



Maggie L. Walker Governor's School for Government and International Studies

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Dear Parent or Guardian:

The adolescent years are marked by a roller-coaster 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.

Our school is offering depression awareness and suicide prevention training as part of the SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention Program. The program encourages students to seek help if they are concerned about themselves or a friend. The SOS Program is listed on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. Our goals in participating in this program are straightforward:

- 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 training in 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

SOS lessons will be implemented in the 9th grade Health and PE classes during the week of November 18th. Students not enrolled in PE will attend the lesson on November 21st and 22nd. During the lesson, students will view and discuss the *Friend for Life* DVD and complete the Brief Screen for Adolescent Depression. The *Friends for Life* DVD aims to create a supportive and responsive atmosphere for students, help them to recognize the warning signs for depression and suicide, and to seek help.

The Brief Screen for Adolescent Depression **is not a diagnostic screening**, but rather an indicator of the presence or absence of symptoms consistent with depression or suicide. Students will complete the seven question screening and school support staff will meet with students if results warrant follow up. Parents and guardians will be contacted if a student's screening led to an interview with counseling staff. The results of the survey are highly confidential and will not be shared with any teaching staff. Administrators will only be notified of results if a student is deemed to be at high risk for self-harm as is standard when concerns of this nature present.

As always, Maggie L. Walker is committed to the well-being of our students and your support is essential. Our hope is that every 9th grader will participate in the SOS lesson. If you do not want your child to participate, please complete the enclosed form and return it to the Counseling Office no later than November 15th. If we do not hear from you, we will assume that your child has permission to participate in the lesson.

If you have any questions about this program, please contact Lisa Ebeling, School Psychologist, at 354-6800, ext. 3260 or by email at lebeling@gsgis.k12.va.us. As Mrs. Ebeling is part-time, email would be the better way to get a quicker response.

Sincerely,

Robert Lowerre
Director

I wish for my child, _____, to opt out of the SOS Lesson.

Parent/Guardian Signature