

Boosting parents' mental health and cyber wellness skills so they can better help their children



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SINGAPORE - Parents will soon get more help in levelling up their mental health knowledge and cyber wellness, so that they can talk openly and constructively to their children about mental well-being issues.

Recognising that parents want to help their children in this aspect, the Ministry of Education (MOE) plans to provide parents with toolkits as well as educational and training resources so that they can approach the conversations effectively.

This was announced by Minister of State for Education and Social and Family Development Sun Xueling at the second Silver Ribbon Mental Health Awards Ceremony, which was held virtually on Tuesday (Dec 7).

This comes after survey findings on youth mental well-being revealed that [98 per cent of respondents felt stressed](#), 88 per cent felt lonely, 89 per cent felt lost, and 36 per cent have felt suicidal at some point.

The survey of 675 young people aged 12 to 35 was conducted by mental health advocacy organisation Silver Ribbon (Singapore) between July and the beginning of December.

"Many young people have shared that mental well-being issues can be triggered by a whole host of factors," said Ms Sun.

"This includes parental expectations, personal expectations for themselves, and also, unfortunately, the disruptions that Covid-19 has caused to their education and career plans, which has added uncertainty to their lives."

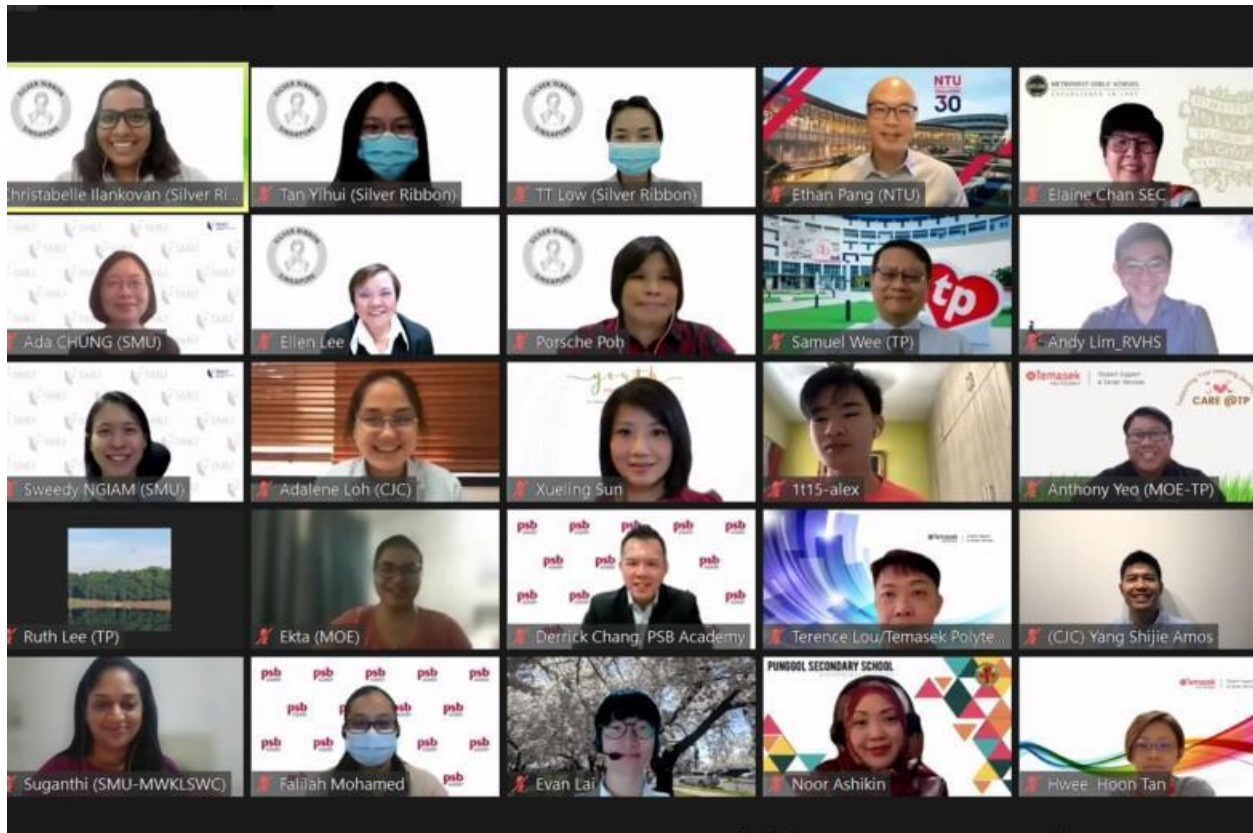
Disruptions to their education and social activities have also resulted in more young people feeling lonely.

And while teachers, staff and counsellors have been trained to spot signs of distress in students and to provide them with guidance and support, the students' family members and parents must also be engaged, Ms Sun said.

"We realise that parents may not know what is the appropriate language to use when their children share with them a mental health issue," she added.

Silver Ribbon president Ellen Lee said youth have told counsellors that they do not approach their parents because they cannot communicate well with them.

She noted that parents have also shared that their children do not confide in them.



"Parents have approached us to share that they feel helpless because, one, they have limited mental health knowledge... They are (also) very worried about making the wrong decision, which might affect their relationship with their kids and their kids' future," Ms Lee said.

Acknowledging that students, parents and the community alike have concerns over the stigma surrounding mental well-being issues, Ms Sun said: "We want to normalise conversations around mental well-being issues - to let young people and, in fact, a whole society know that it's okay to reach out... as they try to overcome mental well-being issues."

She added that the Silver Ribbon Mental Health Awards - given to nine educational institutions and four school projects at Tuesday's ceremony - recognised "meaningful and important efforts made by our schools and institutions in their promotion of mental health".

The student-run CJC On Air podcast by Catholic Junior College was among the winning projects. Run by a team of 11 students, it covers

healthy ways of thinking about and dealing with anxiety and stress through interviews with their seniors, students and teachers.

Two episodes, under 30 minutes each, have been launched, with the third slated for Dec 20.

One of the students involved, Reyes Jason Cheng, 17, who is also vice-president of the student council, said: "We also wanted to sustain close community ties and support networks during these trying times because students are getting more and more isolated in this Covid-19 situation..."

"We were hoping that with early detection and greater self-awareness from the students, they can seek help for early intervention before the situation gets worse."