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PRINCIPAL



ELIZABETH McANDREWS
DEAN OF STUDENTS/CURRICULUM

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Dear Parent or Guardian:

The teen years are often marked by a roller-coaster ride of emotions which is difficult for teens, their parents, and for 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. In the past decade, teen suicide rates have doubled.

In order to proactively address this issue, Amesbury High School is offering depression screening and suicide prevention training as part of SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention Program. This program has been used by thousands of schools over the past nine years. It has proven to be successful at increasing the number of students seeking help for themselves or a friend. This is the only school-based suicide prevention selected by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for its Evidence-Based Programs and Practices that address suicide risk and depression. In a randomized control study, the SOS Program showed a 40% reduction in self-reported suicide attempts (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 to 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

On Monday, March 23rd students will meet in their advisory groups to discuss the program and conduct the screening.

The depression screening tool that we will be using may result in students sharing thoughts and feelings about which parents might not be aware. Although the tool cannot provide a diagnosis of depression, it can provide an indication of whether a young person should be referred for evaluation by a mental health professional. A parent version of the same depression screening form is attached to this message and we ask that you take a moment to fill it out. We have included 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 your child's primary care provider or with a mental health professional for a complete evaluation. If you need assistance, please feel free to contact the guidance office at Amesbury High School.

If you do NOT wish your child to take the written screening test for depression and participate in SOS (Signs of Suicide) intervention training in school, please complete the enclosed form and return it to Amesbury High School, 5 Highland Street, Amesbury, MA 01913 to the attention of Elizabeth McAndrews, Dean of Students before March 23rd. If we do not hear from you, we will assume your child has permission to participate in this program.

If you have any questions or concerns about this program or the enclosed screening form, please do not hesitate to contact me at 978-388-4800, between 8am – 2:30pm.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth McAndrews
Dean of Students/Curriculum