



Plan, Prepare, Prevent: The SOS Signs of Suicide®

Overview

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among youth in the United States. Suicidality is often an indication that there is an underlying illness, usually depression, which is treatable. Schools can play an important role in helping identify students who are at risk for suicide, and encouraging them to seek treatment. The nationally recognized SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention Program, created by Screening for Mental Health, Inc. (SMH), teaches middle and high school-age students how to identify the symptoms of depression and suicidality in themselves or their friends and encourages help-seeking through the use of the ACT® technique (Acknowledge, Care, Tell).

This module will prepare you to...

- Articulate the prevalence of youth suicide attempts and depression, suicide risk factors, and warning signs of suicide.

Descriptive Information

SOS is a school based prevention program that incorporates two prominent suicide prevention strategies into a single program. It combines a curriculum that aims to raise awareness of suicide and its related issues with a brief screening for depression and other risk factors. The educational component is expected to reduce suicidality by increasing students' understanding of and promoting more adaptive attitudes toward depression and suicidal behavior. The self-screening component enables students to recognize depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors in themselves and promotes them to seek assistance. A crucial part of SOS is promoting the understanding that suicide is a feature of mental illness and is, in fact, a part of the diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder. Students participate in guided classroom discussions and view a video that teaches them to recognize signs in themselves and others.

The goal of the SOS program is to make the action step, ACT, instinctual. The acronym ACT stands for Acknowledge, Care, and Tell. One must first acknowledge the signs of suicide that others display and take them seriously. Next, one must let the person know that you care about them and that you want to help. Lastly, youth are instructed to tell a responsible adult. The program attempts to prevent suicide attempts, increase knowledge about suicide and depression, develop desirable attitudes toward suicide and depression, and increase help-seeking behavior among youth.

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