

Dear Parent or Guardian:

The teen years are marked by a roller-coaster ride of emotions – difficult for teens, their parents, and educators. It is easy to misread depression as a normal adolescent turmoil; however, depression (among the most common of mental illnesses) appears to be occurring at a much earlier age, and the past decade has seen teen suicide rates double.

To proactively address this issue, University Academy is offering a depression screening and suicide prevention training as part of the SOS: Signs of Suicide Prevention Program. This program has been used by thousands of schools over the past nine years. It has proven successful at increasing help seeking by students concerned about themselves or a friend and is the only school-based suicide prevention selected by SAMSHA for its National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices that addresses suicide risk and depression, while reducing suicide attempts. In a randomized control study, the SOS 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, and help them assess whether or not they may have symptoms consistent with depression
- 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 a friend
- To impress upon teens that they can help themselves or a friend by taking the simple step of talking to a responsible adult about their concerns.

The depression screening tool that we are using takes into consideration thoughts and feelings, which a parent may be unaware that their child is having. This tool cannot provide a diagnosis of depression, but does give an indication of whether a young person should be referred for evaluation by a mental health professional. We are enclosing a Parent Version of the same depression screening form and ask that you take a moment to fill it out. We include the questionnaire to make you aware of the types of questions that your child will be answering and to help you assess your teen's risk for depression. If you are concerned, we encourage you to speak to your son or daughter and follow up with a mental health professional for a complete evaluation.

If you do not wish your child to take a written screening test for depression and participate in SOS: Signs of Suicide intervention training in school, please contact Brianne Phillips (816-412-5956 or [phillipsb@universityacademy.org](mailto:phillipsb@universityacademy.org)) by October 27. If we do not hear from you, we will assume your child has permission to participate in this program.

If you have any questions or concerns about this program or the enclosed screening form, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,  
Brianne Phillips, LCSW, RPT-S