

# Children with learning disabilities need early intervention, says Unicef

KUALA LUMPUR — Parents must realise the importance of early intervention for children with learning disabilities or development delays in reaching their full potential, the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) said.

Its spokesman Yummy Ang said early intervention education was important for such children.

A mother of five herself, she understands the urgency and importance of early intervention.

"Not many are aware or, even worse, would want to admit their children's situation," she said.

"It is only natural that we as parents want the best for our children, but academic success, while important, should not be the only end goal."

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Ang said she could understand some parents might not be able to accept the fact their children have learning disabilities but their realisation, understanding and compassion would help create a much more supportive environment.

"What we really want for our child is a happy and fulfilling life. With encouragement and the right support, they can build a strong sense of self-confidence and a solid foundation for a life-long success," she said.

Ang said early intervention education

was important in providing the information and support parents needed to maximise their children's overall development.

"Parents, of course, would want to remedy the situation but your job as a parent is not to cure the learning disability, but to give your child the social and emotional tools he or she needs to work through challenges," she said.

She pointed out early intervention would help parents do their own research and keep abreast with new developments in learning disability programmes, therapies, and educational techniques.

"They may be tempted to look to other methods for solutions at first. But parents or caretakers are the foremost experts on their own children, so they must take charge when it comes to finding the tools

their children need in order to learn," she said.

Ang, 52, said early education intervention should be integrated in schools to better change public perception.

"We as a society are not doing enough to help the situation. We need to expose more people to early intervention education," she said.

"That is why we need to include early intervention programmes in the primary and secondary school curriculum. The inclusive education could foster understanding, compassion and comprehension among these children peers.

"Eventually, society itself needs to see past a person's disabilities. I believe any person, be he abled or disabled, has dignity and is able to reach full potential."