

INFOCUS

A publication for employers of foreign domestic workers



MINISTRY OF
MANPOWER

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At Home with *Ariati*



A Happy *FDW*
Helps Make a
Happy Home

Watching
out for her
Emotional Needs



At Home with Ariati



What is the reason for employing an FDW?

Ariati: When I was pregnant with my second child, I knew that it would be a challenge to manage the demands of both work and taking care of the family. I decided to hire a domestic helper to help me.

How long have you employed your FDW?

Ariati: Ella has worked for my family for about 12 years. She is part of my family now.



When Ella first came into your household, how was it like? Can you share with us your experience of the early days of the employment relationship?

Ariati: When she first arrived, she was unable to communicate well in English. I coached her slowly by speaking to her in simple English interspersed with Bahasa Indonesia. I

told her to communicate mainly with me, since my husband could only speak English.

There was an incident that stuck in my mind. I had sent her to deliver something to my friend but she came back shortly and told me that my friend was not at home. I knew she was lying as I had spoken to my friend before asking her to go over. I probed further and Ella eventually confessed that she lied as she could not locate the place and was worried that I would scold her. I took the opportunity to explain to her the importance of trust and honesty. I also offered her a tip, which was to repeat my instructions to ensure she understood what I had said. I find this to be a good way to improve communications between us.

Your FDW has been with your family for 12 years. That's a long time. How did you help your FDW settle down in the beginning, and get used to working for you? Do you have any advice for our readers?

Ariati: I think being kind to Ella played an important part in helping her to settle in. She shares an air-conditioned room with my daughter and has her personal cupboard. I told her that she can just approach me if she ever runs out of any basic necessities like clothing or toiletries, and I will get it for her, without deducting her pay. Sometimes, I would buy her things. For example, in my household, everyone has a designated mug. To make her feel like she is part of the family, I bought one for her as well.

To my relatives and friends, I would introduce Ella as my helper. Ella is more than a maid to my family. I think it is the little things that really matter. We care about her and I would try my best to make her feel welcome and that she is part of my family.

Based on your own experience, how can an employer coach his/her FDW, in order to bring out the best in her, and ensure a fruitful employment?

Ariati: I always give Ella constructive feedback to build up her confidence, and also encourage her to keep trying and learn new things. For instance, when it comes to cooking, I would let her know if the food tasted nice, and also give her tips on how to make it better. I then noticed that her cooking improved. Now she even tries out new recipes from cookbooks!

I find that talking and explaining patiently is more constructive than instructing. They will be more receptive and better understand what is going on. I also shared with her that I would be worried if I could not find her in the house, hence, she made it a habit to always tell me her whereabouts. I also taught her to list down the things she has to do so that she can keep track and not tire herself out.

How do you take care of the well-being of your FDW? Why do you think it's important for employers to do so?

Ariati: I put myself in her shoes and treat her the way I would like to be treated. I allow her the freedom to practise her religion and accept her religious practices. We have mutual respect for one another. I believe that if we give our employees a happy and healthy environment, they will also make a sincere effort to do good work for us! This helps to maintain harmony in the household.

Do you allow your FDW to have a mobile phone? Why do you think it's important to do so?

Ariati: Yes, I allow her to have her own mobile phone, so that she is contactable. When we are out together, I can contact her if she is separated from us or loses her way.

Do you provide a rest day for your FDW? Did you have any reservations and how did you overcome them?

Ariati: I never had any reservations about my helper taking rest days. For me, if there is a need to, I would adjust my rest days, so that my helper can attend educational classes and pick up new skills. However, some FDWs like Ella may not wish to have any rest days to avoid the temptation to spend money unnecessarily, so I pay her salary in-lieu of her rest days.

We always hear stories of bad employers and bad FDWs. Having had the same FDW for the past 12 years, can you share some insights on this perennial gripe?

Ariati: To me, it is a two-way street. Employers must be able to communicate their expectations well and FDWs must also make an honest effort to learn. As employers, we have to understand that no matter how experienced our FDWs may be, they will need time to adapt. After all, every family has different cultures and practices.



Watching out for her Emotional Needs



Everyday, new foreign domestic workers (FDWs) arrive in Singapore to work. They leave their families behind and many travel out of their country for the first time. While they are motivated to work in order to give their families a better life, many will feel anxious working and living in a foreign environment.

It can indeed be stressful to adjust to a new country, a new culture and a new household. You can help your FDW settle in by being patient with her, especially in the initial stages of her employment. She could be overwhelmed by the many new instructions, facing difficulties coping with the workload, or simply homesick and missing her loved ones and children back home.

You can help to look out for these early signs* of stress in your FDW:

1. Loss of weight and/or fatigue
2. Short concentration span and always forgetful
3. Anxious, tense, moody or irritable
4. Complains of aches and pains
5. Dizziness

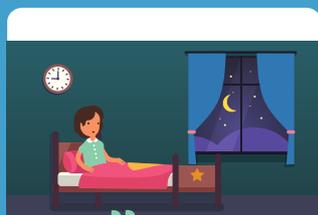
Below are some coping strategies you can use to help your FDW manage stress:



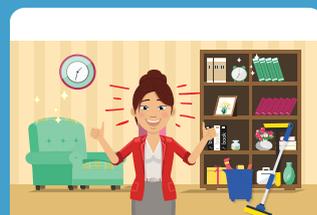
♦ Ask her if anything is troubling her. If it is work-related, you may need to provide more coaching and supervision.



♦ Ask her to call her family or friends for social support



♦ Provide her with enough rest and privacy when she is resting so that she feels energised the next day.



♦ Make her feel accepted by showing care and appreciation for her work.

However, if your FDW appears to be depressed, you may want to seek professional help. The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) offers assessment, counselling and therapy services. Click on www.imh.com.sg to find out more.

Show her you care. Help her cope with the stress, and encourage her to adopt a positive outlook in work and life.

*Adapted from *Overcoming Stress*, Institute of Mental Health, Accessed on 4 Jan 2017, <https://www.imh.com.sg/wellness/page.aspx?id=558>

Her Well-Being Matters

Every employer has a responsibility to take care of their FDW's well-being, including providing her with adequate food and a proper place to rest.

But what does adequate food and proper rest place mean?



Adequate food

- Your FDW needs the energy to carry out the household chores. Provide her with three full meals a day – breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- If she is mainly used to eating rice, she may need more servings if given porridge or noodles.
- Many FDWs are either shy or afraid to raise issues with their employers, for fear of being scolded. You may want to ask your FDW if the food provided is sufficient.
- If she is still hungry after a meal, provide her access to more food or let her help herself to the food items in the house.



Proper rest place

- Your FDW's rest/sleep area must be sufficiently ventilated.
- Consider providing an electrical fan if natural ventilation is inadequate. Rooms with no proper ventilation may result in respiratory problems.
- Provide her with a mattress, a pillow, and a blanket.
- Her rest place must be sheltered from the sun, rain or strong winds. FDWs should not be made to sleep in unsheltered places like the balcony.
- Try to ensure that there is enough space and privacy for your FDW. But she must not be made to share a room with a male adult or teenager.

We believe that a happy FDW will also be a more motivated and productive worker. Like everyone else, your helper needs a good rest after a hard day's work. Take good care of your FDW and help her feel valued. In turn, she will also put in her best to care for your family.

A Happy FDW Helps Make a Happy Home

Be a Caring Employer. Treat your FDW well.



Fostering a Good Working Relationship with your FDW

- ✓ Help her adjust to the new working and living environment.
- ✓ Communicate with her regularly and ask her if she is coping well.
- ✓ Give her time to learn your preferred way of doing the household chores.
- ✓ Repeat your instructions if necessary, as she may not fully understand you.
- ✓ Do not rush through your coaching. Be patient.
- ✓ Show her how to perform the tasks.

Never subject your FDW to any form of ill-treatment or stress that will affect her well-being

- ✗ Frequent scolding
- ✗ Unreasonable rules
- ✗ Punishment
- ✗ Threats



They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

— Carl W. Buechner

A Happy FDW is an asset to your family!

Show your FDW that you care for her. A happy FDW will be an asset to you and your family!



Managing your FDW

Every employer who hires an FDW desires a harmonious employment relationship with her. This takes effort and time to build, as both need to adapt and understand the differences in cultural background and overcome language problems. An employer's patience can also be tested when the FDW repeatedly makes mistakes or fails to understand instructions. If these situations keep happening, what can the employer do?!

Below are some tips!

Janet Seah, an FDW employer for six years, shares her tip to a harmonious FDW-employer relationship: *"The secret to a long lasting relationship with your FDW is mutual-respect. FDWs are human beings too and the least you can do is treat them equally and respect their feelings."*

Getting things right

1. If your FDW has difficulty understanding you, repeat your instructions. If it is about a household chore, show her how to do the task and ask her to repeat your steps.
2. Unlike most of us, FDWs do not live in an urban environment or a high-rise building. Teach her how to do the household chores the way you want them to be done and how to do them safely.
3. In the initial months, guide and supervise her until you are confident she can complete the tasks safely.

Open communication

2. Encourage her to talk to you if she is unsure of instructions or have concerns.
3. Ask her about her family back home, find out about her expectations and aspirations while working here.

Exercising patience and understanding

3. First-time FDWs can become homesick in the initial months. Allow her to call home and talk to her family. If her emotional needs are met, she will be able to adapt more quickly.
4. Give her time to settle in and adjust to working in your household.
5. Be patient when teaching her how the tasks should be performed.
6. Ask her regularly if she can cope with her workload, and discuss ways to help her adapt to your household requirements.

Be sensitive

FDWs come from cultural backgrounds markedly different from ours, and need time to understand our way of life. Some may have different cultural and religious practices from yours. Be understanding and sensitive. If you observe anxiousness or hesitance in carrying out some tasks, ask her if she is uncomfortable doing them, such as looking after the family's dog.

Resolving issues and misunderstandings early can go a long way in establishing a good and sustainable employer-FDW relationship.

MOBILE CDE

Bringing our services closer to you



Having questions regarding your roles and responsibilities as an employer? Do you need someone whom you can seek guidance from? Help is here! With the new Mobile CDE, you can now seek help directly from the centre staff nearer to your homes.

The Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE) was set up by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) in January 2016. CDE engages all stakeholders proactively to harmonise the relationship among all concerned parties so as to engender mutual understanding and respect. Launched on 31 July 2016, the objective of the Mobile CDE is to provide on-the-spot employment-related advisory to both domestic employees and employers. Currently, Mobile CDE is deployed for two Sundays a month to various areas.

*Details of upcoming Mobile CDE deployments will be posted on their Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/cde.singapore>.



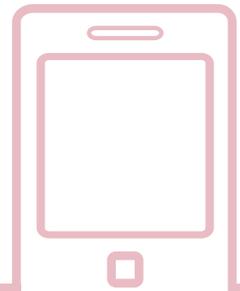
To find out more, employers can visit or contact the Centre (details below):

24-hour toll-free helpline:
1800 CALL CDE (1800 2255 233)

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

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

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)



FIGHT DENGUE

Remove stagnant water at home to protect your families and neighbourhoods.



Tips to protect yourself:



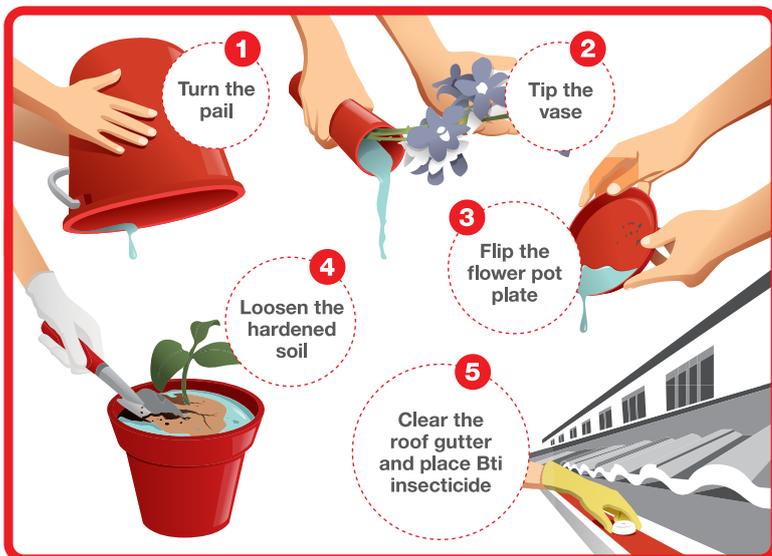
Apply insect repellent



Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants



Seek medical attention immediately if you feel unwell



Please allow NEA officers into your home for inspection and to spray insecticide to kill any mosquitoes.

OUR LIVES. OUR FIGHT.
DO THE 5-STEP MOZZIE WIPEOUT TODAY.



An Initiative By
National Environment Agency

For more information, visit www.nea.gov.sg or www.moh.gov.sg

EA Customer Rating System to Raise Standards in FDW-Placing Employment Agencies

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) launched the Employment Agency Customer Ratings System for employers of foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in June 2016. With this initiative, employers who engaged the services of EAs would receive an SMS invitation to rate their EAs. These customer ratings are aggregated and available on MOM's **Employment Agencies and Personnel Search eService page**, or better known as the EA Directory. The aggregated ratings of each EA provide the feedback to help them improve their service levels, and also give prospective employers seeking for EA services, another source of information to help them in their EA selection.

If you have recently used the services of an EA to hire an FDW, you will receive an SMS from MOM inviting you to go online to give your feedback. Please remember to participate if you receive the SMS.



Frequently-Asked Questions

1. What is the customer rating system about?

An FDW employer who had engaged an EA to hire an FDW will receive an SMS to rate the EA's service. This is usually a few months after the FDW placement, to allow time for the employer to receive the full suite of EA's services, including post-deployment services.

Employers will be invited to rate the EA's performance in four areas:

- ✦ *How well did your EA explain the application process, fees, service contract and the FDW employment contract to you? (5-point rating scale)*
- ✦ *How helpful was your EA when you needed advice or help? (5-point rating scale)*
- ✦ *How able was your EA in finding an FDW that meets your need? (5-point rating scale)*
- ✦ *Would you recommend the EA to your friends? (Yes/No)*

While this is voluntary, employers are strongly encouraged to participate. It will only take a few minutes to complete. The aggregated rating for the individual questions and the EA's overall rating will be published on MOM's Employment Agencies and Personnel Search E-Service page (<https://services.mom.gov.sg/eirectory/>)

2. Can the employer be identified through the **feedback**?

Each employer's rating will form part of the EA's aggregated rating which will be published in the MOM's Employment Agencies and Personnel Search E-Service page. Individual employer's ratings will not be displayed and identities of employers who took part will be kept strictly confidential.



Spotlight: Honouring FDW Employer of the Year at the 7th Annual **FDW** Day

At the 2016 Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) Day, Mdm Catherine Goh received the FDW Employer of the Year award for exemplary care towards her FDW Kanthi Panditha. Indeed, Mdm Goh's story is a commendable example of a good employer-FDW relationship that had lasted over 22 years.

Mdm Goh has always treated Kanthi like family. When Kanthi was hospitalised for an operation, Mdm Goh visited her daily, took good care of her and gave her complete rest until she fully recovered. In another occasion, when Kanthi's son was 14 years old, Mdm Goh paid for his trip to Singapore to spend two weeks with his mother and visit the attractions here. According to Kanthi, "it was an opportunity my son will never forget in his lifetime".

There were many other heartwarming recollections. Mdm Goh would make the effort to celebrate Kanthi's birthdays by bringing her out for good meals. In particular, Mdm Goh gave Kanthi a big "ang pow" (red packet) for her 50th birthday, and bought her a return air ticket to Sri Lanka to spend a week with her family. For other occasions, such as the birth of Kanthi's grandson or the death of Kanthi's mother, Mdm Goh was understanding and allowed her to go back to Sri Lanka so that she could be with her family.

Mdm Catherine Goh's story is one of the many heartwarming stories we hear of FDW employers and their FDWs. It shows how mutual respect and care can help forge a strong and lasting relationship between an FDW and her employer. The Minister of State for Manpower, Mr Sam Tan, presented the award to Mdm Goh at the award presentation ceremony. As shared by Mr Tan at the award ceremony, "There must be open communication, mutual care and respect, and a willingness to understand and accommodate each other."

MOM would like to extend our heartiest congratulations to Mdm Goh and Ms Kanthi. We are proud of your achievements!

[The above examples were taken from Kanthi's write-up when she nominated Mdm Goh for the FDW Employer of the Year Award 2016].



How can I better care for my loved one?



\$200
TRAINING
GRANT

With the **Caregivers Training Grant (CTG)**, you can tap on an annual \$200 subsidy to attend approved training courses. Pick up skills and techniques to better care for your elderly or loved ones with disabilities!

To find out more about the type of courses available and how to apply, visit www.silverpages.sg/CTG or call the Singapore Silver Line at 1800-650-6060