

**SESSION NOTES FOR
ADULTING 101: ARE WE GOING THROUGH A FRIENDSHIP RECESSION?**

**21 AUGUST 2026, 6.00PM - 9.30PM
YWCA CAFE LODGE**

On 21 August 2026, 68 youths from diverse backgrounds attended “Adulthood 101: Are We Going Through a Friendship Recession?” to explore the factors that contribute to building and sustaining meaningful friendships and connections.

The session was organised by the National Youth Council (NYC) and the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and involved the following panellists and moderator:

- Ms Goh Hanyan, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, MCCY & Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment
- Ms Grace Ann Chua, Co-founder, Friendzone and HTHT & INSPIRIT Youth Leader
- (Moderator) Mr Brian Liu, Co-founder, Bros Before Woes & INSPIRIT Community Leader

Participants engaged in breakout group discussions on how connections are formed and sustained, the mindsets and barriers that affect relationship-building, and skills required to maintain meaningful relationships. This was followed by a panel dialogue on: (i) Friendships and what they mean to youths today, (ii) Understanding the pressures, barriers and realities that affect meaningful connections, and (iii) Exploring how spaces, environments and initiatives can better support friendships.

Key Insights from Breakout Group Discussions

- Participants said that schools and National Service were the most common environments for forming friendships, as repeated interactions and shared experiences helped relationships develop over time. They said that while digital platforms were useful for discovering activities and maintaining existing connections, in-person interactions through shared activities such as sports, volunteering and religious gatherings were more conducive to building deeper relationships.
- Participants said that competing priorities, limited time, mental fatigue and fear of rejection were key barriers to forming new friendships, while geographic distance and changing life responsibilities made existing friendships harder to sustain. They said that building and maintaining friendships required initiative, communication and consistent effort, such as starting conversations, listening actively and investing time in relationships.
- Participants said that having more affordable social spaces and making social opportunities easier to discover could help youths form and sustain friendships. They also said that life-stage transitions such as entering the workforce, marriage and parenthood made maintaining friendships more difficult, and suggested life-stage-specific programmes and a centralised platform for interest-based activities.

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Key Insights from Panel Dialogue

Theme: Friendship and What They Mean to Youths Today

The moderator asked the panellists what friendship meant to them.

- SPS Goh said that while individuals had unique experiences and preferences, friendships typically arose from the desire for meaningful connections, a sense of belonging and trusted support. She shared that the quality of friendships mattered more than the number of social connections.
- Ms Chua said that friendships naturally evolved across different life stages, with changing expectations and financial circumstances adding complexity to maintaining relationships. She shared that friendships provided emotional support while also exposing individuals to new ideas, opportunities and experiences.

A participant asked the panellists how youths' perspectives on friendship had evolved with technology and social media.

- Ms Chua said that social media had changed how friendships were maintained as people could remain loosely connected, and social media could also create an illusion of closeness and encourage comparisons based on incomplete representations of others.
- SPS Goh said that while digital platforms had made it easier to stay in touch, the convenience of quick and frequent communication could come at the expense of deeper, more meaningful interactions. She said that the underlying purpose of friendship remained centred on trust, support and helping one another grow.

The moderator asked the panellists to share what the concept of a "friendship recession" meant to them.

- SPS Goh said that the term "friendship recession" suggested a generation-wide struggle to connect, but forming friendships ultimately came down to individual effort and initiative. She encouraged participants to take ownership and leverage available opportunities to build connections.
- Ms Chua shared that people were increasingly turning to online sources for advice and information rather than relying on their personal networks, and that parasocial relationships could give a sense of connection without the depth of genuine friendships. She also said that asking friends for help could strengthen relationships, while managing challenges independently could result in missed opportunities for deeper connection.

A participant asked the panellists what kinds of friendships youths should prioritise building.

- SPS Goh encouraged youths to remain open to friendships with people from different backgrounds and perspectives. She said that individuals should be mindful of unhealthy relationships where others consistently make them feel small in order to elevate themselves.

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- Ms Chua said that it was healthy and realistic to have friendships that served different purposes, such as bonding over shared interests, engaging in professional discussions, or having deeper and more personal conversations.

Theme: Pressures, Barriers and Realities That Affect Meaningful Connections

A participant asked the panellists how an individual could navigate developing romantic feelings for a close friend, and the fear of jeopardising the friendship by expressing them.

- Ms Chua said that expressing one's feelings was important if that was the desired course of action, and encouraged individuals to continue investing in new friendships, including people of the same gender who could provide additional perspectives and support.
- SPS Goh said that individuals should not fear rejection excessively, as disappointment could become easier to process over time and friendships could recover even after expressing romantic feelings. She said close friends were often already aware of hidden feelings in friendships, and that rejection was rarely permanent.

A participant asked the panellists whether adults may feel the need to frame attempts at new friendships as “networking” to avoid social awkwardness.

- Ms Chua said that individuals should not be overly concerned with labels, as people associated different meanings with terms such as networking and friendship. She said that interactions could instead be viewed as connections that developed from weaker to stronger ties through repeated interactions.
- SPS Goh said that framing an interaction as “networking” could create professional or transactional expectations. While appropriate in professional settings, she said that individuals looking to build friendships could instead express a genuine interest in meeting again, rather than approaching interactions with a networking mindset.

Theme: Spaces, Initiatives and Environments That Can Better Support Connections

A participant asked what opportunities were available for youths who are keen to forge meaningful connections, but may find it challenging to attend programmes after work or school due to the demands of their daily routines.

- SPS Goh said that the SG Youth Plan supported the expansion of youth spaces and interest-based communities, including a network of approximately 12 youth “third spaces” across Singapore.¹ She shared that these were free, informal spaces where youths could hang out, pursue shared interests and participate in or organise activities, without having to commit to structured programmes.

¹ Youths can tap on a growing network of spaces and communities — including *SCAPE and the Somerset Belt; 12 youth “third spaces” across Singapore offering activities such as games, arts, sports, music and casual hangouts; and interest- and relationship-based communities such as Playces, Friendzone and For Real Co.

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- Ms Chua said that beyond organised programmes and “third spaces”, opportunities for connection already existed in everyday settings such as school, work, community projects, Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs) and hobby groups, and youths could take the initiative to reconnect with people they wanted to know better.

A participant asked the panellists how community spaces such as Community Clubs (CCs) could become more youth-friendly and better support youth communities.

- SPS Goh said that community spaces needed to remain relevant to younger generations. She shared that the Government had established informal youth drop-in areas, community builders and outdoor spaces that youths could book independently, and said that institutions should also make funding, spaces and community support more accessible to youths.
- Ms Chua said that establishing more youth-friendly spaces in communities required trust between community partners and young people. She shared that youths and community organisations could work with CCs to create more informal youth spaces, citing Friendzone's “Dilly Dally” collaboration with Bishan Community Club.

A participant asked SPS Goh how the Government balanced allocating spaces for youths against other community needs.

- SPS Goh said that youth spaces did not need to follow a single model, and communities could identify and repurpose underutilised spaces based on local needs. She said that youths could also engage grassroots organisations and youth networks to advocate for spaces that better met their needs.

Closing Remarks

The moderator asked the panellists to share one piece of advice on building deeper and more meaningful relationships.

- Ms Chua said that friendships could be strengthened through shared experiences, and that doing activities or working on common interests together created opportunities for relationships to deepen.
- SPS Goh said that meaningful friendships began with self-acceptance, as being comfortable with oneself could help individuals choose healthy relationships where they were valued for who they were.

Notes recorded by the NYC Youth Leadership and Engagement team.