

# Bond with the wired ones



ST PHOTO: RAJ NADARAJAN

**American researcher Tim Elmore believes that a different style of parenting is needed for the Generation iY**

Jane Ng

**Y**ou have heard of Generation Y or Gen Y but probably not Gen iY. They are the younger of the Gen Y folks, born in the 1990s, have less empathy than their seniors and see technology as an appendage to their bodies.

Called iY because of their obsession with everything i – internet, iPhone, iChat – they require a different style of parenting, said American researcher Tim Elmore (above), who coined the term.

Dr Elmore, who was in Singapore recently, gave a talk at Temasek Polytechnic's Character Education Forum, organised by the polytechnic's Centre for Character Education. Speaking to about 500 parents and teachers, he gave advice on how to cope with these young people, who think they can change the world and do so "by noon on Friday".

Mostly, they believe that they can achieve this goal by sitting in front of a computer. Hence his other term for them: "slactivists" – they are both slackers and activists, who would join online campaigns to support causes they believe in.

To help parents understand this generation, he listed some character traits of the young people: They see life as a cafeteria where they can make up their own meals; and they are very confident and well connected socially. At the same time, they appear to have what he calls the "Neverland Syndrome" – the characteristics of kids who do not want to grow up.

This is a result of how their parents have raised them, he said. "Some are helicopter parents – they hover over their children too much. Then there are the karaoke parents who mimic their children's dressing and are more their children's pal than a parent."

With kids exposed to so much information from, say, YouTube videos, while at the same time lacking real-life experience, it creates in them what he called an artificial maturity. "I don't think they're bad kids but they have this confidence that will take real-life experience to temper and give reality checks," he said.

A way parents can manage this is to balance screen time with real-life experiences, he added, relating his experience dealing with his children, Bethany, 23, and Jonathan, 19. "We said if you had so many hours on the computer, we would equal those with experiences outside technology, which could include playing or taking them to work with homeless people."

Another thing parents can do is to judiciously give their kids autonomy and responsibility. Dr Elmore said: "My son has a driver's licence. So if he asks to use the car, I say, 'Sure, but you have to fill it up with gas.' You can't have one without the other or it doesn't get them ready to be healthy adults."

To get Jonathan to cut down on playing video games, he showed his son research on how gamers' grades tended to drop.

The result? Jonathan decided on his own to reduce the time spent on video games. "It probably wouldn't have worked if I said, 'Jonathan, stop playing that.' That needed to be his decision."

Parents should also learn what their kids love, he said. "I watch MTV and I do not enjoy it, but it helps me see why they think or speak like that."

But perhaps the most relevant piece of advice to Singaporean parents is a reminder to focus on the child's strengths and develop them. "When you get your child's report card, focus on the As and not the Ds. This will help them find their niche in this world."

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Dr Tim Elmore's books are sold at Equipping Leaders for Asia at Jalan Pemimpin. For details, call Jenny Chng on 6255-7608 or e-mail [jennychngequippingleadersasia.org](mailto:jennychngequippingleadersasia.org).

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DR TIM ELMORE on how parents should focus on and develop their children's strengths