

Dear Families of LME 5th graders,

During the month of March we will be teaching one depression and suicide prevention lesson to all 5th grade classes. 5th grade is a time when many students begin experiencing more complex emotions. We know that students may be experiencing higher levels of academic stress, anxiety, and social isolation. These factors can create a higher risk of stress and sadness evolving into depression. We want to give students the tools to cope with these emotions *before* they transition to middle school. We will be teaching the difference between sadness and depression, warning signs of stress and depression, and what to do if your student or someone they know needs help.

There exists a common myth that talking about depression and suicide can put the idea in someone's head, or cause "suicide contagion". This is not true. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, "Several studies examining this concern have demonstrated that asking people about suicidal thoughts and behavior does not increase such thoughts or the risk of suicide." The reality is that having open conversations with young people about depression and suicide can help identify students who need help, teach students how to cope with big emotions and look out for one another, and effectively *prevent* suicide.

A second common myth is that elementary students are too young to experience depression. Unfortunately, children can and do become depressed. The National Institute of Mental Health tells us that elementary students can experience true depression. The NIMH also tells us that, "For many adults who have mental disorders, symptoms were present -but often not recognized or addressed -in childhood." Early treatment of childhood mental health problems can help prevent more severe, lasting problems as a child grows up. Mental health providers know that students and adults may be experiencing higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than ever before.

We use the *Signs of Suicide Curriculum* which is an evidence based curriculum used for students aged 10-18. The lesson teaches about the signs of stress to watch for in themselves and their friends. The lesson teaches the acronym **A-C-T**. **A** stands for **Acknowledge** the feelings the student is having. **C** stands for showing **Care** to the student or friend experiencing these feelings. The **T** stands for **Tell** a trusted adult to get help for yourself or a friend.

Attached to this letter you will also find a newsletter from our school health curriculum detailing the information we will be covering. We encourage you to have conversations at home with your child about these topics, and encourage you to ask the depression screener questions to your child at home. Following our depression lesson, we will be asking each 5th grade student to complete a google form that will ask them about their feelings and the current stressors in their lives. This is not a diagnostic tool but will help us identify students that may need follow up with our school counselor or possibly with a mental health professional. If your student is identified through this survey as needing more support, we will call you promptly in order to get support in place for your student and family. We will be offering a counselor follow up request form to each student following the lesson. We will be having students create an individualized self-care plan at the end of the lesson to help students identify safe adults in their life to talk to and action steps to take if and when they are feeling intense stress.

We have included the following parent resources on how to talk to your child about depression as well as community referral resources if you want to seek professional support for your child. Our goal is to decrease the stigma around talking about mental health and to give students the tools to acknowledge,

care, and seek help for themselves and for their friends that may be experiencing a mental health crisis. Please contact us with any questions or concerns.

<http://www.sosignsofsuicide.org/parent>

 Parent Webinar on Depression in Children

[ACT Parent Message Flyer](#)

 ACTParentHandout2020.pdf

[Childhood Depression: What Parents Need to Know \(for Parents\) - Nemours KidsHealth](#)

 Treating Depression in Your Child.pdf

 Community Resources 2021.docx

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's participation in this program please contact me at (360) 428-6125 ext. 24111 (8:30-4:00) or sbrooks@mvsd320.org (anytime). You can also contact our school counselor, Pam Ridenour, at (360) 428-6125 ext. 24025 (8:30-4:00) or pridenour@mvsd320.org (anytime).

Sincerely,

Stacy Brooks-Malcolm (Ms. Stacy)
Little Mountain Elementary School
Health Teacher

Class Schedule:

March 11 - Lee

March 12 - Otterholt

March 15 - Carpenter

Talking to your child

Take some time to start a conversation about mental health.

This can be tough since we don't usually talk about mental health like physical health. Feelings of depression or anxiety are often hidden because youth are confused, embarrassed, or ashamed. **Make sure your child knows they can talk to you about mental health.**

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Let your child steer the conversation to what they want to talk about.
- **Don't rush to solve their problems.** Instead, ask what they think would help a situation.
- **Be available and make sure your child knows it.** "I'm around if you want to talk later" may help.
- **Let them talk more than you do.** Try to avoid interruptions or distractions.

- **Avoid unkind words that shame or blame.** Try not to minimize their feelings with blame. Ex “you get everything you want, you have a great life, what reason do you have to be depressed”
- **Acknowledge their feelings.** Let them know that it took courage to share their feelings with you
- **Be patient.** Ask one question at a time and then wait for them to answer. Respect the silence gap.
- **Avoid diagnosing or giving advice.** Offering reassurance is most important. “We will get through this together”
- **Make a Self-Care Plan.** Help your child identify safe people to talk to, actions to do to help feel better, and a plan to follow if they are feeling overwhelmed in the future.
- **Seek Help.** If you are still worrying about your child then seek professional help, don't wait!

Stress Screener

Parents, here is the screener that we encourage you to use with your child. This is not a diagnostic tool but a way to look for warning signs.

1. During the last 2 weeks, how often have you had little interest or pleasure in doing things you normally enjoy?
2. During the last 2 weeks, how often have you been feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?
3. During the last 2 weeks, how often did you feel tired, always sleepy or have little energy throughout the whole day?
4. During the last 2 weeks, how often did you have a poor appetite or overeat?
5. During the last 2 weeks, how often did you feel bad about yourself, or feel that you are a failure, or have let yourself or your family down?
6. During the last 2 weeks, how often have you felt moody, grumpy or frustrated?
7. Have you ever wished you were dead, thought about hurting yourself, or that you didn't want to live anymore?
8. Have you thought about a plan to end your life?
9. Have you ever taken steps to follow through with your plan for self-harm?
10. Do you think you or someone you know needs help for depression or thoughts about self-harm?



CRISIS TEXT LINE |

Text **ACT** to 741741.



Request a Counseling Appointment for Your Student

Dear Parents, if you would like for me to reach out to you or your student, please fill out my counseling referral form by scanning this QR Code. This will send an email to me right away. Please indicate what way you would prefer that I reach you (email, phone, other.) I want to be available for you and your students during this time. Respectfully~Ms. Ridenour