

# ***SOS Program***

## **Signs of Suicide and Signs of Self-Injury Prevention Program for Middle School**

### ***Summary of Program:***

The SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention Program is an award-winning, nationally recognized program designed for middle and high school-age students. The program teaches students how to identify the symptoms of depression and suicidality in themselves or their friends, and encourages help-seeking through the use of the ACT® technique (Acknowledge, Care, Tell). It is the only school-based suicide prevention program listed on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices that addresses suicide risk and depression, while reducing suicide attempts. This program can be delivered through our current health education curriculum. It educates students, parents and trains staff members on how to recognize and address signs of depression or self-mutilation in a comprehensive and consistent manner, thus addressing our need to provide education to students, act in a proactive manner and screen all students in a building for their level of self-harm.

Currently the states Grade Level Equivalents (GLE)'s 2.4.1 and 2.4.3 require school districts to teach the signs of depression, prevent injury to self and others and stress-management techniques. The student SOS lesson is delivered through one health class period – that's all. The AMS Student Assistance Team became aware of the growing need for this type of program through the increasing number of teacher and parent referrals regarding student depression/cutting and pleads for help in addressing these issues. Our AMS team will schedule the lessons and develop a plan to address student's emotional/social needs within our building. We will also develop a plan to connect student/parent needs with community based mental health resources.

### ***Why Participate in the SOS Program?***

The SOS Signs of Suicide Prevention program is the only school-based suicide prevention program listed on SAMSHA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices that addresses suicide risk and depression, while reducing suicide attempts. In a randomized controlled study, the SOS program showed a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40% (BMC Public Health, July 2007). The SOS program has been used by thousands of schools nationwide since 2000. It has proven successful at increasing help-seeking by students concerned about themselves or a friend.

Furthermore, research shows that a positive relationship with an adult is one of the most critical factors in preventing student violence, suicide, and bullying. The SOS program encourages students to identify a trusted adult in their life and teaches them how to turn to them when in need.

Sadly, suicide is the third leading cause of death among children ages 10-24 (4,320 deaths in 2007) (CDC, 2007). In children and adolescents, an untreated depressive episode may last between 7 to 9 months, potentially an entire academic year. Ninety percent of children and adolescents who die by suicide have at least one major psychiatric disorder (Gould et al., 2003). Suicidal children and adolescents report feelings of intense emotional distress involving depression, anger, anxiety, hopelessness, and worthlessness and an inability to change frustrating circumstances or to find a solution to their problems. Social stressors can include getting into trouble at school or with the law, a broken relationship with a boyfriend or a girlfriend, or a fight among friends. While these stressors are rarely a sufficient cause of suicide, they can be precipitating factors in young people.

Further questions feel free to contact:

JoAnna Rockwood, School Psychologist and Behavioral Specialist at Alderwood Middle School  
Phone: 425-431-1775  
Email: rockwoodj@edmonds.wednet.edu