

DUDLEY-CHARLTON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
DUDLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL

70 Dudley-Oxford Road
Dudley, Massachusetts 01571

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Dear Parent or Guardian:

The adolescent years are marked by a roller-coaster ride of emotions—difficult for students and their parents. It is easy to misread depression as normal adolescent turmoil; however, depression (among the most common of mental illnesses) appears to be occurring at a much earlier age. Depression—which is treatable—is a leading risk factor for suicide. In addition, self-injury has become a growing problem among youth.

To proactively address these issues, Dudley Middle School is offering depression awareness and suicide prevention training as part of the SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention Program. The program encourages students to seek help if they are concerned about themselves or a friend. The SOS Program is the only youth suicide prevention program that has demonstrated an improvement in students' knowledge and adaptive attitudes about suicide risk and depression, as well as a reduction in actual suicide attempts. Listed on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, the SOS Program has shown a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40-64% in randomized control studies (Aseltine et al., 2007; Schilling et al., 2016).

Our goals in participating in this program are straightforward:

- To help our students understand that depression is a treatable illness
- To explain that suicide is a preventable tragedy that often occurs as a result of untreated depression
- To provide students training in how to identify serious depression and potential suicide risk in themselves or a friend
- To impress upon youth that they can help themselves or a friend by taking the simple step of talking to a trusted adult about their concerns
- To teach students who they can turn to at school for help, if they need it

Students will complete an online survey tool to complete the initial screening in the SOS protocol. The first section of the survey asks general questions of the student and concludes with a question asking if they wish to continue. Students may opt out at that point. The remaining sections of the survey are the full SOS protocol. Surveys will be completed under the supervision of teachers and/or counselors and results will be used to identify individuals who may have risk for depression and/or be in need of support or intervention. An overview of the program will be provided on our school website as will a link to a parent survey. All results of the survey will be kept strictly confidential and will not be provided to any school personnel beyond the counseling team, administration, and nurse.

If you do **not** wish your child participating in SOS Program in school, please write a note indicating that you do not approve of your child's participation in the SOS Program and return it to Dudley Middle School to the attention of Mr. Strazzullo by Monday, December 4, 2017. If we do not hear from you, we will assume your child has permission to participate in this program.

Respectfully,

Christopher E. Starczewski

“...to advance the knowledge and well being of our children and our community.”