

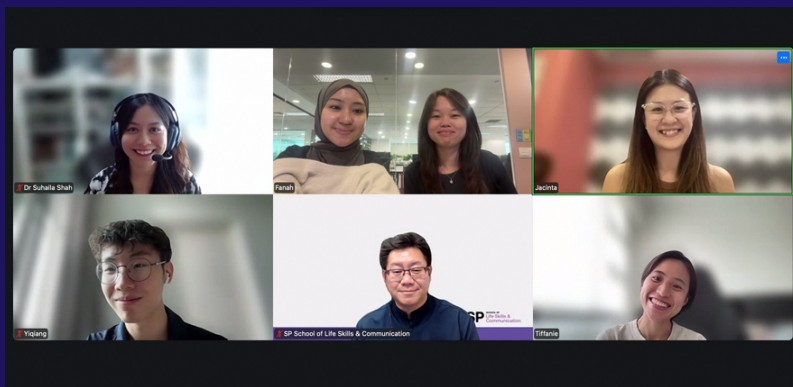
National Youth Council (NYC) x Singapore Polytechnic (SP) Webinar Series 2025-2026:

Webinar #1 - Tackling Social Disconnect in a Social Media Era

19 November 2025 | Online (Zoom)

On 19 November 2025, 192 youths from Singapore Polytechnic (SP) participated in a webinar on Youth Mental Wellbeing, which discussed: (i) understanding the effects of social disconnect; (ii) getting youths out into the real world; and (iii) improving social connections though peer and community support.

This session was co-organised by SP and NYC, and involved the following panellists and moderator:



- Dr Suhaila Binte Zainal Shah, Research Fellow, Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities
- Ms Tiffanie Chia, Lead (Community Experience and Partnership), Friendzone
- [Moderator] Mr Chen Yiqiang, Year 2 Student at NTU, Public Policy and Global Affairs

The moderator began by sharing that NYC and its Government and non-Government partners were conducting a year-long series of engagements, one of which was the NYC x SP webinar, to develop the SG Youth Plan. He said that the SG Youth Plan was an inclusive action blueprint that intended to capture the hopes and aspirations of young Singaporeans, to empower them to co-create the future Singapore they want to see by catalysing opportunities, platforms, and resources for youths and others to take action together.

i) Understanding the effects of social disconnect

Participants were asked (via Slido) on a scale of ‘Disagree to Strongly agree’, if there were sufficient opportunities for youths to form friendships with others from different backgrounds.



- The top response was “agree”.

The moderator asked panellists about their thoughts on the poll results.

- Dr Suhaila said that she found the results promising but noted that there was insufficient information about friendship types such as whether they were physical or online friendships. Ms Chia said she observed increased social networking initiatives post-COVID-19, suggesting people recognised the importance of building connections whilst lacking opportunities to meet people from diverse backgrounds.
- The moderator said that findings from a recent poll reported that 26% of youths felt lonely often, with 63% of them significantly bothered by it. He said reasons included the lack of time or energy due to responsibilities, high cost of social activities, and excessive time on social media. He said youths experiencing frequent loneliness were also more likely to report having no close friends and no close family relationships.

The moderator asked panellists how online safety concerns affected youths' willingness to be authentic, and what were barriers that prevented youths from forming meaningful connections.

- Dr Suhaila said findings from SG Her Empowerment's Safeguarding Online Spaces (SOS) studies highlighted that online harms were determined by emotional impact rather than visible content. She said that "cancel culture" led youths to present curated versions of themselves, undermining friendship quality.
- Dr Suhaila said that unsolicited exposure to sensitive material significantly contributed to poor mental health outcomes. She said research found that 60% of young people were unintentionally exposed to harmful content such as body image messaging, and sexual or violent material, often through algorithmic suggestions.
- Ms Chia said that pressures like time constraints from academic workloads and co-curricular activities, and personal struggles including anxiety from unpredictable human interactions, prevented youths from forming meaningful connections.
- Ms Chia said that youths neglecting their mental health created a cycle of withdrawal from social interactions, and academic overload combined with online comparison contributed to anxiety and social disconnection.
- Ms Chia said AI conversations provided predictability whilst human conversations created uncertainty and fear of rejection and highlighted that Friendzone addressed this by creating structured spaces that softened unpredictability.

Participants asked (via Zoom Webinar Q&A) if AI would be a better companion rather than genuine social connections.

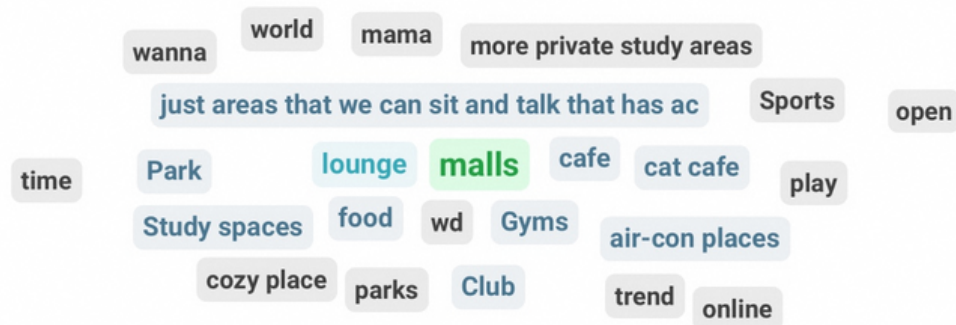
- Ms Chia acknowledged AI's appeal as it provided users with affirmation and direct answers, but said that true companions offered honest feedback, commitment, and correction.
- Dr Suhaila said AI could perpetuate positive or negative thoughts without discernment, which could be harmful. She noted that humans played an essential role in supporting one another and maintaining genuine connection.

ii) Getting youths out into the real world

Participants were asked (via Slido) what kind of physical spaces they would like to have more of in their community.

What physical spaces would you like to have more of in your community, for hanging out with your friends, or on your own? What type of programmes or activities would you like to do at these spaces?

Review answers (90) >



- The top responses were “Malls”, “Lounges”, and “Study Spaces”.

The moderator asked the panellists what youths desired from these physical spaces.

- Dr Suhaila said that youth often sought low-effort spaces where organic relationships could develop. She said that these spaces should feel comfortable, where youth could recognise familiar faces and build connections organically through repeated interactions. She said that there were currently limited areas that encouraged lingering.
- Ms Chia said that unstructured spaces, like void decks, facilitated natural connection and allowed youth to meet and interact casually. She said malls and lounges were examples of informal spaces that helped facilitate friendship-building naturally. She said that simple spaces rather than complex or fancy ones, were what people needed to feel comfortable in their community.

Participants asked (via Zoom Webinar Q&A) the panellists on how to develop strategies to manage academic stress and digital overload while maintaining meaningful offline connections in an increasingly online learning environment.

- Dr Suhaila said online study groups during COVID served dual purposes: academic learning and socialisation. She said youths must try different approaches and not hesitate to seek professional help if needed.
- Ms Chia suggested prioritising urgent tasks and removing stress-inducing platforms like Instagram. She emphasised that solutions depended on individual circumstances, goals, and platforms causing stress.

Participants asked (via Zoom Webinar Q&A) Ms Chia the reasons why Friendzone’s events appealed to youths who feel lonely, and how Friendzone supports them in taking that first step.

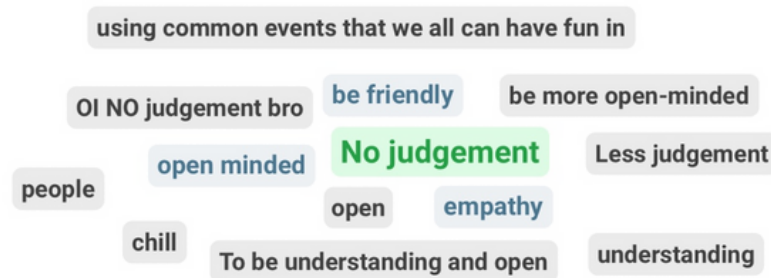
- Ms Chia said that activity structure helped ease anxiety and facilitators provided emotional safety through guided interactions. She said that the conversations were designed to gradually deepen and inclusion helped to prevent cliques. She said that after the structured sessions, casual free-flowing discussions allowed flexibility for the participants.

iii) Improving social connections through peer and community support

Participants were asked (via Slido) how the community/society could support them to be more confident and comfortable to form new relationships and friendships.

How can the community/society support you to be more comfortable and confident to form new relationships and friendships?

Review answers 72 >



- The top responses from youth were “No Judgement”, and “Empathy”.

The moderator asked the panellists how policy frameworks could be designed to prioritise social well-being and how youths could be empowered to enact change.

- Dr Suhaila said the actionable results above showed youths the value of co-creating solutions to issues that affected them. She advocated involving youths from the start of processes rather than consulting them only at the end, enabling co-creation that built confidence, empathy, problem-solving skills, and agency.
- Ms Chia recommended being a “connector”, someone who noticed when others needed help and linked them to resources or support. She said being a connector was not complicated or grandiose; it simply required attention and action. She said encouraging diversity enriched connections and small actions like reaching out to isolated individuals created meaningful impact, without large campaigns or resources.
- Ms Chia said empathy was a skill everyone could develop. She explained it could be learned by studying examples, applying lessons, and gradually developing a personal, authentic way to respond to others’ emotions.

Closing Remarks:

Participants asked (via the Zoom Webinar Q&A) the panellists how to make face-to-face conversations more comfortable and lively, especially for youths who were energetic online but felt awkward in person.

- Dr Suhaila recommended starting with small actions, focusing on forming one meaningful connection rather than many superficial ones. She encouraged embracing shared awkwardness, as it helped genuine connections develop, and suggested ignoring the critical inner voice that negatively framed social interactions.
- Ms Chia said everyone experienced awkwardness, which levelled the playing field. She noted that face-to-face interactions were harder than online ones but encouraged adopting a different mindset. She said to prioritise quality over quantity in connections as meaningful relationships required consistent effort. She said that persistence and trial-and-error were essential for developing genuine connections.

Here is an available resource for youths looking to strengthen social connections:

- Friendzone

<https://friendzone.sg/events>

SG Youth Plan

To encourage a whole-of-society effort in supporting youths' aspirations, NYC will not only be engaging youths from all walks of life but also non-youth stakeholders from the rest of society.

- **Want to share your aspirations, voice your ideas, and connect with others who are just as passionate about making a difference to Singapore?** Find out how you can take part in the [SG Youth Plan](#) engagements and other opportunities in NYC! You can also lend your voice to issues youths are concerned about through completing online tasks on [CrowdTaskSG](#).