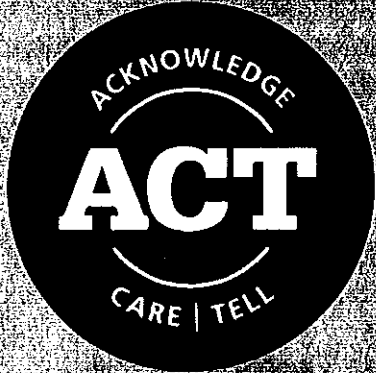


# INTRODUCING THE SOS PROGRAM

Thank you for championing youth suicide prevention efforts in your school and community by participating in the Signs of Suicide® (SOS) prevention program. The program highlights the relationship between mental health and suicide, teaching that suicide is, most often, a fatal response to a treatable disorder—depression. While encouraging individual help-seeking, the program uses peer-to-peer messaging that encourages students to ACT® (Acknowledge, Care, Tell) when concerned about themselves or a friend.



**SOS Program Key Message: ACT®**

The SOS programs use a simple and easy-to-remember acronym, ACT (Acknowledge, Care, Tell), to teach students action steps to take if they encounter a situation that requires help from a trusted adult.

- **Acknowledge** that you are seeing signs of depression or suicide in yourself or a friend, and that it is serious.
- **Care**: Let your friend know how much you care about them and that you are concerned that they need help.
- **Tell** a trusted adult that you are worried about yourself or a friend.

## SOS Program Rationale

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the second leading cause of death for U.S. children and adolescents ages 11-18 (2015). Suicide is public health crisis for our youth.

The strongest risk factors for suicide in youth are depression, substance use, and a history of previous attempts. The prevalence of depression in adolescents and young adults is on the rise, increasing from 8.7% in 2006 to 11.3% in 2014 (Mojtabai et al., 2016). Depression has been linked to poor school performance, substance use, running away, feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, and suicide.

The SOS program was created to address the problems of youth depression and suicide simultaneously and age appropriately. The program uses a universal approach to assist in identification of youth at risk.

## SOS Program Goals

- Decrease suicide and suicide attempts by increasing knowledge and adaptive attitudes about depression among students;
- Encourage help-seeking behavior for oneself or on behalf of a friend;
- Reduce stigma by linking suicide to mental illness that, like physical illness, requires treatment;
- Engage parents and school staff as partners in prevention by educating them to identify signs of depression and suicide in youth and by providing information about available resources;
- Increase self-efficacy and access to mental health services for at-risk youth and their families;
- Engage parents and school staff as partners in prevention by teaching them to identify signs of depression and suicide in youth and by providing information about available resources;
- Encourage schools to develop community-based partnerships to address issues associated with student mental health.

## SOS Program Evidence

The SOS program is the only youth suicide prevention program that has demonstrated an improvement in students' knowledge and adaptive attitudes about suicide risk and depression, as well as a reduction in actual suicide attempts. Students who participated in the SOS program demonstrated a 64% reduction in self-reported suicide attempts in a randomized control study (Schilling et al., 2016).

We hope that you will see the success of the program through healthier and better-educated students who understand the symptoms of depression and suicide risk and how to respond. We also hope you will have more parents, faculty and staff prepared to address mental health issues including the symptoms of depression, substance use, self-injury, and suicide risk. You are taking an important step towards protecting youth by identifying those who may have mental health concerns, encouraging help-seeking, and connecting students to appropriate treatment when needed.