

# Plainfield East High School

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Dear Parent or Guardian:

The adolescent years are marked by a roller-coaster ride of emotions—difficult for students, their parents, and 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. 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, Plainfield East is offering depression awareness and suicide prevention training 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. Listed on SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices, the SOS Program showed a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40-64% in randomized control studies (Aseltine et al., 2007 & Schilling et al., 2016).

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

This program will be presented to all 12th grade students during their English class on Tuesday, March 3, 2020. The SOS program is brought to us by Elyssa's Mission, a nonprofit organization dedicated to suicide prevention. Elyssa's Mission is the only organization in the state of Illinois to fund, distribute and implement SOS. To get more information on suicide prevention, visit their website at [www.elyssasmission.org](http://www.elyssasmission.org). Make sure and view their online Parent Presentation at <http://elyssasmission.org/suicide-prevention-training/> for specific information on warning signs and how to keep your child safe.

As part of the program, facilitators will show the SOS video and subsequently lead students in discussion. Students will then complete a brief depression screener as well as fill out a Response Card indicating whether or not they would like to speak to an adult about themselves or a friend. The depression screening tool addresses thoughts and feelings which a parent may be unaware their child is having. This tool does not provide a diagnosis of depression, but rather alerts school staff to those students requiring further investigation. Students will also complete a Response Card indicating whether or not they would like to speak to an adult at the school about themselves or a friend. School mental health staff or a qualified community mental health partner will be available to meet with designated students; school staff will subsequently notify parents/guardians regarding any needed next steps.

If you have any questions and/or do NOT want your child to participate in the SOS program, please contact Erika Bibian, Social Worker, at [ebibian@psd202.org](mailto:ebibian@psd202.org) or myself, Heather Boswell, Assistant Principal, at [hboswell@psd202.org](mailto:hboswell@psd202.org), prior to the program date. If we do not hear from you, we will assume your child has permission to participate in this program.

Sincerely,

Heather Boswell, AP Student Services

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