



**NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**3 Primrose Street**  
**Newtown, CT 06470**

PHONE: (203) 426-7646 x6602  
FAX: (203) 270-6199

September 17, 2019

Dear 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Parent or Guardian:

The adolescent years are marked by a rollercoaster 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.

To proactively address these issues, Newtown Middle School offers depression awareness and suicide prevention education as part of the SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention program. This 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 attitudes about suicide risk and depression, as well as a reduction in actual suicide attempts. Listed on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (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).

Our goals in participating in this program include:

- 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 education on 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

The first week of October we will begin implementation of the SOS Program as part of students' health rotations. There will be four health rotations during the course of the year. The program will take place during one health class. A voluntary depression screening tool is part of the SOS program. This tool cannot provide a diagnosis of depression but does give an indication of whether your child should be referred for evaluation by a mental health professional. We are attaching a [Parent Version](#) of the same depression screening form. We include the questionnaire to make you aware of the types of questions that your child will be answering and to help you assess your teen's risk for depression. If you are concerned, we encourage you to speak with your son or daughter and follow up with a mental health professional for a complete evaluation.

All students will:

- Watch the SOS for Middle School video
- Participate in a discussion
- Complete a depression screening form (voluntary)

Students whose responses indicate they may be depressed or thinking about suicide will be seen by our support staff immediately **and parents/guardians will be notified**. Students may also request to talk with a support staff member regarding a friend they are concerned about.

To learn more about the SOS program and tools for supporting your child's mental health, you can log on to the SOS Program's new online resource for parents at [sossignsofsuicide.org/parent](https://www.newtown.k12.ct.us/parent). **For additional community resources, please visit our Newtown District website: <https://www.newtown.k12.ct.us/Resources>**

If you do **NOT** wish your child to take a written screening test for depression, please complete the attached form by Wednesday, September 25, 2019 and return it to **Stacey Premus, Newtown Middle School Counseling Office, 11 Queen Street, Newtown, CT 06470 or fax to: (203) 270-6102 or scan and email to: [premuss@newtown.k12.ct.us](mailto:premuss@newtown.k12.ct.us)**. If we do **NOT** hear from you, we will assume your child **has permission** to participate in this screening.

If you have any questions or concerns about this program at NMS, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Thomas Einhorn  
Principal  
Newtown Middle School  
11 Queen Street  
Newtown, CT 06470  
(203) 426-7642  
[einhornt@newtown.k12.ct.us](mailto:einhornt@newtown.k12.ct.us)