

## Mental health task force in S'pore working with social media platforms to mitigate cyber bullying

**Shermaine Ang,**  
*The Straits Times*, 19 March 2022

SINGAPORE - With the 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.

Speaking at the launch of a citizens' panel on youth mental health on Saturday morning (March 19), Minister of State for Social and Family Development 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.

Set up by the ministries of Health and Social and Family Development, the task force oversees mental health efforts here, focusing on issues that require inter-agency collaboration.

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 the youth. They are organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and funded by charity foundation Ngee Ann Kongsi.

Ms Sun, who is also Minister of State for Education, told The Straits 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 been taught a [new character and citizenship education curriculum which tackles cyber wellness issues](#).

It hopes to instil in students the need to be respectful and considered in their online comments, to recognise cyber bullying, to be a source of support for one another and work with trusted adults when they come across hurtful incidents, said Ms Sun.

Besides the focus on creating a healthy online culture, the task force will also find ways to reduce the stigma around seeking help and make mental health services more coordinated and accessible, she said.

This may include ensuring support is channelled to where it is most needed, and bringing in more partners to the "ecosystem", she said.

"This may also mean more training for our mental health professionals, practitioners and also peers," she added.

On Saturday evening, a music festival also raised the issue of the stigma around opening up about mental health struggles, with singer-songwriters Yanni Ruth Chin, 22, and Erika Prakash, 23, speaking about their struggles with anxiety and depression.

The show, called Illuminate - Beauty In Imperfection, was organised by Project Green Ribbon, a non-profit mental health organisation. It was live-streamed on Project Green Ribbon's social media channels.

Speaking 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."