

INFOCUS



MINISTRY OF
MANPOWER

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SPOTLIGHT

A Family AFFAIR

Eko, from Indonesia, has been with the **Toh household** for almost a decade and is now considered a part of the family. Read on and discover the secrets to a harmonious relationship between employer and Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW).

What are some of Eko's main duties at home?

She helps look after our children and does housework like cooking and cleaning. We don't really specify what she needs to do because she already knows. Basically, she looks after everyone in the family.

Having an FDW stay on for five years or more is quite rare. How did you develop such a harmonious working relationship with Eko?

It's all about give and take. We realised that there will be ups and downs in the relationship and we tolerate it to a certain extent. If she makes mistakes, we don't blow it out of proportion because we also make mistakes. As long as she's honest and we develop trust and she gets along well with everyone – especially the kids – then everything is good.

How do you make Eko feel like she's part of your family?

We bring her along on family trips to places like Hong Kong, Macau and Malaysia. We also celebrate her birthday. And since she's a mother, we celebrate Mother's Day together too. We buy her cake and presents, and sometimes, we all dine out together.

Let's talk safety. How do you ensure that Eko is safe at all times while working?

We tell her not to clean the windows' exterior. We also share tips and give reminders. For example, we tell her to make sure that the floor isn't wet while she is working so that she doesn't slip and hurt herself. She's very knowledgeable about housework

Jennett Lim Hong Lian, 54
Housewife

Steven Toh Chin Hock, 53
Sales Manager



Clarence, 14

Eko, 37

Sheila, 19

though, which is great. Sometimes, she's the one who tells us how to properly do chores! *chuckles*

Why is the safety of your FDW important to you as her employer?

If we don't keep her safe, then it won't be any different from being a murderer. At the end of the day, the misfortune that happens to your FDW can come back to you. You'll forever feel guilty for that injury or loss of life.

How do you feel about the tighter safety requirements imposed on FDW employers?

We understand that they come to Singapore and the lifestyle here is totally

different. We feel that FDWs should know what to do and what they shouldn't do as well. They must educate themselves on dos and don'ts, which can result in a harmonious and safe relationship.



EKO SAYS...

On staying with her employers for almost a decade:

"It's because I'm comfortable around them and they treat me fairly. I feel happy working for them."

On work safety:

"I always try to be careful and I focus on doing my job the safe and proper way."

Putting

SAFETY

Above All

WHAT EMPLOYERS MUST DO

- Employers must educate their FDWs on the new regulations - that they are not permitted to clean the window exteriors unless the two conditions are met.
- Employers must inform and educate their family members on the regulations by reminding them to not let FDWs clean the window exteriors without the two conditions in place.

IF THE WINDOWS DO NOT HAVE GRILLES, EMPLOYER MUST:

- Instruct FDW not to clean the window exteriors since it is not allowed, even when supervised.

IF THE WINDOWS HAVE GRILLES, EMPLOYER MUST:

- Be present to supervise the FDW while the window exterior is being cleaned. Employer may appoint a suitable adult representative to supervise her if needed.
- Ensure the FDW remains indoors while cleaning windows.
- Ensure the FDW does not extend any part of her body, except her arms, beyond the window ledge.
- Provide extendable cleaning tools for safe window cleaning and ensure that the FDW uses it when cleaning.
- Frequently remind the FDW on what she can and cannot do. The employer should encourage the FDW to ask questions whenever there is something she does not understand.

DEVELOPING A SAFETY MINDSET

Everyone, not just FDWs, should practise proper safety when doing household chores.

You must ensure the safety of your FDW as you would ensure yours and your family members. FDWs are also mothers, sisters and daughters. Every life is too precious and the guilt and regret over that life lost will be hard to bear.

EMPLOYERS SHALL NOT PERMIT FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKERS (FDWS) TO CLEAN WINDOW EXTERIORS

This year, there have been nine cases of FDWs falling to their deaths while working. The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) is deeply concerned over this tragic and unnecessary loss of life.

On 4 June 2012, MOM announced that FDW employers **shall not permit** their FDWs **to clean window exteriors** unless these two conditions are met:

- a. The employer or a suitable adult representative of the employer is present to supervise the FDW; and
- b. Window grilles have been installed and are locked at all times during the cleaning process.

The new requirement was applied with immediate effect to all homes, except for those located on the ground level or along common corridors.

Employers can refer to the *FDW Employer's Guidebook* to familiarise themselves with the safety Dos and Don'ts, which can be downloaded from MOM's website at www.mom.gov.sg/FDW-publications.

TOUGHER PENALTIES

Failure to comply with these tightened requirements is a breach of the Work Permit Conditions. For added deterrence, MOM intends to double the penalties from the current S\$5,000 fine and/or six-month imprisonment to S\$10,000 fine and/or 12-month imprisonment. This is part of the ongoing review of the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act and its subsidiary legislation. Employers will also be barred from hiring an FDW during the period of investigations, which could take up to a year.

PAYING SALARIES ON TIME:

An Absolute Must

Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) Joycelyn and Joessel lodged complaints at the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) because their employer did not pay them their salaries for months. What happened?

Investigations by MOM revealed that the 39-year-old Singaporean employer failed to pay his two FDWs their salaries, which amounted to S\$2,400. He was convicted on 31 July 2012 and was fined S\$4,170.

The Work Permit Conditions state that employers must pay their FDW's salaries no later than seven days after the last day of the salary period. Employers who fail to do so will be fined up to S\$5,000 or imprisoned for up to six months or both. All outstanding salary and levy arrears must be settled.



ADVISORY FROM MOM

- Pay your FDW's salary no later than seven days after the last day of the salary period.
- Carefully manage your monthly finance and cash flow situation to comply with the Work Permit Conditions.
- Maintain a proper record of the monthly salary paid to the FDW, which is required by law.
- Employer and FDW are strongly encouraged to endorse the record each time there is a payment.
- You are advised not to safe keep the salaries of your FDW even though she may have agreed to such arrangements. Notwithstanding there being agreements on safe keeping, MOM still receives complaints from some of these FDWs that they have not received their salaries in full towards the end of their employment.
- As a good practice, you should allow your FDW to manage salaries and money matters on her own, so as to minimise misunderstandings.

CHECKLIST

Lean On Me: PROPER ELDERLY CARE

Your Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) may not be a trained nurse, but you can still help her give your elderly family members the special care they require. Here are some simple guidelines to follow.

MOBILITY

- Hold elderly's arm firmly and support his/her back when walking.
- To prevent falls, ensure that no objects (ie. toys, footwear, etc.) are left on the floor and that the floor is always dry.
- Before transferring elderly from bed to wheelchair or vice versa, ensure that wheelchair wheels are locked.
- To prevent injury when moving elderly, FDW should bend her knees and keep back straight.
- Hug elderly around his/her back, instead of lifting from armpits. This results in a safer, firmer hold.



MEALS

- Ensure that food is cut into small portions and never scalding hot.
- When feeding elderly, check that they have properly chewed and swallowed their food before they take another bite.



BATHS

- Prepare a tub of warm water, mild soap and towels for gentle sponge baths.
- When rinsing off, be careful to prevent soapy water from getting into elderly's eyes and ears.



GOT AN EMERGENCY?

Here's what you need...

First aid kit essentials for seniors: A digital thermometer, gauze, adhesive tape, a flashlight, aspirin, latex gloves, scissors, a thermometer, tweezers, a blanket, triangular bandages, an instant cold pack, saline solution, antiseptic solution.

SINGAPORE EMERGENCY NUMBERS:

Fire/Ambulance: 995

Civic Ambulance: 6333 3000

Police: 999

SETTLING IN *Safely*

The Settling-In Programme (SIP) is now compulsory for all new Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) in Singapore. Here's a quick overview of what the course covers.

ABOUT SINGAPORE

FDWs are reminded of their employment goals and are also taught some common Singaporean cultural/lifestyle practices.

EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

FDWs are reminded of their work permit conditions and employers' responsibilities to ensure their safety. They are also given the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) FDW helpline to call when faced with problems.

KNOW THE RISKS

FDWs are taught the risks of working at heights, such as standing on elevated platforms or tiptoeing to hang laundry/clean windows.

VIDEO AND DEMONSTRATION

A video on the risk of working at



height is screened, along with a demonstration of the correct ways to clean windows/hang laundry.

PRACTICAL

Each FDW is asked to practise hanging laundry/cleaning windows safely.

Despite these precautions, employers must supervise FDWs to prevent them from endangering their lives while carrying out chores. Employers must also know that the home environment is different compared to what the FDW experienced during the SIP.

SAFETY FIRST

If your FDW hasn't attended the SIP or the Safety Awareness Course (SAC), she can attend a new four-hour course run by Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Skills Training, which covers topics like identifying risks while at work, proper care for children and working safely at heights.

Cost: **S\$5** per FDW,
S\$30 per employer

If you and your FDW would like to attend this safety course, visit www.gmcs.com.sg for more information.



When employers create an environment where FDWs can easily communicate with them, FDWs feel comfortable and can settle down better. FDWs who can openly share their feelings are not afraid to seek help when in doubt. This will benefit employers, who

Communication:

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR FDWS BETTER

Communicating effectively with your Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) will be one of your most immediate concerns.

can then better understand and manage their FDWs, and find ways to help them overcome challenges.

Employers should understand that FDWs are vulnerable or may experience homesickness, so please be patient and tolerant. Employers should also assure their FDWs that they can approach them for help. It is a simple gesture, but definitely goes a long way in cultivating a long-term relationship built on trust and openness.

SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

If you have a smartphone, download an app that can translate and pronounce simple phrases in your FDW's native language. Alternatively, get a handy phrase book to practise basic words and use it as a reference when communicating with your FDW.

Teach your FDW the basics of communicating in English or your native language.

Learn some important phrases in your FDW's native language to communicate more effectively in an emergency.

Take time to practise and use these phrases when communicating with your FDW.

Need Help?

Employers may get in touch with the Association of Employment Agencies (Singapore) at 6836 2618 for independent advice on employment matters between employers and their FDW or for dispute resolution between the employer and their employment agency.