

Parents will get help to talk to kids about mental health

MOE to provide toolkits, educational and training resources so they can approach conversation effectively

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Parents will soon get more help in levelling up their knowledge of mental health 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 plans to provide parents with toolkits as well as educational and training resources so 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 yesterday.

The announcement came 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) from July to the start of this month.

"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 have added uncertainty to their lives."

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

While teachers, school staff and counsellors have been trained to spot signs of distress in students and provide them with guidance and support, the students' parents and other family members 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 said.

Silver Ribbon president Ellen Lee said young people have told counsellors that they do not approach their parents because they cannot communicate well with them. She noted that parents have also said their children do not confide in them.

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

She said the Silver Ribbon Mental Health Awards - given to nine educational institutions and four school projects at yesterday'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 senior schoolmates, other students and teachers.

One of the students involved, Reyes Jason Cheng, 17, said: "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."