worthy and valued people, which motivates the FDWs and increases productivity. Secondly, employers with children should teach their children to respect and address FDWs properly, especially in requesting for things politely (not dictating commands or orders). Treating FDWs as part of the family and dignifying their work by providing for them

adequately without discrimination will help to foster a productive and harmonious working relationship.

MANY EMPLOYERS IN SINGAPORE ARE NOT UNKIND, BUT THEY ARE JUST WARY THAT FDWS WILL “CLIMB OVER THEIR HEADS” IF THEY SHOW KINDNESS TOWARDS THEM, WHICH IS UNFORTUNATE. WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON THIS AND HOW COULD WE CHANGE THIS MINDSET?

If one is taken advantage of, there are ways to deal with that. Ultimately, the employers still have control. For example, they can take away some privileges and let the FDW go when the contract is up for renewal. Or if the FDW has committed a serious breach, she can also be let go within the guidelines of MOM. In the case of my friends, they have done a lot of wonderful things for the FDWs including helping them to save money and helping them to set up small businesses or buy land in their hometown. These FDWs are ever so grateful and they are still in touch.

ANY TIPS ON HOW EMPLOYERS CAN BE MORE GRACIOUS TOWARDS THEIR FDW?

I believe in the power of love, which is kindness in action. People need to feel loved and appreciated, respected and valued. FDWs are here to work because they are poor or they cannot find jobs in their homeland. They are no different from us. They have aspirations for their families and they too would like to see their families being taken care of.

In exchange for their labour, they are given compensation – we too exchange our labour for compensation. In the way we expect our bosses to appreciate and value our contributions, we show the same appreciation for our FDWs. We are motivated by kind bosses who affirm us; so are FDWs. It is always good to practise this old saying: "Do to others what you want others to do to you!" When we care for FDWs genuinely with kindness, most will reciprocate with loyalty, with joy in service and trustworthiness.



Dr. William Wan is the General Secretary of the Singapore Kindness Movement. Prior to his role as General Secretary, he practised law and managed a psychometric company. A winner of the Active Ager Award (Council for Third Age) 2011, Mr Wan has always been active in community-based work and believes that kindness breeds kindness.



ACTIVE TOGETHER

Weekends are precious pockets of time that we have to spend with the family. Instead of staying in air-conditioned comfort all the time, head outdoors for some sun! Not only is it a chance to squeeze in a little exercise, you get your family moving too. Explore these options, and your kids will thank you for it.



For something more interactive, head on over to the **Singapore Sports Hub** where the Experience Sports programme is in full swing. Anyone, regardless of age, can learn to play a new sport from handball to lacrosse; just sign up on the spot! There's also an Experience Sports Village with bouncy castles and sports stations for the little ones.



Thanks to Singapore's urban planners, we have **Gardens by the Bay** with its magnificent supertrees juxtaposed against several outdoor gardens. Not only does the botanical attraction possess more than 100,000 species of plants, it also houses the Far East Organisation Children's Garden. Opened in January 2014, it has a massive water play area and Adventure Trail.

For some respite from the hustle and bustle of city life, go offshore. Hop on the bumboat from Changi Point Ferry Terminal to **Pulau Ubin**. The island is one of the last *kampongs* in Singapore, best explored on foot or bicycle. But keep an eye out for monkeys, dogs and the occasional wild boar. Bike out to Chek Jawa, among the few wetlands left that has seven interdependent ecosystems. Walk along the boardwalk and get your kids to spot the marine life, rare plants and migratory birds.

Welcome To Pulau Ubin

Alternatively, board the ferry from Marina South Pier to get to **Kusu Island**, and pay a visit to the Chinese temple, three Malay shrines and Tortoise Sanctuary, home to hundreds of tortoises. Spend the rest of the day with a picnic under the shade or on the beach.





A popular destination for families, **MacRitchie Reservoir** is made up of three reservoirs shrouded by jungles and swamps. To explore the unadulterated greenery, go on one of the five walking trails; the easiest is about 3km and takes three hours, and the toughest is around 11km and takes up to five hours. For non-hikers, there are jogging tracks, a playground and the Prunus Boardwalk Trail skirting the reservoir's edge that makes for a scenic walk.



Also off the beaten track is **Punggol Waterway Park**, which covers a walking distance of 8.4km. There are four themed areas and the Recreation Zone is where you'll find a sand and water play area for the little ones, as well as a fitness corner for all ages. Bicycles or skates can be rented too, and we're betting that this area is much less crowded and more picturesque than the often-packed East Coast Park.

SAY NO TO ILLEGAL EMPLOYMENT



Have you come across friends or relatives who hire part-time FDWs to do their household chores, or ask their FDWs to help out at their businesses? These acts are actually against the law.

It's tempting to get quick help from FDWs who offer to work for others outside of their official employment to earn extra money. However, hiring a moonlighting FDW is illegal and will get both the FDW and the hirer into trouble. If you need help for a weekend cleaning stint, there are other legitimate part-time cleaning services available that you can use.

MOM would like to remind all FDW employers to abide by the Work Permit conditions on employing an FDW. You are not allowed to deploy your FDW to work at locations other than at home. She is not allowed to help you at your office or stall. If found guilty of hiring an FDW without a valid work pass, you may be liable to a fine of not more than \$30,000 and/or imprisoned up to 12 months.

If your employer makes you work illegally for example in his office or coffeeshop, you should say:

COFFEESHOP



Clean all the tables over there!



"Sir/Madam, I can only work in the address stated on my Work Permit card and I can only do domestic chores."



ENSURING THE SAFETY OF *Foreign Domestic Workers*

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) would like to remind all foreign domestic worker (FDW) employers that you have a role to play to ensure your FDW works safely. You should work with your FDW to create a safe working environment in the home, by identifying the dangerous acts that she must avoid, and reminding her not to be overzealous in performing her duties, which could compromise her own safety.

EMPLOYERS NEED TO SUPERVISE FDWS CLOSELY

The Work Permit conditions were revised in June 2012 to prohibit FDW employers from requiring their FDWs to clean the window exterior unless the two conditions were met:

- The FDW employer, or an adult representative, is physically present to supervise the FDW; and
- Window grilles have been installed and are locked at all times during the cleaning process. The rules apply to all homes, except for windows that are at the ground level or along common corridors.

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EMPLOYERS SHOULD ENSURE FDWS PRACTISE SAFETY GUIDELINES

As an employer, you have an important role, and that is to supervise and ensure that your FDW works in a safe working environment. She should never be put in situations which may endanger her life, such as cleaning the glass panel of a balcony, standing on a chair to clean windows or hang laundry, or picking dropped items from the ledge.

Failure to ensure the work safety of the FDW is a breach of the Work Permit conditions, and constitutes an offence under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA). Employers can be fined up to

\$S\$10,000 and/or imprisoned up to 12 months, and be barred from employing an FDW in future.

You can refer to the *FDW Employer Safety Pamphlet* to familiarise yourself with the safety dos and don'ts. In addition, you can also refer to the safety guidelines at MOM's website at <http://www.mom.gov.sg/statistics-publications/others/publications>.

WINDOW SAFETY DAYS
CHECK, CLEAN & CHANGE YOUR WINDOWS ON EVERY

6 JUN & **12 DEC**

Falling windows can endanger public safety. Homeowners can face a fine of up to \$S\$10,000 and/or a jail term of up to a year if a window falls. So do your part to help keep our community safe by checking your windows twice yearly!

CASEMENT WINDOWS

- CHECK** that fasteners are not rusty or loose.
- CLEAN** and lubricate joints or movable parts.
- CHANGE** if nuts from aluminium to stainless steel by engaging an approved window contractor.

SLIDING WINDOWS

- CHECK** that safety stoppers and angle stops are in their proper places.
- CLEAN** the tracks and ensure window panels operate smoothly.
- CHANGE** worn-out safety stoppers and angle stoppers by engaging an approved window contractor.

For more information about window safety and the list of approved contractors: Visit www.bca.gov.sg/window_safety (BCA) or www.hdb.gov.sg/window_safety (HDB). Call 6325 8677 (BCA) or 1800 225 5432 (HDB).