



NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
3 Primrose Street
Newtown, CT 06470

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FAX: (203) 270-6199

September 4, 2018

Dear 7th Grade Parent or Guardian:

The teen years are marked by a rollercoaster ride of emotions – difficult for teens, their parents, and educators. 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, and the past decade has seen teen suicide rates double.

In order to proactively address this issue, Newtown Middle School Health Curriculum contains a suicide prevention lesson as part of the SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention program. This program has been used by thousands of schools over the past ten years. It has proven successful at increasing help-seeking by students concerned about themselves or a friend, and is the only school-based suicide prevention program selected by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for its National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices that addresses suicide risk and depression, while reducing suicide attempts. In a randomized control study, the SOS Program showed a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40% (BMC Public Health, July 2007).

Our goals in participating in this program are straightforward:

- To help our students understand that depression is a treatable illness, and help them assess whether or not they may have symptoms consistent with depression.
- 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 suicidality in a friend.
- 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.

The last week in September we will begin implementation of the SOS Program in our middle school as part of the student's health rotation. 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. You can use the depression screen form to start the conversation.

All students will:

- Watch the video, "Time to Act"
- 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.

If you do **NOT** wish your child to take a written screening test for depression, please complete the attached form by Tuesday, September 18, 2018 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**. 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 or the attached screening form, please do not hesitate to contact **Mark Gerace** at (203) 426-7646 x6602 or e-mail him at geracem@newtown.k12.ct.us.

Sincerely,

Mark Gerace
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Thomas Einhorn
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Attachments (2)

