

# INFOCUS



MINISTRY OF  
MANPOWER

A publication for employers of foreign domestic workers

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**CDE is here  
to Help!**

A Well-Rested Worker  
**Can Take  
Better Care**  
of Your Family

**A Phone  
Call Is  
All That  
Is Needed**

**Looking to  
Upgrade the skills  
of your FDW?**

Putting Yourself

**“in Her Shoes”**

# Putting Yourself “in Her Shoes”

**Benjamin Heng**  
Actor



**Yasinta**  
Benjamin's Helper



Benjamin Heng shares with us his secret for building a great working relationship with his foreign domestic worker (FDW), Yasinta.

FLY Entertainment Artiste and Actor Benjamin Heng and his wife employed Yasinta six years ago when they were about to become new parents. Since the beginning of Yasinta's employment, she has contributed significantly to the household both in her kindness towards the kids and loyalty to her employers.

Earlier this year, Benjamin made a surprise visit to Yasinta's hometown in Indonesia to spend time with her and her family. It was an inspiring and educational trip for both Benjamin and Yasinta.

Let's find out from Benjamin, what being a responsible and inspiring employer means to him and his family and their tips for maintaining a good relationship with their FDW:



## How was it like when your FDW first came into your household? Can you share with us your encounters in the early days of the employment relationship?

We were fortunate as our first FDW was very experienced and had a pleasant personality. She was capable of handling household chores and cooking our daily meals. However, she had to leave due to family commitments at home. Our subsequent FDWs came without any experience and were quite young. They didn't stay long.

## How did you help your FDW settle down and adapt when she started working for you? Do you have any advice for our readers?

We gave her time to settle in and become acquainted with the family. We provided her with a list of do's and don'ts. We encouraged her to ask questions if she was unsure of anything or needed any clarifications. It's important to let your FDW settle in and be comfortable with the family, so that they can start to bond with everyone.

## Even after your FDW has settled into her job, do you continue to supervise her? How important do you think coaching is to bring out the best in her, while ensuring a fruitful employment relationship?

Constant supervision is a challenge as my wife and I have regular 9-to-5 day jobs. We feel that it is best she learns from mistakes. As her employers, we must be patient, but within reasons, of course (laughs). It is always best to encourage them to talk, and ask questions when in doubt.

## How have you managed to maintain this good relationship with your FDW for the last six years?

Yasinta is our 4th FDW in this household. We have succeeded in maintaining a productive and healthy relationship because both parties are able to communicate effectively. Of course, there are times when things go wrong, but we have learnt to be patient and work things out amicably.

## What are some observations you'd like to share with us on bonding with your FDW?

It is pretty much the same employer-employee relationship, as you would find in any other industry. The only difference is that we live under the same roof, hence the relationship is definitely stronger. Frequent chats with your FDW will also help to lighten the load and we cannot stress enough that communicating with them is the key to a successful and healthy relationship!

## What activities do you believe encourage trust building and healthy communication between your family and your FDW?

Frequent interaction among members of the household is top on the list; followed by family outings, be it a simple dinner or an extended social gathering. I would encourage mingling between your FDW and other FDWs of your friends or relatives during these occasions to make them feel welcome.

## Any final comment which you want to tell our readers to have a successful employment relationship with their FDWs?

I was recently involved in a reality TV series with Yasinta for MediaCorp Channel 5. In the programme, I joined two other local TV personalities who travelled to our respective helper's hometown to experience what life was like for them back home. It was a very humbling and emotional experience for me. We now understand how tough life is being away from your family for an extended period of time. We learnt to embrace the difficulties of handling daily tasks without the amenities that we often take for granted in Singapore.

The experience definitely opened up my eyes! We already have a good relationship prior to this trip, but I would say we have deepened the bond further after the trip. I got to meet and know her family more, and vice versa.

I'm not saying everyone needs to go back to their helper's hometown, but it helps to strengthen the relationship when you spend some time "in their shoes". It's also good for those with young children to watch and learn how others live in their own countries where you may not have running toilets, washing machines and a stable WIFI connection.

For Heng and his family, their time spent nurturing their helpers has borne fruit as they built on each other's strengths and weaknesses to create a harmonious working relationship.

"I do not believe a relationship with an FDW is one-sided. Good communication is a two-way street that builds and maintains a strong bond between employee and employer."

He strongly believes that it is important for employers to get to know their FDWs and where they come from. "I truly encourage employers to speak to their helpers to find out more about their daily struggles," said Benjamin. "It's important for both parties and everybody will learn from it."

Most Singaporeans today live in high-rise buildings. Your foreign domestic worker (FDW) may not be used to high-rise living and is less aware of the precautionary measures needed when working at heights.

If you require your FDW to clean windows or hang laundry outside, you must ensure that the following precautions are met:

# Her Safety Matters

## Ensure that your FDW works safely



The window must be locked before your FDW cleans the interior of the window pane.



If your FDW is cleaning the exterior of the window pane:

- You or an adult representative must be present to supervise your FDW.
- There must be window grilles and they must be locked during cleaning. Do not allow your FDW to clean the exterior of the window pane if there are no grilles.
- Your FDW should use cleaning tools with extended handles.



- Your FDW should not stand on chairs, stools or any raised platform when cleaning windows or hanging laundry.
- Don't allow your FDW to climb onto the ledge or lean out of the window to clean the exterior of the window pane or retrieve items on the ledge.

# CDE is here to Help!

Launched on 24 January 2016, the Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE) is a new initiative of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) to promote cordial employer-employee relationships in the domestic household setting. The CDE helps foreign domestic workers (FDWs) who need assistance and advice on employment-related issues or services, such as mental health screening, mediation, legal clinics and emergency shelter.

Besides offering assistances and services for FDWs, CDE also reaches out to FDW employers through dialogues and other engagement platforms.

To find out more, employers can visit or contact the Centre (details below):

**24-hour toll-free helpline:**  
1800 CALL CDE (1800 2255233)

**Address:**  
185A Thomson Road, Goldhill Centre (Level 2), Singapore 307629  
Nearest MRT Station:  
Novena (Exit B, towards United Square)

**Operating Hours:**  
Tuesdays to Sundays  
10am to 6pm  
Closed on Mondays and Public Holidays

Need advice or help?  
CDE provides advisory and mediation services to support you in your employment. 24-Hour Helpline: 1800 CALL CDE (1800 2255 233)



# A Well-Rested Worker Can Take Better Care of Your Family



Rest days are important for all of us. Taking a break from work allows us to relax and recharge, and spend quality time with family and friends. Our foreign domestic workers (FDWs) are no different. They need time off to recharge and be with their friends or to attend to personal matters, such as remitting money or enrolling in training courses. More importantly, a well-rested FDW can take better care of your family and your home.

To help your FDW spend her scheduled rest days constructively, you can discuss with her the activities she can participate or the courses she might be keen to attend.

Two FDWs shared with us how they spent their rest day.

## Rest, Relax, Play...and Learn

Mrs Jocelyn Mompal from the Philippines, has worked with her employer for 14 years. As an avid learner, Jocelyn spends her rest

days attending training courses such as financial management and leadership development.

However, even on her rest days, she never forgets her primary role as an FDW: On every Sunday, before leaving her employer's home, she will ensure that breakfast and lunch are prepared and no outstanding chores are left undone. By doing so, she is able to spend her rest days without any worries.



## Getting Your Priorities Right

Ms Eka Suphriyatin from Indonesia, has worked with her employer for eight years. Since 2009, Eka has had every Sunday off and she would attend various courses, including her A Levels. Eka hopes to continue pursuing higher education and to obtain a degree in either Business or the English language. Eka is grateful to her employers for support, without which all of this would not have been possible. She believes that the key to the good relationship with her employer is mutual trust and open communication.

## About Weekly Rest Days for FDWs

From 1 January 2015, all FDWs in Singapore are entitled to a weekly rest day. If an FDW agrees to work during her rest day, the regulation provides employers the flexibility to provide extra pay, or a replacement rest day within the same month. If you know of an FDW who is not given rest days or compensation-in-lieu, help her by reporting the case to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) by calling the MOM FDW Hotline at 1800 339 5505.

# Money Matters

## Paying your FDW on time, every time

**U**nder the law, employers must pay salary to their FDWs promptly every month.

In April 2015, a 30-year-old Singaporean woman was convicted in the State Courts for failing to pay \$5,778 in salaries to her FDW for one and a half years. She was fined \$32,000 for defaulting on her FDW's salaries.

See the following for tips on salary management:

- Enter into a written employment contract with your FDW. The contract should specify the salary amount, the agreed salary payment date and the mode of payment. This avoids misunderstandings and unnecessary disputes.

- Pay your FDW her salary punctually every month, and not later than seven days after the last day of the salary period.
- Pay your FDW's salary in full. Do not withhold any part of the salary.
- Bring your FDW to open a bank account in her name. Credit her monthly salary into her bank account.
- If your FDW requests for her salary to be credited into her bank account, you are legally obliged to do so.
- Maintain a written record of the monthly salary paid

### Can I keep my FDW's salary on her behalf?

You should not withhold any part of your FDW's salary. Allow your FDW to manage her own finances. You are encouraged to

open a bank account for your FDW and credit her salary into her bank account. This helps to avoid misunderstandings and disputes regarding salary payment in the future. Your FDW should have full access to her bank account, including the ATM card and bank account book. Even if you have your FDW's consent to keep part of her salary on her behalf, your FDW's salary must still be paid in full upon her request. Failure to do so is tantamount to unlawful withholding of salary, and you could be fined up to \$10,000 and/or imprisoned for up to 12 months.

## Need More Help?

For further clarifications on FDW salary issues, employers are advised to approach their employment agencies for help or refer to the FDW Employer handy guide (available on the MOM website).

Employers may also write in to [mom\\_fmmd@mom.gov.sg](mailto:mom_fmmd@mom.gov.sg) or call MOM at (65) 6438 5122.



# Care for her, when she is in your CARE

**I**s your FDW working in Singapore for the first time? Is she feeling homesick and experiencing some stress as she adapts to the new environment? This is not uncommon. New FDWs could feel stressed because they are:

- 1 Overwhelmed by their employer's demands and expectations
- 2 Unable to cope with the daily chores
- 3 Having difficulty adjusting to the new surroundings
- 4 Burdened with financial concerns back home

**You can help your FDW by showing her care and concern!**

## What should I look out for?

Common symptoms of stress include a lack of concentration, decreased productivity, physical pains, and sudden changes in sleep patterns and appetite. Your FDW may cry more easily, feel nervous and have fainting spells.

In more severe cases, stress may result in violence and suicide.

## What Can I Do?

The best way to help your FDW is to build a good rapport with her and look after her well-being. Find out and monitor how she is coping. Your concern will make her feel accepted as part of your family. In turn, she will be more motivated to do her best to take good care of your family. Below are some useful tips.

- ◆ **Communicate with her:** Sit down and discuss with her ways of coping with her workload. Speak with her calmly and gently – if she feels reassured, she is more likely to be open with you.
- ◆ **Be patient and understanding:** If your FDW needs more time to do her tasks well, be patient and guide her along. Do not expect her to get everything right at the first attempt. If she is feeling overwhelmed by her work or have trouble coping, it is a sign that some adjustment to her workload is necessary.
- ◆ **Allow your FDW to communicate** with her family and meet her friends. They can offer her social support to cope with stressful situations. If your FDW has a handphone, allow her to keep it to stay in touch with her loved ones, so that she can have peace of mind when working for you. (You can set some rules on the usage if needed.)

Stress is present in any job. Remember, your FDW is likely to be at home almost all the time and may not have the opportunity to take a breather outside during the work day. She may also be missing her family. So your understanding and patience will mean a lot to her. Your concern will certainly be appreciated by your FDW.

If you find that your FDW is withdrawn, she could be in depression. Please seek professional help for her. The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) offers assessment, counselling and therapy services for FDWs. You can contact the IMH at 6389 2222 (24-hour hotline). Additionally, some employment agencies (EAs) also offer counselling services to FDWs who experience severe difficulties in adjusting to their employers or households. You may wish to speak to your EA.

# Your FDW's well-being is your responsibility

As your FDW's employer, you are responsible for her well-being. What do you need to take note of when it comes to protecting the well-being of your FDW? Read on to find out more:

## Provide Weekly Rest Day

All FDWs whose work permits are issued or renewed on or after 1 January 2013 are entitled to one rest day a week. If your FDW agrees to work on her rest day, you will need to compensate her with at least one day's salary or a replacement rest day taken within the same month.

We encourage FDW employers to provide a weekly rest day for your FDW.

A rest day provides your FDW with an emotional and mental break from work and helps to improve her productivity at work.



## Provide Space and Privacy



You must provide your FDW with a proper place to rest and sleep. Her sleeping area should be private, and be sheltered from natural elements such as the sun, rain or strong winds.

## Ensure Modesty

Your FDW must not be made to sleep in the same room as a male adult/teenager. This is to protect her modesty and allow her to rest with a peace of mind.

## Provide Sufficient Food



You should provide your FDW with sufficient food so that she has the energy to perform domestic chores for your family. You must not deduct her salary to offset the cost of her food.

A happy FDW is a motivated and productive FDW. Take good care of your FDW, and she will put in her best to care for your family.

# A Phone Call Is All That Is Needed



**I**t can be lonely working and living so far away from home. It is natural for FDWs to feel homesick and want to keep in touch with their family and friends. Allow your FDW to have a peace of mind. Let her own and use her mobile phone to stay in contact with her family as that will help to relieve her stress and better cope with the demands of work. If she does not own a handphone, allow her to use the house phone. Your FDW is better able to look after your family if she does not have to constantly worry about her family back home.

You may establish ground rules from the start of her employment, so that she knows your expectations on the usage of the phone and when she can make calls.



## Establish house rules on phone usage

Reach an agreement with your FDW on when and how often she may make phonecalls. Explain to her the reasons for the ground rules, for example, to help her focus on her work, and to help her save on hefty mobile phone charges. If your FDW does not have her own phone, assure her that she can always come to you for help if she needs to make emergency calls.



## Allow your FDW to keep her mobile phone

Your FDW might need to make emergency calls, or her family might need to get in touch with her urgently. Having the handphone with her can give her assurance and keep her mind at ease.



## Encourage your FDW to use prepaid SIM card

If your FDW uses her handphone to make calls, you can encourage her to use a prepaid SIM card as this can help her to manage the cost of her phone bills.



# Communicate to Avoid Conflict

Communication is the key to facilitating a good relationship and avoiding misunderstandings between you and your FDW. Take the time to talk to your FDW about any issues or concerns regarding work expectations and household rules. Encourage her to raise any issues or concerns to you early, so that you can address these together. If your FDW is shy about voicing her concerns, you can initiate conversations with her to find out if she is coping well. Assure her that she can always approach you if she faces any problems.

**R**emember that your FDW may not be as fluent or accustomed to conversing in your preferred language. Be patient in your communication with her, as she may take some time to understand your instructions.

Nevertheless, incidents may happen that can lead to unhappiness and conflicts. For example, your FDW may have used the wrong detergent when doing laundry; you may also have misinterpreted your FDW due to language barriers.

It is important for FDWs and employers to learn how to manage and resolve conflicts. You can try out the five-step process below if you find yourself in such a situation:

1



## Identify the source of the conflict

It is important for both parties, the FDW and the employer, to ask questions in order to identify the root cause of the issue: "When did you feel upset?" or "How did this incident happen?"

2



## Look beyond the conflict

Often, it is not the situation but one's perspective of the situation that causes anger. Do not allow your FDW or yourself to get trapped in emotions and negative feelings. Take a step back and understand why you are feeling angry. Sometimes it could be due to a misunderstanding.

3



## Work towards a solution

After understanding each party's viewpoint, the next step is to identify how to make things better. If it helps, ask a third person for suggestions on how a similar situation can be avoided in the future.

4



## Identify solutions to support

You are listening for the most acceptable course of action. Point out the merits of various ideas, not only from each other's perspective, but in terms of the benefits to the family.

5



## Agreement

Both you and the FDW should be committed to adopt the solutions which both of you have agreed. Some employers may put this down in writing. But in most cases, it is sufficient to establish a common understanding on what each party will do if the same situation occurs in the future.

There may come a time when you no longer require an FDW to take care of your home and your family. Below is a guide on how you can begin the employment termination process.

# When All Good Things Come to an End

## Give her sufficient notice



You must give your FDW sufficient notice when you intend to terminate her employment. The notice period should be in accordance with the employment contract. Similarly, your FDW has to give you the same duration of notice if she wishes to leave employment.

## Send her home promptly



- ◆ You are responsible for sending your FDW back to her hometown in her home country.
- ◆ You must bear the full cost of sending your FDW home, regardless of the reason for the termination. All outstanding salaries due must be paid to your FDW before she is sent home.

## Settle all outstanding salaries



All outstanding salaries due must be paid to your FDW before she is sent home.

## Cancel her work permit



You need to cancel your FDW's work permit. You can do this online via [www.mom.gov.sg](http://www.mom.gov.sg).

### Note

*It is a breach of the Work Permit Conditions if employers fail to send their FDWs home upon cancellation of their Work Permits. It is an offence that carries a fine of \$10,000 or imprisonment of 12 months or both.*

# Healthy Food and Food Preparations

The main objective of this course is to increase participants' knowledge in basic healthy food hygiene. They will learn to understand and use basic words in cooking and will learn how to prepare basic healthy cooking as well.

## What you will learn:

### Healthy Food Hygiene

- ✦ Food Hygiene
- ✦ Food Contamination
- ✦ Keeping the kitchen clean
- ✦ Cleaning the domestic kitchen

### Healthy Food Preparation

- ✦ Ways to select healthier food
- ✦ What is on a food label
- ✦ Choices of fruits and vegetables
- ✦ Cooking methods
- ✦ Basic knowledge and awareness in cooking

**Date** : Every Tuesday (subject to minimum class size)

**Time** : 10am – 5:30pm (Lunch and Refreshments for 2 tea breaks will be provided)

**Venue** : 10 Raeburn Park Blk C Level 2 Singapore 088702

**Fees** : S\$50 nett per participant

### For More Details

Call 62964333 or visit [www.gmcs.com.sg/courses](http://www.gmcs.com.sg/courses) for more info!

# Specialized Aged Care

The main objective of this course is to provide information for the caregiver in order to fulfill the special needs and requirements that are unique to senior citizens.

The aim is for the caregiver to help the elderly live a life that is purposeful and meaningful while retaining as much independence as they can.

## What you will learn:

### Elderly Care

- ✦ Role and Responsibilities of a Caregiver
- ✦ Making the Home Safe and Preventing Falls in the Elderly
- ✦ Senior Nutrition: Feeding the Body, Mind and Soul
- ✦ Medication and the Elderly
- ✦ Personal Hygiene
- ✦ Communication and the Elderly
- ✦ Elderly Fitness / Activities for the Elderly
- ✦ Mobility & Transfers

**Date** : Every Thursday and Friday

**Time** : 10am – 5:30pm (Lunch and Refreshments for 2 tea breaks will be provided)

**Venue** : 420 Keramat Road Singapore 758859

**Fees** : S\$50 nett per participant

### For More Details

Call 62964333 or visit [www.gmcs.com.sg/courses](http://www.gmcs.com.sg/courses) for more info!

# Check Out MOM's Revamped Employment Agency Directory!

Need help to look for a foreign domestic helper, but don't know where to start?

Don't know which employment agency (EA) to choose to help you look for a worker?

- ✓ **MORE USER-FRIENDLY INTERFACE:**  
Easy to navigate
- ✓ **EASY TO USE:**  
Enhanced search function to look for a suitable EA
- ✓ **CONVENIENT:**  
Anytime. Anywhere
- ✓ **EXTRA NEW FEATURES:**  
Assess quality and compare track record of an EA

<http://services.mom.gov.sg/eadirectory>

