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SOS for Parents & Caregivers

When teens are struggling with depression or thoughts of suicide, it is common for them to turn to each other. This is why it's important for every student to know when to ACT.

How to ACT

1. Acknowledge signs of suicide.
2. Show their friend they Care, and
3. Tell a trusted adult.

Students are learning to look out for warning signs of suicide, such as:

Major changes in behavior, appearance, eating, or sleep.

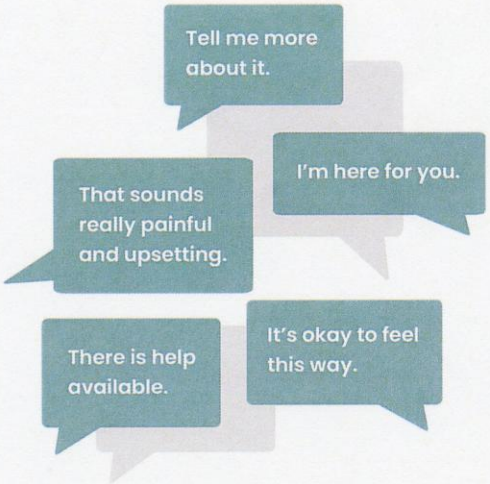
Sounding hopeless, trapped, or overwhelmed.

Talk of death or wanting to kill themselves.

If they spot signs of suicide in themselves or a friend:

Students are encouraged to reach out to a trusted adult at school or home. Keep communication lines open by:

- **Talking openly about mental health and life stressors** so they feel more comfortable sharing their struggles.
- **Taking their concerns seriously.**
- **Listening without judgement.**
- **Connecting them to help.** Reach out to their pediatrician or the school counselor. Call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988 for free 24/7 support.





Visit MindWise.org/parents or scan the QR code to learn more about youth suicide prevention.

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SOS Signs of Suicide

The Facts About SOS

We want all our clients to feel confident using SOS Signs of Suicide. To support this effort, we've put together a list of commonly asked questions that we often hear from school district leadership, community partners, parents and caregivers, and more.

What is SOS Signs of Suicide?

- SOS Signs of Suicide is a school-based universal suicide prevention program designed for middle and high school students. Its mission is to save lives.
- The goals of SOS are to 1) decrease suicide and suicide attempts by increasing student knowledge and adaptive attitudes about depression; 2) encourage personal help-seeking and/or help-seeking on behalf of a friend; and to 3) reduce the stigma of mental health concerns and acknowledge the importance of seeking help.

Why are we teaching suicide prevention in school?

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for 10- to 24-year-olds in the United States and is a global public health issue, with a recent declaration of a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association.
- Prevention education can save lives. Most children and teens who are considering suicide do not share their thoughts with an adult at home or at school. But many of these students display warning signs or even directly indicate thoughts of suicide to their peers. SOS teaches all students to ACT: Acknowledge signs of suicide, show their friend they Care, and Tell a trusted adult. Students are not taught to serve as a counselor for a friend. Rather they are encouraged to become a pathway to adults who can provide the right support.
- Suicide prevention education prepares students to help a friend in need while also encouraging students to seek help for their own needs. In multiple randomized control trials, SOS reduced suicide attempt rates by 40-64%.

Does teaching about suicide put the idea in students' heads?

- No. Several studies have examined the impact of responding to research questions about suicidal thoughts on students and found no negative effects (Gould et al., 2005).
- One of the biggest concerns about teaching students about suicide is the potential for "triggering" or increasing suicidal thoughts in vulnerable students. However, SOS is designed to reduce this risk by empowering students to seek help and emphasizing their role in prevention for themselves and peers.
- Additionally, SOS content does not glorify or provide graphic details of suicide. Instead, real students and their friends and family share stories of recovery. Roleplay scenarios model how students can save a life by seeking help.
- SOS includes guidance for schools to provide immediate support for students who reach out for help after the program.

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What is the depression screen in SOS Signs of Suicide?

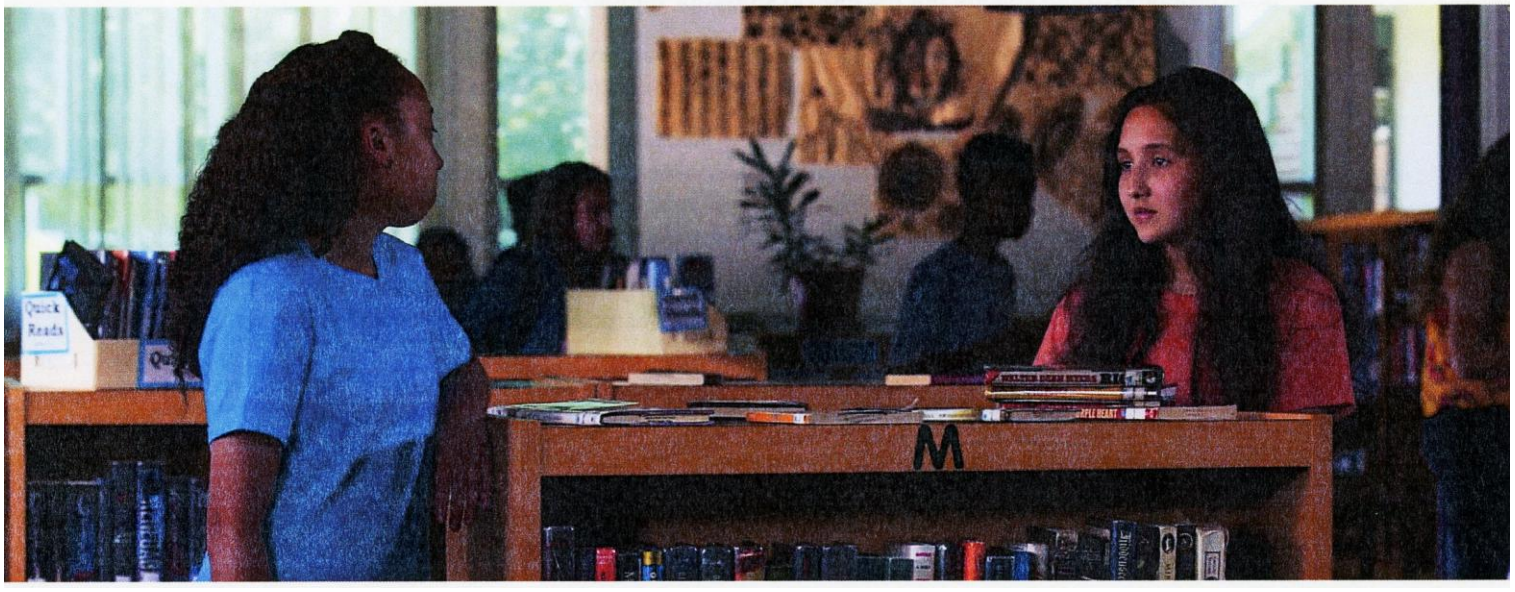
- SOS uses mental health screening as an educational tool that teaches students about the signs of depression and suicide risk. The screening does not provide a diagnosis. Once students independently answer the questions, they read help-seeking advice based on their answers. If they are experiencing signs of depression or suicide risk, the form encourages them to seek help from trusted adults.

Is the screening portion of SOS safe for our students?

- Yes. Years of research on school-based screening for suicide risk has shown no increased risk for students. In fact, high–risk students appeared less distressed following screening (Gould et al. 2005) and were more likely to receive mental health treatment (Gould et al., 2009). Screening youth for suicide risk is a safe and effective component of school-based suicide prevention.
- All research conducted on SOS included videos, classroom discussion, and anonymous self-screening. These strategies are used together to teach students the signs of suicide and encourage them to reflect on whether they or their friends are experiencing these signs. SOS was shown not to increase risk for students. Instead, SOS reduced suicide attempt rates by 40-64%.

How Are Students Screened?

- Classroom facilitators walk through the screening questions as part of the lesson while students answer each question privately at their desk.
- Once students answer the questions, they self-score their forms, and read help-seeking advice based on their answers.
- If they are experiencing signs of depression or suicide risk, the form encourages them to seek help from trusted adults.
- For detailed guidance on SOS screening, refer to the Quick Start Guide.



Are children able to access the program on their own?

- No. SOS is designed to be presented by a member of school staff to a classroom. SOS materials are only accessible by the adult presenting the material.

Does SOS track any information about our students?

- No. SOS does not track any information about students. The program does not require access to any rostering information, personally identifying information, or other data.

Do you encourage parent involvement in SOS?

- Yes. We believe that parents and caregivers are a critical part of any youth suicide prevention program. We strongly advise that schools or community partners provide parents and caregivers with information on the SOS curriculum prior to delivering the program. Further:
- SOS contains a wealth of information to share with parents and caregivers, including a parent presentation, letter, and handout.
- SOS includes a dedicated web page for parents and caregivers to learn more about SOS, as well as how they can continue the conversation at home.
- We believe that parental involvement is key to the success of the program. For more recommendations on educating parents and caregivers on SOS prior to delivery, see page 8 of our Quick Start Guide.

What is the data behind SOS?

- Since the program's inception, researchers have assessed the effectiveness of SOS Signs of Suicide by conducting several randomized controlled trials – an evaluation known as the "gold standard" of research studies. For a complete list of this research and its findings, please visit mindwise.org/evidence-behind-sos-signs-of-suicide.

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SOS para los padres y guardianes

Cuando los adolescentes luchan contra la depresión o pensamientos suicidas, normalmente ellos se comunican entre sí. Por eso es importante que cada estudiante sepa cuando actuar.

Como ACTUAR

1. Reconozca las señales de suicidio en un amigo
2. Demuéstrele a su amigo que le preocupa
3. Informe a un adulto de confianza.

Los estudiantes están aprendiendo a buscar señales sobre advertencia de suicidio, tales como:

Cambios significativos en comportamiento, apariencia, alimentación o sueño

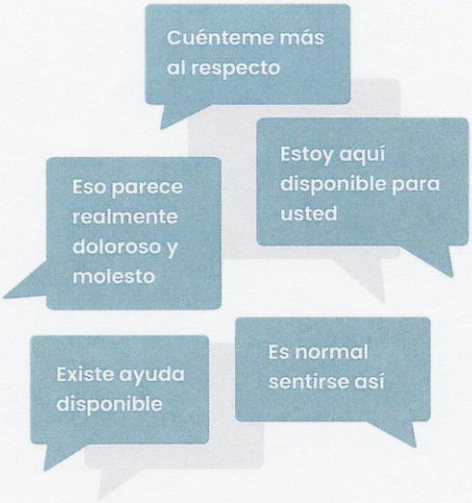
Parece desesperado, atrapado o agobiado

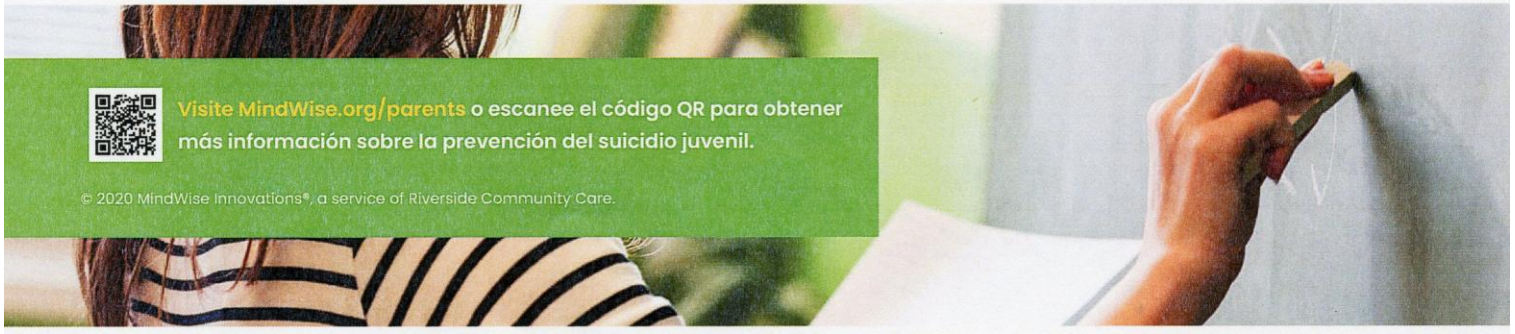
Habla de la muerte o de cometer suicidio.

Si detectan señales de suicidio en ellos mismos o en un amigo:

Se estimula a los estudiantes a comunicarse con un adulto de confianza en la escuela o en el hogar. Mantenga las puertas de comunicación abierta así:

- **Hablar sinceramente acerca de la salud mental**, las causas del estrés y así se pueden sentir más cómodos compartiendo acerca de sus luchas, conflictos.
- **Tomar sus preocupaciones seriamente**
- **Escuchar sin juzgar**
- **Hacer contactos para ayudarlos.** Contacte su pediatra o consejero escolar. Llame o envíe un mensaje de texto a Suicide & Crisis Lifeline al 988 para obtener ayuda gratuita 24 horas, 7 días de la semana.





Visite MindWise.org/parents o escanee el código QR para obtener más información sobre la prevención del suicidio juvenil.

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