

# Mental health task force looking to mitigate online risks

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With youth spending much of their time on social media like Twitter and Instagram and messaging platforms like WhatsApp, an inter-agency task force on mental health is working with technology platforms on ways to promote positive practices online.

At a citizens' panel on youth mental health yesterday, Minister of State for Social and Family Development and Education Sun Xueling said the Interagency Taskforce on Mental Health and Well-being will also look at developing practical solutions to mitigate online risks, such as cyber bullying.

The task force, formed in July last year, is refining its recommendations and will be seeking the public's views in the coming months to develop a national strategy and action plan on mental health. It is also looking at ways to make mental health services more accessible and reduce the stigma around seeking help, said Ms Sun, who is a member of the task force.

The citizens' panel will hold seven online sessions and involve about 50 participants from Republic Polytechnic to think of ways to build greater mental resilience among youth. The sessions are organised by the Institute of Policy Studies and funded by charity foundation Ngee Ann Kongsi.

Ms Sun told *The Sunday Times*: "Students use social media to interact with one another and during the pandemic, more so than ever. It has become an important channel for them to stay connected with friends and organise themselves around causes they feel strongly about. But social media can also become a place where

there are echo chambers, where hurtful and inappropriate comments are made, and there is a lack of interventions and moderation of such content."

Since the start of this year, upper secondary students island-wide have had a new character and citizenship education curriculum that tackles cyber wellness. It hopes to instil the need to be respectful and considered in online comments, to recognise cyber bullying, to be a source of support for one another and to work with trusted adults when they come across hurtful incidents, said Ms Sun.

The task force will also find ways to reduce the stigma around seeking help and make mental health services more coordinated and accessible, Ms Sun said. This may include ensuring support is channelled to where it is most needed, and bringing in more partners to the ecosystem. "This may also mean more training for our mental health professionals, practitioners and also peers."

Yesterday evening, a music festival saw singer-songwriters Yanni Ruth Chin, 22, and Erika Prakash, 23, speaking about their struggles with anxiety and depression.

The show, *Illuminate – Beauty In Imperfection*, was organised by Project Green Ribbon, a non-profit mental health organisation.

At the event, Mr Eric Chua, Parliamentary Secretary for Social and Family Development, said: "It is important that we have young people coming together to share their experiences with other youth so that this will resonate better with them, and help to collectively build a stronger peer support culture here in Singapore."

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