

Parentification

IN THE ASIAN
HOUSEHOLD

What is “Parentification”?

The process in which children/adolescents assume the role of the parent and other adult responsibilities.

The roles of parent and child are reversed, resulting with the child "stepping up" as the caretaker or "protector" of the family.

Parentification can result from difficult life circumstances such as immigration, divorce, the death of a family member, abuse, or mental illness in a parent/parents.

Often, children – especially first-borns – in immigrant families are taught to contribute to the family, to always be grateful for what their parents provide, and to avoid failure.

Many children of immigrant families experience parentification and grow up in intense childhoods.

You may have been responsible for making appointments, translating important documents for your parents, helping your younger siblings with homework, cooking and cleaning, help your parents with finances, etc.

Migrating to a new country and adjusting to a new life is stressful for many people. Your family may have moved away from trauma or difficult situations.

Sometimes, parents depend on their children to cope and alleviate this stress.

Children and adolescents who are assigned parental responsibilities may not have the space to be children.

Parentification can also impact the emotional development of youth. For instance, the process can result in feelings of anxiety about taking care of others and their needs. Some may struggle with processing emotions, asking for help, self-blame, internalized guilt, etc.

For those who experience parentification:

You are worth it

Your feelings are valid

It is acceptable to put your own needs first

It's okay to ask for help

You are not alone