

High-rise safety for home helpers

It was Anna's first time away from home. On top of that, she had never lived or worked in a high-rise home. Now she had to hang laundry and clean windows at a 12th storey flat.

Many foreign domestic workers are in a similar position, and depend largely on their employers to educate and supervise them on performing their chores safely in an environment that is unfamiliar to them.

Recounted Mrs Oringa Vathanasin, who has been employing foreign help for 10 years: "When my maid first arrived, I showed her the safe way to clean windows and hang laundry, before getting her to carry out these tasks with me.

"When she seemed more certain, I allowed her to do these chores on her own, but only when I was around to watch her."

Because previous maids she employed were also from villages, like Anna (not her real name) is, Mrs Vathanasin knew she could not take for granted that her maid would know how to tackle some chores that could be dangerous if they are not done the right way.

So she made it a point to closely supervise her maid during the woman's first three months on the job.

"Every household is different and every employer has different expectations. So it's important to orientate her to ensure your maid can perform household chores

Mrs Vathanasin makes sure her maids learn to do household chores in a safe manner.

without compromising her own safety," she added.

She also encourages her maid to seek her advice before attempting to perform any task that could be risky.

Mrs Vathanasin believes such effort and patience in supervising a maid are necessary to help prevent unpleasant episodes. As an employer, she has a

moral obligation to look after the safety and welfare of her employee.

She said: "I've told her that it's okay to let go of the bamboo pole of wet clothes if she feels that the weight of the laundry is pulling her out of the window.

"I wouldn't want her to jeopardise her life."

SAFETY CHECKLIST

Hanging laundry

DO:

- Hang heavier clothes closer to the bracket and light clothes at the far end of the pole.
- Be extra careful on windy and rainy days as the clothes are more difficult to handle then.



Cleaning windows

DO:

- Lock window grilles before cleaning the windows.
- Use safe cleaning tools such as those with extended handles, or use a magnetic cleaner.

