

Raise them with respect

A volunteering period at the paediatric ward taught a child development specialist why it's important to bring children up with respect, writes

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RACHEAL Kwacz, 35, spent her teenage years in suburban Damansara Jaya going to the cancer paediatric ward of the Universiti Malaysia Medical Centre, bringing school to critically ill children.

While teenagers her age were busy going out with friends or discovering music and movies, Kwacz volunteered because she naturally "loves children". She taught them how to read, write and draw with a group of volunteers and honed her skills of communicating with them.

It was that stint that made her realise that children are often misunderstood people, resulting in a communication gap and breakdown between them and adults. She was a teenager then half child, half-adult

So she was more receptive and understanding of them compared to a fully grown person who has forgotten the innocent follies of a child.

"When you need to deal with cancer-stricken children, your communication

Kwacz with some of the toys she sourced under her brand, Racheal Kate. skills change. You have to learn to be more emphatic. These children have gone through so much, even more than adults, so it takes great skill to talk to them.

"You need ways and words to explain their conditions in a way they can process instead of distracting them from the issue that they are chronically ill. How do you make a child understand something as complex as cancer and its treatment?"

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A mother to 4-year-old Ella Grace, Kwacz came back eight years ago because she realised the importance of the old adage that it takes a whole village to raise a child. She wanted to bring up Ella Grace in a community of relatives "because there are always things that grandfathers and your favourite aunt can teach you that your parents can't".

"That's the value of family and that's why we lived in a big house with 11 people," she says.

I ask her if including children in decisionmaking would lead them to be entitled. Traditional parenting says parents decide because parents know best.

"Parents still decide," she says.



The toys encourage playtimes between adult and child.



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Kwacz with some of the toys she sourced under her brand, Racheal Kate.

"And they have to create boundaries and be strict about them but within those boundaries, let children explore and decide,"

Kwacz makes an interesting point about children putting shoes on the wrong side because they don't know left and right.

"The automatic response is parents will tell them that is wrong and correct it. But maybe, if we let them wear wrong side shoes for a moment, they will realise that it's uncomfortable and will begin to know that this is the wrong way of putting on shoes.

"We don't teach kids how to deal with disappointments, how to make mistakes and learn from them. We don't teach them enough on how to deal with emotions like anger, jealousy or inadequacy, yet these are important skills to learn if you want to go through life being happy, fulfilled and confident.