



QUINCE ORCHARD HIGH SCHOOL

Office of the Principal

February 23, 2018

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) remains committed to sharing information and resources about mental health topics that could potentially impact students. During the 2017-2018 school year MCPS has reviewed programs and activities that support the physical, social, and psychological well-being of students. A variety of initiatives (e.g. mindfulness, individual and group counseling, wellness initiatives, etc.) are available for students to participate in at each school.

We know that the teenage years are marked by a roller-coaster ride of emotions—challenging for teens, their parents/guardians, and educators. It is easy to misread depression as normal adolescent turmoil; however, depression (which is one of the most common of mental illnesses) appears to be occurring at a much earlier age than before. The prevalence of depression in adolescents and young adults increased from 8.7 percent in 2006 to 11.3 percent in 2014 (*Mojtabai, et. al, 2016*). Suicide also is the second leading cause of death among 11–18-year-old youth in the United States (*Centers for Disease Control, 2015*).

To proactively address this issue, MCPS is enhancing its suicide prevention curriculum using the Signs of Suicide® (SOS®) Prevention Program. Currently, MCPS uses the Red Flags suicide prevention curriculum to discuss this topic in Health courses. The SOS® Program is a youth suicide prevention program that has demonstrated an improvement in students' knowledge and adaptive attitudes towards suicide risk and depression, as well as a reduction in actual suicide attempts. Listed on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, the SOS® Program showed a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40 to 64 percent in randomized control studies (*Aseltine, et al., 2007; Schilling, et al., 2016*).

Our goals for participating in this program are straightforward:

- To help 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 with the education and skills to recognize the signs of serious depression and potential suicidality in a friend, and
- To impress upon teens that they can help themselves or a friend by taking the simple step of talking to a responsible adult about their concerns.

All students in Grade 9 through 12 will be shown a video entitled *Friends for Life* during an extended advisory period on Thursday March 8, 2018. Students also will receive handouts that include the *Act to Save a Life* student newsletter and a list of school, local, and national resources that are available on mental health needs. A copy of the resource list is attached.

If you have any questions or concerns about this program, please do not hesitate to contact your child's school counselor between 7:45am and 3:00pm, Monday through Friday.

Sincerely,

Carole A. Working



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SOS Signs of Suicide Prevention Program

The SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention Program was developed to reduce the incidence of suicide among adolescents. SOS is unique among suicide prevention programs as it incorporates two prominent suicide prevention strategies into a single program: the educational curriculum which aims to raise awareness of suicide and its related issues and a brief screening for depression and other risk factors associated with suicidal behavior.

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 SAMHSA'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).

The SOS Program can be easily implemented by existing school personnel within one school period. Participating schools receive program components containing everything needed to implement the program.

The SOS Program is Designed to:

- **Decrease** suicide and attempts by increasing knowledge and adaptive attitudes about depression
- **Encourage** individual help-seeking and help-seeking on behalf of a friend
- **Reduce stigma:** mental illness, like physical illness, requires treatment
- **Engage** parents and school staff as partners in prevention through gatekeeper education

SOS Key Message: ACT

Acknowledge that you are seeing signs of depression or suicide in a friend and that it is serious.

Care: Let your friend know that you care about them and you are concerned that they need help you cannot provide.

Tell a trusted adult that you are worried about your friend.

Program Components

Training: SOS Certified Training Institute (train-the-trainer), SOS Program implementer training and gatekeeper training available for all adults interested in championing youth suicide prevention programming in their community or school.

Parent Outreach: Guidelines for parent outreach, seeking consent, and planning and implementing a parent night focused on gaining parent buy-in and training parents as gatekeepers. Online Parent Brief Screen for Adolescent Depression allows parents to assess their child for suicide or depression risk factors.

Peer-to-Peer Middle or High School Student Program: DVDs, discussion guides, newsletters and supplementary materials provided for the evidence-based SOS Prevention Program.

Screening: A validated, seven-item Brief Screen for Adolescent Depression designed to identify at-risk students for further evaluation. Screening forms are educational in nature and do not take the place of a formal diagnosis.

Consultation: Ongoing support is available to schools to strategize about implementation, assist facilitators, and help ensure the program is successful.