



State of the Family 2024: Shaping Next Generation Relationships

21 February 2024

Focus on the Family Singapore's (FOTFS) annual *State of the Family* (SOTF) is a platform that provides a local analysis of emerging trends impacting the Family, and aggregates efforts of family champions in the community. SOTF started in 2015 with the objective of informing church leaders on the latest trends pertaining to family. Since 2022, this event has been extended to include partners in the community (e.g. social service agencies, self-help groups, educators), corporates, and government ministries.

The theme for this year's edition of SOTF was ***Shaping Next Generation Relationships***, which shone the spotlight on *Emerging Families*. Who exactly are the *Emerging Families*? They consist of the young families of today and the youth of our nation, both of whom represent the future of Singapore. See the event highlights on our [Facebook](#) and media coverage [here](#) and [here](#).

Mr. Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development, Second Minister for Health, and Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs, graced *State of the Family 2024* as the event's Guest-of-Honour.

Strengthening the family is not a once-off effort. What all of us do signals the value we place on families in our society.

It starts from the family itself – when children see their father and mother partnering with one another, helping each other build a family, and investing in their relationships. They will grow up knowing the warmth of love of a family.

- Minister Masagos, State of the Family 2024

This year's event had an attendance of **400** participants, the **largest ever turn-out** for an SOTF event. Participants were representatives from various community groups, corporates, faith-based organisations, schools, and volunteers of FOTFS.

FOTFS is committed to collaborating with our partners towards achieving the vision of a Singapore Made for Families. This report provides a **summary of key observations, discussion questions and insights** that may help you think through the trends surrounding *Emerging Families* and determine how to apply them in your context.

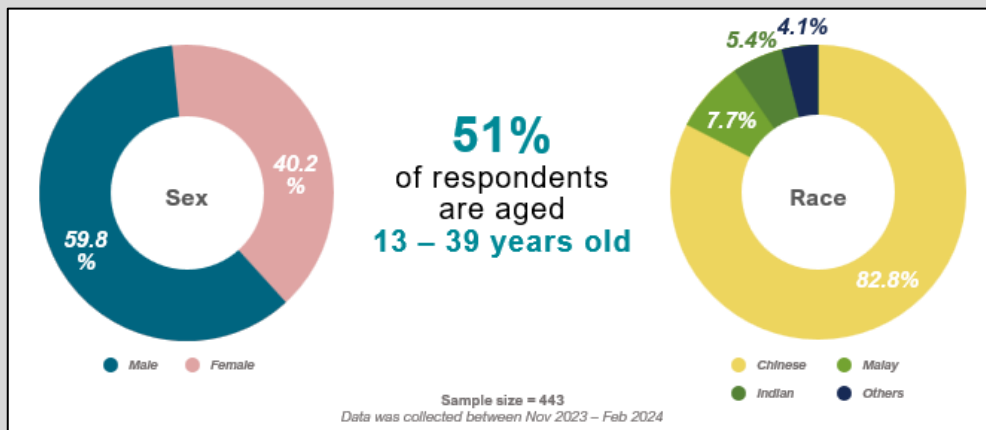
FATHERHOOD INVOLVEMENT

In support of the government’s stance to enhance work-life and promote the involvement of fathers by [doubling government-paid paternity leave in 2024](#), FOTFS ran the *Fatherhood Involvement and Marriage Aspirations Survey* with the aim of supporting and informing new and soon-to-be fathers in their parenting journey.

This retrospective survey invited respondents to:

- i) Reflect on their own experiences with their most influential father figure (e.g. biological father, adoptive father etc.) and how involved their father figure has been in different aspects of their lives
- ii) Consider their own beliefs about marriage and marital aspirations (for unmarried respondents)

A total of **443** responses were received between November 2023 to February 2024.

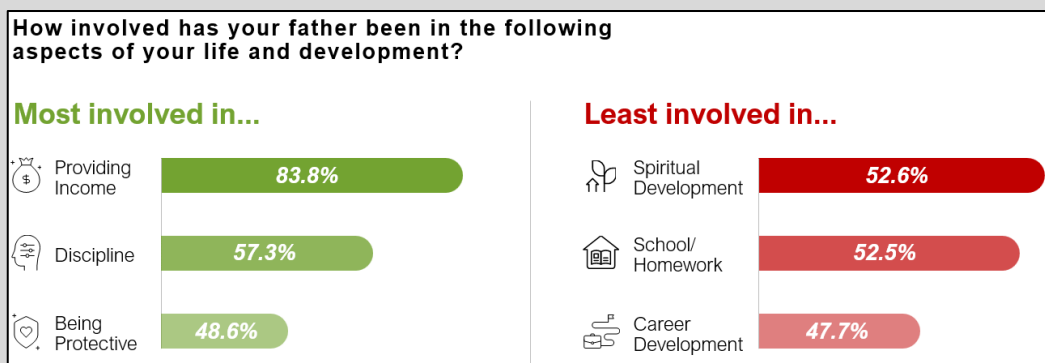


Source: FOTFS – Fatherhood Involvement and Marriage Aspirations Survey 2023

The age distribution of the respondents to the survey was relatively even, with slightly more than half of the respondents being 13-39 years old. There were slightly more male than female respondents, and there was representation from the various ethnic groups in Singapore.

Which dimensions have fathers been doing well in?

Fathers have been most involved in providing for their family, discipline, and being protective.



Source: FOTFS – Fatherhood Involvement and Marriage Aspirations Survey 2023

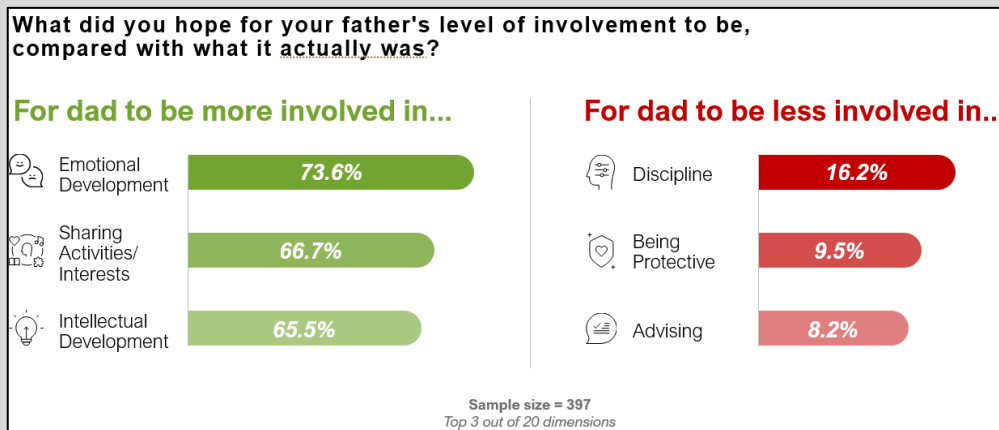
397 respondents indicated their biological father as the most influential father figure in their lives.

For these respondents, a majority felt that their biological father predominantly played the traditional roles of a provider, disciplinarian and protector. According to [Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs](#), these are roles that address children’s physiological and safety needs.

Conversely, these respondents said their fathers were least involved in dimensions related to their self-esteem and self-actualisation, which are categorised as growth needs associated with realising an individual's full potential. While fathers are competent in meeting the basic needs of their children, they can fare better in addressing their children's psychological needs, such as guiding them in their school or career pursuits and spiritual development.

Which areas do people want their fathers to be more involved in?

People desire more emotional involvement and shared experiences with their father.



Source: FOTFS – Fatherhood Involvement and Marriage Aspirations Survey 2023

Respondents indicated that they hoped for their fathers to be more involved in their socio-emotional and intellectual development, and to spend more time engaging in activities and interests together. The top two areas that respondents wished for their fathers to be less involved in – “Discipline” and “Being protective” – correspond to the top two categories that respondents answered as the area of greatest involvement from their fathers.

These results suggest that the respondents see the value and purpose of a father's involvement beyond meeting their basic physical needs, and desire for fathers to be involved in the development of one's self-esteem and self-actualisation.

CHILD'S FIRST RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER AND MOTHER AND ITS IMPACT ON IDENTITY

A panel discussed responses to the survey findings and pertinent attitudinal trends among Singapore youths. The discussion was hosted by **Delia Ng**, CEO of Focus on the Family Singapore, and the panellists were:

- **Nicholas Gabriel Lim** (Head, Graduate Diploma in Youth Work and Professional Life Coaching Programmes, Singapore University of Social Sciences)
- **Judith Xavier** (Working Mum of Two Teenagers)
- **Luke Ong** (Undergraduate in Social Sciences, Youth Advocate)

Each parent – father and mother – brings different qualities to the life of a young person.

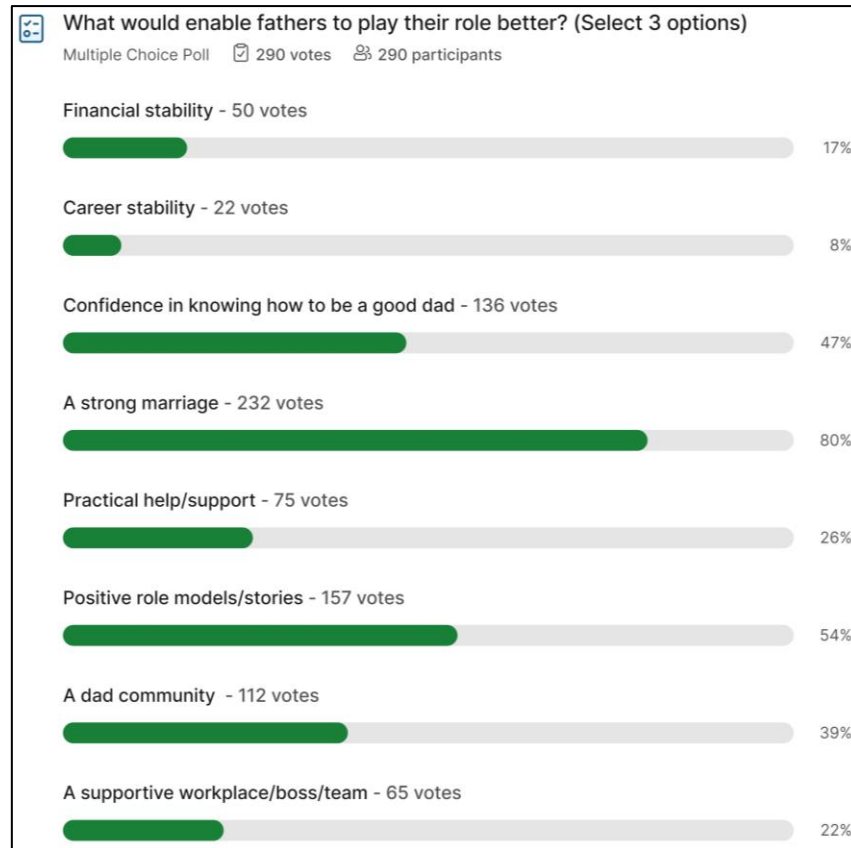
- Nicholas Gabriel Lim

Lending perspective from his expertise in neuropsychology, Nicholas shared that *"Mother generally nurtures and connects; Father prepares the child to go out into the world. There can be this healthy tension as such. Therefore, learning to navigate that tension may be necessary."*

Highlighting what distinguishes an involved father, Luke commented *"There is interaction and there is meaningful interaction. Society can help men to have more meaningful interactions with their children."*

Among the varied experiences that the panelists had with their fathers and observation of their grandfathers' role in raising their parents, Judith acknowledged that "It's encouraging to know the legacy of fathering can evolve and improve from generation to generation. We don't have to get stuck repeating old mistakes."

The audience was invited to participate in the discussion by responding to a poll. Among the 290 responses, 80% of respondents deemed that a strong marriage is the key factor to enable fathers to play their role better.



For further discussion:

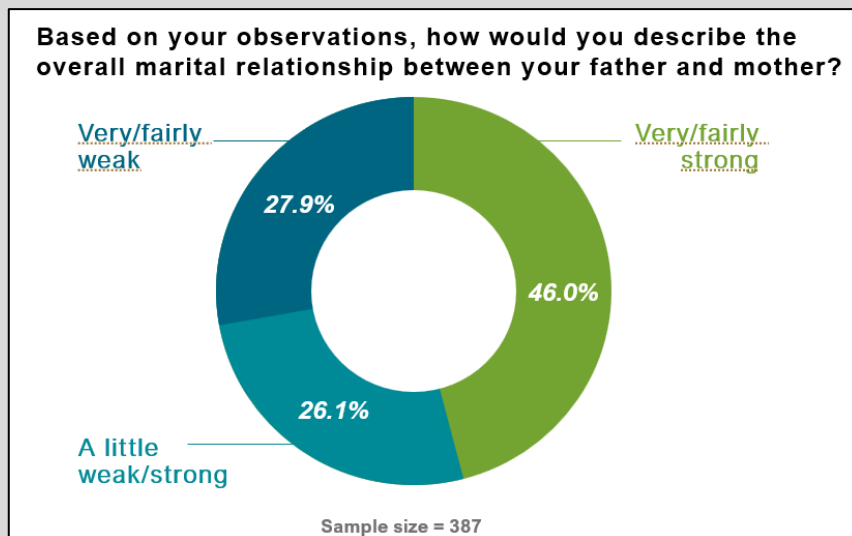
1) How do we address the apparent gap between the expectations of participants towards their fathers' roles and the reality of how fathers perceive and play their role?

2) We know that fathers [want to be more involved](#), and the government is encouraging them to do so. What can we as a society do to support new and soon-to-be dads as they begin their journey of fatherhood?

STATE OF CURRENT MARRIAGES AND ITS IMPACT ON THE NEXT GENERATION

How do people perceive the state of their parents' marriage?

Less than half of the respondents said that their parents enjoy a strong marriage.



Source: FOTFS – Fatherhood Involvement and Marriage Aspirations Survey 2023

Participants of the survey were asked to rate their parents' marriage along a continuum – from “very weak” to “very strong” – to help participants reflect on their parents' marital relationship. Respondents were relatively divided in their perception of the marital health of their parents, with slightly less than half responding that their parents' marriage were very or fairly strong.

In response to this finding, both Judith and Nicholas shared candidly their personal experience of relating to their spouses and how it impacts their parenting.

Taking the perspective of a husband, Nicholas emphasised that *“Communication is a factor. How can I do better in communicating with my wife such that it deepens my understanding of our needs and our parenting?”*

Judith added, *“As a wife and mum, I had to also learn to support my husband to practice fathering in a way that he was comfortable with. The more I stepped back, the more I saw him stepping up. The more he worked his ‘fathering muscle’, the more confident he grew as a dad.”*

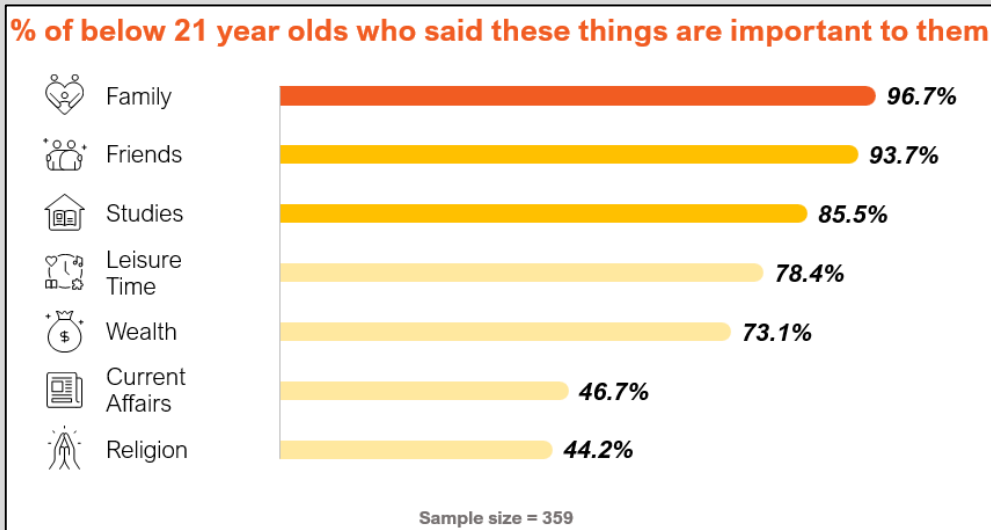
If strong families are the bedrock of society, then marriage is the cornerstone.

- Judith Xavier

Panellists also agreed that positive role models in the community are needed to encourage fathers to grow in their role. Judith recognised that “showing vulnerability can be scary” and suggested for fathers to have “a strong and encouraging support system via one's wife and circle of mentors and friends.”

THE ASPIRATIONS OF YOUTHS AND THEIR FUTURE FAMILIES

Youths rank Family as priority in life



Source: FamChamps - #FFTW Survey 2023

#FamilyForTheWin (#FFTW) is a street survey conducted as part of the [FamChamps®](#) Camp Experience, where youths aged 13-15 – under the guidance of their adult mentors – head out to the streets to interview fellow students. The 2023 edition of the street survey asked respondents to rate the above seven aspects of life on a 4-point scale (“Not at all important” to “Very important”).

This survey question was adapted from the [World Values Survey 2020](#) (WVS 2020) and sought to supplement its findings by contributing the perspectives of Singaporeans who were below 21 years of age.

Ranking of priorities (“Rather important” + “Very important”) by age group

Rank	#FFTW 2023	WVS 2020				
	Below 21 years old (n = 359)	Overall	21-35	36-50	51-65	Above 65
1	Family (96.7%)	Family (99.1%)	Family (99.1%)	Family (99.7%)	Family (99.3%)	Family (97.3%)
2	Friends (93.7%)	Friends (91.8%)	Friends (95.3%)	Friends (91.5%)	Friends (91.5%)	Friends (91.0%)
3	Studies (85.5%)	Wealth (86.7%)	Leisure time (92.1%)	Work (89.6%)	Wealth (87.3%)	Leisure time (84.4%)
4	Leisure time (78.4%)	Leisure time (86.0%)	Work (91.9%)	Wealth (89.3%)	Work (84.8%)	Wealth (80.5%)
5	Wealth (73.1%)	Work (82.6%)	Wealth (88.3%)	Leisure time (84.8%)	Leisure time (83.3%)	Religion (72.9%)
6	Current affairs (46.7%)	Religion (65.3%)	Religion (56.8%)	Religion (62.6%)	Religion (73.3%)	Work (51.7%)
7	Religion (44.2%)	Politics (43.4%)	Politics (42.8%)	Politics (49.7%)	Politics (46.5%)	Politics (41.7%)

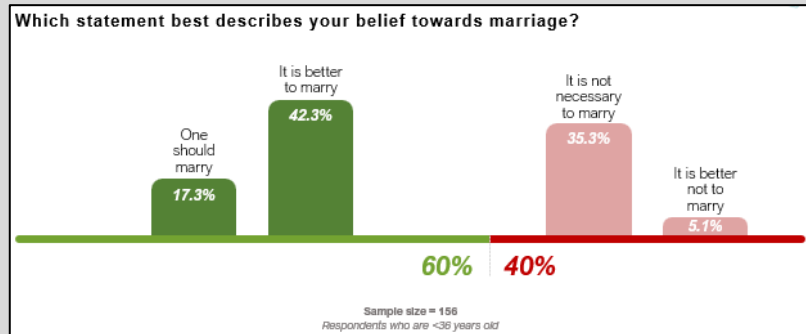
Sources:

- 1) FamChamps - #FFTW Survey 2023
- 2) IPS Exchange Series - Our Singaporean Values: Key Findings from the World Values Survey

It was heartening to see that the youths who were surveyed prioritised relationships with their family and friends, much like the respondents to the WVS 2020.

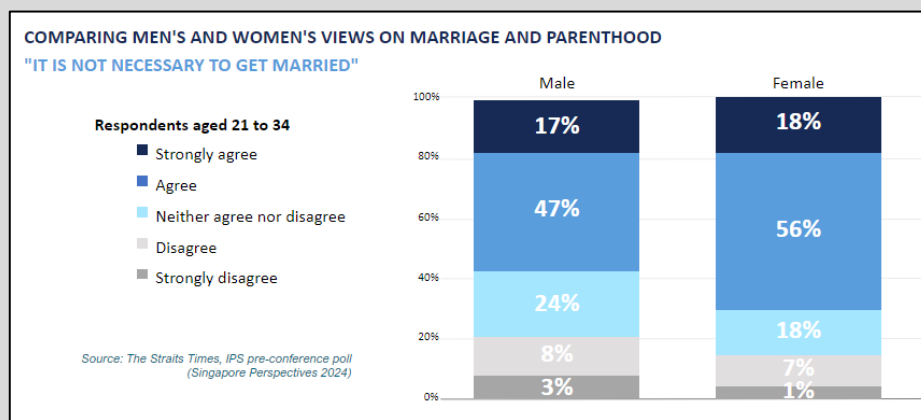
Similarly, current affairs and religion were rated the two least important aspects of life. However, a smaller proportion of #FFTW respondents rated religion as important compared to WVS 2020 respondents.

Youths have mixed views on marriage



Source: FOTFS – Fatherhood Involvement and Marriage Aspirations Survey 2023

60% of respondents to the *Fatherhood Involvement and Marriage Aspirations Survey* who were under 36 years of age believe one should marry or that it is better to marry. These results were similar to the perspectives captured in the [National Youth Survey 2021](#).



Source: IPS pre-conference poll (Singapore Perspectives Conference 2024)

Results from a [poll conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies \(IPS\)](#) found that 7 in 10 younger respondents feel that it is not necessary to marry, though most still want to. The same poll revealed that women aged 21-34 years old were more likely to agree that it is not necessary to marry, as compared to their male counterparts.

Despite youths ranking family as very important, they have mixed views towards marriage. Representing the *Emerging Family*, Luke observed that *“Experiences sometimes shape reality. Many of my peers cite bad experiences in their own life, such as lack of fatherhood involvement, abusive behaviour, as the reasons why they are not keen on marriage.”*

In response, Delia pointed out that *“The courage and persistence that the current generation puts into marriage will benefit the next generation and show relational strength and credibility. When trust and commitment are modelled, it gives them (the next generation) courage to explore a long-term relationship in the future.”*

While acknowledging that some children might be raised by a single-parent or other caregivers due to death, divorce or other circumstances, Delia emphasised that research has consistently shown *“the strengths of a mother and father have strong biological underpinnings. It is irreplaceable to be raised by a father and mother in the context of a loving home.”*

Hence, if society prizes the holistic development of children and youth, it is critical to safeguard man-woman marriage as children's identity formation, understanding of gender roles and relational skills are hinged upon their first relationship with father and mother.

- Delia Ng

In response to a question from the audience about managing the demands of work-life in time-starved and fast-paced Singapore, Judith related from her experience as a working mother of 2 teenage boys. *"Learn to put marriage first. That is often counter-intuitive. When there are so many things to do in day-to-day living, we schedule intentional time together. The stronger our marriage is, the better parents we are. The small things don't bother us that much."*

Acknowledging that many young people cite high cost of living as a reason for not having children, Judith also quipped *"It does take money to have a family, but we need to normalise doing free things as well. It's not about how much money you spend but spending time imparting values and letting your child know how much you love them."*

Offering another perspective as a young adult, Luke observed that our society's over-emphasis on performance and achievements might have sidelined other trajectories towards a fulfilled life: *"One of the biggest challenges among youth is this: We can enjoy the flowers (of dating), but we may not enjoy the fruits (of marriage and having kids)."*

How can we put the intangibles – the value of family – back into the equation for our young?

- Luke Ong

For further discussion:

- 1) *In a landscape where youths may be [prioritising other aspirations](#) above dating and marriage, and where society is experiencing a [decline in the 'value' of children](#), what can we do to support and help youths to believe in and aspire towards marriage?*

RESPONSES AND RECOMMENDATION

To wrap-up the panel discussion, the audience was invited to share their thoughts on “What is one thing you or your organisation can do to enhance the desirability of marriage & parenthood in the next generation?” via a Slido poll.

Below are some of the key themes that were raised:

1. Strengthening marriage:

- *“Work on strong marriages that will translate into strong families so that the next generation will have the desire to perpetuate the same in future.”*
- *“Conduct marriage preparation class and have mentor couples to journey with younger couples. Conduct classes for first time parents and encourage them to be connected with fellow parents so they can support one another. To conduct marriage retreats for married couples.”*
- *“I will love my wife and take care of my family. And hope that Singapore will continue to have strong families (between a husband and wife).”*
- *“Lead and show by example. I was personally encouraged that marriage and love is a good thing through witnessing how my parents were loving, and also older couples around me (strangers or not) being loving to one another despite their age.”*

2. Mentoring youth:

- *“Be a role model to youths who lack parental role models in their lives.”*
- *“Having mentors who enjoy strong marriages to hold conversations about their marriages with youths. Give these youths a glimpse of what a strong marriage is, especially when they come from a broken family.”*
- *“Be more intentional in engaging the next generation in building strong marriages & families. More inter-generational dialogues.”*

3. Influencing culture:

- *“Introduce the importance of families and marriages early in life. Talk about it in homes, schools and in organisations.”*
- *“In order for marriage to be seen as important and something intrinsically meaningful, we need to impart the value of marriage early on, even in schools.”*

As emphasised by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during the [2022 National Day Rally](#), *“We believe that marriage should be between a man and a woman, children should be born and raised within such families, [and] the traditional family should form the basic building block of our society.”*

Shaping the marriage and family aspirations of the Emerging Family requires the collective effort of community partners and family champions in Singapore. This includes building strong marriages and extending relational support to children affected by family breakdown, such that the narrative of a fulfilling family life can be authentic and attractive to the next generation.

Notwithstanding that which is already being done sufficiently and/or well, we recommend the following:

1. Broaden the opportunities available to young people seeking mentors by introducing family life mentoring as a category.

We affirm that mentoring has been identified as a key thrust under the Forward Singapore exercise to refresh Singapore's social compact. It will be beneficial to our youths if family life mentoring for teens (e.g. [FamChamps Camp Experience](#)), mentoring for dating couples (discovery stage) and marriage mentors can be included in the scope of Mentoring SG (the national movement that aims to build a culture of mentoring in Singapore). It will be critical to equip mentors with skillsets that include understanding how family dynamics shape a person's identity, relational competencies, engagement skills, and emotional intelligence, as well as ongoing family life education.

2. Broaden scope of relationship education in schools to increase socio-emotional competencies and familial sense of belonging.

The existing Ministry of Education Character and Citizenship Education curriculum seeks to develop a child's social-emotional competencies and well-being through an integrated approach across National Education (NE), Sexuality Education (SEd), Mental Health (MH), Education and Career Guidance (ECG), Cyber Wellness (CW), and Family Education (FE).

Based on the curriculum's core constructs of Identity, Relationships and Choices, we recommend giving every child an opportunity to discover how their first relationship with father and mother has an impact on one's identity. Backed by family theories and developmental psychology, interpersonal relational skills are shaped by a person's experience in their family of origin. In addition, researchers have observed that family stories create a shared history, strengthens emotional bonds, and increases resilience in children¹. Hence, it is critical for children to be guided in discovering their identity in light of their formative family relationships.

3. Support diverse work-life goals by shaping individual mindsets and workplace culture through education and training in organisations and community groups.

Recognising the importance of sustainable work-life against a backdrop of increased caregiving demands on the emerging family, the government can drive a thorough and systematic follow-up on all 17 recommendations of the Citizen's Panel on Work-Life Harmony. This could include incentivising employers to adopt flexi-work arrangements and championing national campaigns that spark new work-life narratives against the backdrop of family-centric organisation culture and healthy gender roles.

In addition, community-based coaching for relational success can be promoted and made available with grants or schemes to facilitate ongoing conversations for young adults outside of the school environment to guide them towards pursuing varied pathways to and of success.

¹ Fivush, Robyn & Merrill, Natalie. (2016). An ecological systems approach to family narratives. *Memory Studies*. 9. 305-314. 10.1177/1750698016645264.

Maurya, Rakesh. (2016). Use of Family Narratives as a Tool of Effective Parenting. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*. 3. 2348-5396. 10.25215/0302.090.

RESOURCES

CONNECT2™

[Connect2 Marriage Assessment](#)

For organisations looking to support the marriages of your community, FOTFS is looking to conduct a pilot run of the **Connect2 Marriage Assessment** with a handful of partner organisations, with the aim of helping you to identify the strengths and gaps within their community and constituents who are married.

[Connect2 Marriage Preparation Workshop](#)

To support marriages in Singapore, FOTFS runs the **Connect2 Marriage Preparation** workshop which aims to help couples address issues that they may face as newlyweds, and to build a solid foundation in their early years of marriage.

[FamChamps Camp Experience Youth Mentor](#)

We are recruiting mentors who are looking to make a difference for Family and the next generation! Find out more about how you can be involved in the **FamChamps Camp Experience** at our upcoming information sessions.

[The 1825 Collective: Conversation](#)

The 1825 Collective aims to provide youths (18 to 25 years old) a safe space to have conversations on important issues that affect the family. Below is a reflection shared by one of our participants from 2023:

"I came in rather cynical about conversations when it came to marriage.

However, hearing about what a marriage should look like — oneness, practicing a culture of honour, and celebrating the small moments — helped me to reshape my thoughts and know that my future is not determined by my past!

I can create a future that is different." – 21-year-old participant

Family

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IN THE HEADLINES

Cultivate

Cultivate SG is a non-profit organisation which desires to see families and our society thrive for generations. They call this "social sustainability," which involves rights and responsibilities, stable marriages, strong families and children's interests. They also want to build a cultural climate that supports such personal and family growth and social harmony. View their articles and resources [here](#).

We look forward to the continued partnership with government, social service agencies, community and corporate organisations to co-create a Singapore that is Made for Families.

We are grateful to [Perennial Holdings](#) for their generous support and sponsorship of the event. The organisation also sponsored State of the Family 2023.

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