

February 11, 2008

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The adolescent years are marked by a roller-coaster ride of emotions- difficult for youths, their parents, and educators. It is easy to misread depression as normal adolescent turmoil; however, depression (among the most common of mental illnesses) appears to be occurring at a much earlier age. Depression, which is treatable, is a leading risk factor for suicide. In addition, self-injury has become a growing problem among youth.

To proactively address these issues, Agawam Middle School is offering depression awareness and suicide prevention training through the SOS Middle School Program. This program, for which Agawam Middle School counselors have been trained, has been developed by the highly regarded non-profit organization that created the SOS Signs of Suicide Program for High Schools, used by thousands of schools nationwide since 2000. It has proven successful at increasing help seeking by students concerned about themselves or a friend and is the only school-based suicide prevention program to show a reduction in suicide attempts in a randomized, controlled study (American Journal of Public Health, March, 2004). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released its Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted in 2003. Across states, the percentage of students who reported that they had seriously thought about killing themselves, ranged from 18% of sixth graders to 28% of eighth graders. Eleven percent of 6<sup>th</sup> graders and up to 17% of eighth graders reported that they had made a plan about how to kill themselves. Most alarmingly, the percentage of youth that reported that they had actually tried to kill themselves ranged from 7% among sixth graders to 11% of eighth graders.

This program will be offered once during your child's Structured Learning Time (SLT) period and; therefore, he/she will not miss any academic classes.

Please sign and return the enclosed permission slip allowing your child to participate in the SOS Middle School Program in school by **Friday, February 15, 2008**.

If you have any questions or concerns about this program, please do not hesitate to contact the Guidance Office at 789-1400 ext. 455.

Sincerely,

Mr. Cowles  
School Adjustment Counselor

Mrs. LaPoint  
Guidance Counselor

## SOS Middle School Program

I, \_\_\_\_\_, **do give permission** for \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent/Guardian Name of Student

to participate in the SOS: Get Into the ACT Program, to take place during the month of  
February.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, \_\_\_\_\_, **do not give permission** for \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent/Guardian Name of Student

to participate in the SOS: Get Into the ACT Program, to take place during the month of  
February.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**\* Please return by Friday, February 15, 2008.**