



## Signs of Suicide (SOS) Program

SAVE Promise Clubs are required to implement at least one of Sandy Hook Promise's [Know The Signs](#) violence prevention programs, including Say Something, Start With Hello or Signs of Suicide (SOS).

### Who is Sandy Hook Promise?

Sandy Hook Promise (SHP) is a national, nonprofit organization based in Newtown, Connecticut. We are led by several family members whose loved ones were killed in the tragic mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012 that claimed the lives of 20 first-graders and 6 educators. SHP is focused on preventing gun violence (and other forms of violence and victimization) BEFORE it happens by educating and mobilizing youth and adults on mental health and wellness programs that identify, intervene and help at-risk individuals. SHP is a moderate, above-the-politics organization that supports sensible non-policy and policy solutions that protect children and prevent gun violence. Our intent is to honor all victims of gun violence by turning our tragedy into a moment of transformation. For more information, visit [www.sandyhookpromise.org](http://www.sandyhookpromise.org).

### What is the problem?

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for American teenagers and many adolescents suffer in silence. Those who reach out for help tend to confide in their friends and peers, who are often unequipped to intervene. By teaching middle and high school students to recognize the warning signs of depression and suicide, we are building their capacity for empathy, social responsibility, and social activism, leading to safer schools and communities, and providing them with vital knowledge they can use for the rest of their lives.

Suicide is preventable; everyone has a role in saving lives. Youths have a tremendous amount of influence in each other's lives, and we can leverage power that by teaching students the warning signs of depression and suicide. In doing so, youths are empowered to ACT, building safer schools and communities.

### What is Signs of Suicide (SOS)?

At its core, the SOS Signs of Suicide Prevention Program (SOS Program) relies on three easy-to-remember steps, denoted by the acronym ACT:

- Acknowledge that you are seeing warning signs and that it is serious
- Care let your friend know how much you care about them
- Tell a trusted adult that you are worried about your friend

The SOS program uses an educational curriculum to teach students to recognize the symptoms of depression and suicide, and can be implemented by existing school personnel within one class period. The main teaching tool is a video that shows dramatizations and real life stories of hope about the right and wrong ways to react when a friend exhibits certain behaviors. The program includes a mental health self-assessment that screens every student for depression and suicide. The program also includes training and educational materials for faculty, staff and parents.

An enlightened student body means earlier detection and increased help-seeking behavior. Research has shown that the SOS Program, which is listed on SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, improves students' knowledge and adaptive attitudes about suicide risk and depression, and reduces actual suicide attempts by 40%-64% in randomized controlled studies (Aseltine et al., 2007 & Schilling et al., 2016).

### **Who Should Participate in SOS?**

The SOS Program is designed for all middle and high school students. Additionally, school faculty and staff, parents, and community members receive training as trusted adults who have a critical role in reducing stigma, promoting help-seeking and responding to youth in need.

### **Who Will Benefit from SOS?**

Evidence-based suicide prevention programming benefits the entire community. Students and school staff learn critical and potentially life-saving skills, parents are encouraged to advocate for their children's health, and the community becomes more resilient overall.

### **What is the Core Learning of SOS?**

Students learn:

- Age-appropriate, fact-based information about suicide and the associated mental health concerns of depression, substance use, and self-injury
- Messages of hope that encourage help-seeking because mental illness, like physical illness, requires treatment
- Clear steps to take when worried about themselves or a friend (ACT: Acknowledge, Care, Tell)

Schools receive guidance on:

- Best practices in suicide prevention including universal student education and depression screening
- Training for faculty and staff on warning signs, risk factors, and how to support a student in need
- Strategies and tools for engaging parents in suicide prevention in-person and online

### **How Can I Bring SOS to my School or Youth Organization?**

If you are interested in bringing SOS to your school or youth organization, please contact us at [programs@sandyhookpromise.org](mailto:programs@sandyhookpromise.org). We can answer your questions and help you get started – at no-cost to your school or youth organization!