



December 19, 2018

Dear Raytown Schools Parent or Guardian:

The adolescent years are marked by a roller-coaster 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) does occur in some adolescents. Depression – which is treatable – is a leading risk factor for suicide. In addition, self-injury has become a growing problem among youth.

To proactively address these issues, in accordance with Section 170.048, the Raytown School District is offering depression awareness and suicide prevention training for students as part of the *SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention Program*. The program aims to increase help-seeking by students concerned about themselves or a friend. SOS is listed on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices and in a randomized control study, the SOS High School 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
- 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 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 responsible adult about their concerns
- To help students know whom in the school they can turn to for help, if they need it

Beginning the week of January 14, students in grades 6-12 will watch a video, participate in teacher led discussions, and complete a Brief Screen for Adolescent Depression (a copy is provided in the link). The screener will be confidential and scored by counselors. Students will also indicate if they need to talk to someone about themselves or a friend or do not need to talk to someone. **Prior to your student's class viewing the video, you will receive a second letter, allowing you to opt your student out of the program.**

In addition to providing resources for our students, and we want to empower parents and guardians with tools to help them ACT if there is a suspicion that a child may consider self-harm. ACT stands for Acknowledge, Care, and Tell. We ask that our parents and guardians take this opportunity to have an open conversation with their student. Please help us by doing the following:

- Be aware of the social media applications used by your student.
- Be aware of the movies and television shows your students is watching.
- Know your student's friends/social influences.
- Encourage your student to avoid rumor and speculation.
- Reassure that there is help available and encourage your student to talk to an adult, such as an administrator, parent, or teacher.

- Remind your student to immediately report incidents of concern to adults and report to us any information you may have.
- Remain calm, be nonjudgmental, and listen.
- Avoid statements that might be perceived as minimizing the student's emotional pain (e.g., "You need to move on").
- Ask the student directly if they are thinking about suicide.
- Focus on your concern for their well-being and avoid being accusatory.
- Get help. Never agree to keep a student's suicidal thoughts a secret.

We appreciate the cooperative efforts of our students, families, and staff to provide a safe environment for our students both in and out of school. If you have any questions, please contact your school's principal or counseling center.

Suicide is NEVER the answer. Getting help is the answer. Prevention, awareness, and support are available at [Suicide.org](http://www.suicide.org) or National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8225 or text 741741). For more information about suicide prevention, please visit <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/preventing-youth-suicide-tips-for-parents-and-educators>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allan Markley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Dr. Allan Markley