



SOS: Signs of Suicide

Program Description

SOS incorporates two prominent suicide prevention strategies into a single program, combining a curriculum that aims to raise awareness of suicide and its related issues with a brief screening for depression and other risk factors associated with suicidal behavior. In the didactic component of the program, SOS promotes the concept that suicide is directly related to mental illness, typically depression, and that it is not a normal reaction to stress or emotional upset. The basic goal of the program is to teach high school students to respond to the signs of suicide as an emergency, much as one would react to signs of a heart attack. Students are taught to recognize the signs and symptoms of suicide and depression in themselves and others and to follow the specific action steps needed to respond to those signs.

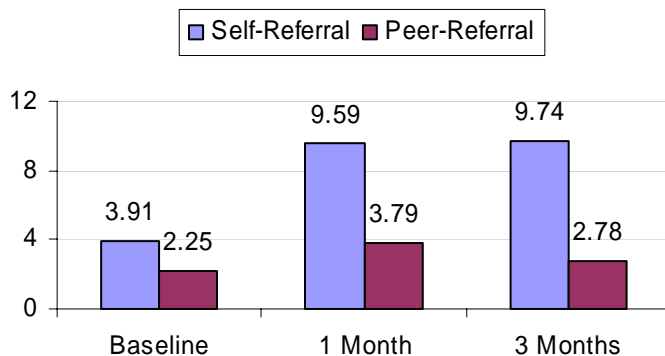
Program Activities

Program activities include a 50-minute classroom presentation that features a 25-minute video, a teacher-led discussion, and the administration and scoring of the SOS Student Screening Form. Support materials such as posters, handouts, and cards are provided.

Evaluation Design & Outcomes

An experimentally designed study (Aseltine & DeMartino, 2004) found that program participants were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the three months following program implementation than were students in a control group. A separate pre-post study (Aseltine, 2002) reported increases in the number of school-wide referrals for suicidality/depression (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Average Number of Self- and Peer-Referrals



SPRC Classification

Promising

Program Characteristics
Intervention Type School-Based
Target Age 14-18
Gender Female & Male
Ethnicity Multiple
IOM Category Universal Selective Indicated

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Generalizability

The evaluation results reported above were taken from primarily urban populations. However, the SOS Program has been administered in over one-thousand high schools containing a diversity of students. Evaluation efforts are currently underway to evaluate program effects in suburban and rural populations.

Implementation Essentials

Essential components of the SOS program are (1) a student video *Friends for Life: Preventing Teen Suicide*, (2) a teacher training video; and (3) a teacher discussion guide. Schools should be prepared to appropriately handle an increased number of referrals for depression and suicide. Other components include a brief student self-report for depression and a parent version of the same instrument that can be used by parents to evaluate possible depression in their children.

Targeted Protective and Risk Factors

The SOS program impacts the following risk and protective factors that have been targeted by the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* for the reduction of suicide in the United States.

Increased Protective Factors

Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions and support for help-seeking
Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation
Strong connections to family and community support

Decreased Risk Factors

Stigma associated with help-seeking behavior

Language Availability

Spanish language versions of the student screening form and parent instrument are available.

Program Materials and Costs

Teachers implementing the program will require 1-2 hours of training and a site coordinator (usually a counselor). The following program materials are supplied by the developer for a cost of \$200.

- Procedure manual (40 pages)
- Teacher training video (28 minutes)
- Student video (25 minutes)
- Teacher discussion Guide
- Student self-screening form & administrator protocols
- Parent version of the student screening form & directions for parent use
- Support Materials (anti-suicide posters, hand-outs, cards, & the like)

For Additional Program Information Contact

Barbara S. Kopans
Screening for Mental Health Inc.
One Washington Street, Suite 304
Wellesley Hills, MA 02481
Phone: (781) 239-0071
Fax: (781) 431-7447
Webpage: www.mentalhealthscreening.org
Email: highschool@mentalhealthscreening.org

References

Aseltine, R. H. Jr., & DeMartino, R. (2004). An outcome evaluation of the SOS suicide prevention program. *American Journal of Public Health, 94*(3), 446-451.

Aseltine, R. H. Jr. (2002). An evaluation of a school based suicide prevention program. *Adolescent & Family Health, 3*(2), 81-88.