

Dear Parents or Guardians,

MCPS is committed to ensuring that all students are able to learn and grow in school communities where they are safe and supported. We continue to address health-related concerns and needs, including mental health and wellness, suicide awareness, substance use, and bullying prevention. We strive to support our students by providing factual information that they may use to confront serious issues and make positive, responsible decisions.

The best way to support and protect our youth is to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and suicide by encouraging open, honest conversations during which students may speak about and share their feelings. When students receive the message that it is acceptable and desirable to talk about feelings, mental health, and their worries, students are more likely to reach out to an adult for help when they are in distress.

The Comprehensive Health Education curriculum is provided in middle and high schools to address and support mental health and suicide awareness. Additionally, MCPS collaborated with Montgomery County government and other community agencies to launch the BtheOne campaign. The goal of this campaign is to provide students with the knowledge and skills to make good decisions so that they seek help if they or their friends are thinking of harming themselves. The website addresses for the BtheOne campaign and other local and national resources are provided below to assist parents and guardians in having these difficult conversations with their students.

Montgomery County Youth Crisis Hotline, 301-738-9697, provides free, confidential, and anonymous support to youth by trained counselors, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Montgomery County Crisis Textline, 301-738-2255, provides free, confidential, and anonymous text support by trained counselors. This service currently is available from Monday through Thursday, from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 800-273-8255, provides free, confidential, and anonymous support nationally.

The Montgomery County Crisis Center, provides crisis services 24 hours a day/365 days a year. These services are provided over the telephone (240-777-4000) or in person at 1301 Piccard Drive, Rockville, Maryland (no appointment needed). The Mobile Crisis Outreach will respond anywhere within Montgomery County to provide emergency psychiatric evaluations.

The Crisis Chatline is a service of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Youth may access support 24 hours a day via chat. www.CrisisChat.org.

The Montgomery County BtheOne suicide awareness and substance use prevention campaign website describes action steps to help oneself and friends and includes links to resources and hotlines. www.BtheOne.org.

EveryMind, 1000 Twinbrook Parkway Rockville, MD 20851, 301-424-0656, info@EveryMind.org, provides mental health services to youth, adults, and the military, as well as crisis support services.

The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide family resource webpage includes information on warning signs, how to support your child who needs help, and how to talk with your children about mental health, suicide awareness, and the aftermath following a tragic loss. www.sptsusa.org/parents

The Centers for Disease Control information fact sheet on the prevalence and public health issue of suicide, warning signs, and resources. www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/suicide_factsheet-a.pdf.

Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) is an eight-hour, internationally-recognized course that teaches adults who interact with youth how to identify signs of emotional distress and a five-step action plan to engage with youth and connect them to professional support. Just as Cardio-pulmonary Resuscitation (or CPR) teaches individuals to help others experiencing a medical emergency until professional help arrives, Youth Mental Health First Aid teaches adults to address mental health crises until professional help can be accessed. Courses are offered throughout the county. www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/take-a-course/course-types/youth/.

The Dougy Center's National Center for Grieving Children and Families provides resources, by age group, and information on support groups for youth, adults, and families experiencing grief following a death. www.dougy.org/grief-resources/talking-with-children-about-tragic-events/.

The Campaign to Change Direction's goal is to change the culture of mental health so that individuals are able to seek and receive the help and support that they need. The Campaign includes information and infographics on five of the warning signs of depression and strategies to support emotional wellbeing. www.changedirection.org/.