

SOS for Middle School Discussion Guide & Screening Instructions

“Today we are going to be learning about suicide prevention. We will be watching some videos and discussing them as a group.

This can be a difficult topic to talk about but it’s important to learn how we can help each other.”

*(Continue reading except for end-of-day classes**)*

At the end of the class, we will be asking you to complete a brief survey where you will be answering some questions about how you have been feeling over the past month. You will also have an opportunity to indicate if you would like to speak to an adult privately about any questions or concerns that you may have about yourself and/or a friend/peer.”

****NOTE: For classes being facilitated the last 1-2 periods of the school day (pre-determined by your school’s SOS Team), students should be directed to complete the survey *before* the SOS lesson.**

Directions for End-of-Day Classes:

****Read the directions to students before passing out the forms! Let students know that they should turn their paper over when they finish, and you will collect it from them. Do NOT have students pass papers forward or deposit in a pile!**

“Today we will be viewing and discussing the SOS Middle School Program videos. Before we start, I am going to pass out a brief survey. Please write your first and last name legibly at the top, and then answer the seven yes-or-no questions to the best of your ability. All but one question asks you to think about how you have been feeling over the **past 4 weeks**, *not* just how you are feeling today, or even how you were feeling two summers ago or last school year, just how you’ve been feeling over the past month. Next, think of trusted adults both at home and at school, and complete this portion of the survey. If your trusted adult at home is a relative (mom, grandma, uncle, etc.) you can write their title as opposed to their name. For school, please specify a particular person (don’t just write “teacher” or “counselor”).

In our discussion today we will be talking about the importance of the ACT help-seeking message. I want to give you an opportunity right now to request to speak to an adult at the school about concerns that you may have about yourself or a friend. Please fill in the appropriate bubble on the bottom of the form indicating whether or not you would like to talk to someone. Your choices are 1) I would like to talk to someone today, because it is an emergency, 2) I would like to talk to an adult one day this week—it is not an emergency, or 3) I do not need to talk to an adult at this time. Just fill in one of the three bubbles. I know we have not gone through the lesson yet, so just make a choice based on how you feel right now. If your answer changes by the end of the lesson, please notify me at the end of the class period.”

Video 1 - Introduction

“In the first video, you will learn about ACT. You’ll also see Aiden and David, two close friends. David is very worried about Aiden. As you watch, think about why David is worried about Aiden.”

Show Video 1 & Guide Class Discussion

Q1: What are some of the differences between sadness and depression?

A: Sadness:

- Common part of life for everyone
- Can still go about daily life
- Temporary feeling that can go away on its own
- We can minimize sad feelings by doing something to help take our minds off whatever is bringing us down (e.g., talking to a friend, listening to music, playing sports, etc.).

A: Depression:

- Lasts for two weeks or longer
- Serious health condition that affects the mind and body (e.g., eating and sleeping habits, energy level, interest in activities, academic performance, concentration, decision-making, etc.) and prevents you from doing the things that were once important to you
- Important to get treatment from a qualified doctor or mental health professional in order to get better

Q2: What are some of the warning signs that a person might be thinking about suicide?

- Sudden anger or intense sadness
- Major changes in behavior like withdrawing from friends or quitting activities they once loved
- Talking about suicide
- Feeling hopeless and/or like things aren’t going to get better

Q3: What should you do if you notice warning signs in a friend?

A: You must ACT: Acknowledge signs of suicide in a friend, show your friend you Care, and Tell a trusted adult. Encourage students to discuss how they would use the ACT steps.

Optional Question:

How does David use ACT in the right way?

A: Acknowledge: He points out that Aiden isn’t acting like himself, and that the things Aiden is saying, like that he wants to “drop dead,” are serious. **Care:** He reminds Aiden that they’ve been friends for a long time, and that if the situation were reversed, Aiden would want to help. **Tell:** He doesn’t leave Aiden alone, and doesn’t give up, even when Aiden yells at him. David helps Aiden think of an adult he could talk to and goes with him to make sure that he follows through.

Q4: What makes someone a trusted adult? Who are the trusted adults in your own life?

A

- A trusted adult is someone you can turn to when you are concerned about yourself or a friend.
- Encourage students to talk about their trusted adults inside and outside of school. This can be a great opportunity for students to recommend trusted adults that others may not have thought of (i.e., English teacher, health teacher, etc.).

Video 2 – Introduction

“In the next video, you’ll hear students talk about some dangerous ways that people try to cope with difficult feelings. As you watch, think about what you can do if you are worried that a friend is struggling to cope.”

Show Video 2 & Guide Class Discussion

Q5: The students talk about ways that people try to cope that end up making things worse. What helps you get through difficult times or emotions?

A: Encourage students to share their positive coping strategies. Consider a classroom poll or activity for students to rank their best healthy coping skills.

Q6: What would you do if your friend was drinking or hurting themselves, but they said they were okay and begged you not to tell.

A: Encourage students to share their ideas for how they would follow the ACT steps in this situation. Discuss that sometimes a friend will say they are fine when they are feeling depressed or even thinking about suicide. It’s important to look out for warning signs and trust your instincts. If you are worried, tell a trusted adult about what you’ve noticed.

Note to Facilitator:

Keep information about self-injury very general and within the context of seeking help from a trusted adult.

- Self-injury is when a person hurts their body on purpose without the intention to die. It is often an attempt to cope with overwhelming emotional pain.
- Self-injury is a mental health concern that can be treated; there are people in the school who can help students who self-injure.

Q7: Kennedy suggests that Bella talk to her music teacher, the nurse, or the counselor. In our school, who would you suggest a friend should talk to and why?

A: Encourage students to discuss your school's trusted adults. Any adult in school can help a student in need. Ask students if they know where the student services office is and how they can get in touch with the counselors or social workers. Use this opportunity to offer yourself as a trusted adult for any of your students if they would like to talk.

Video 3 - Introduction

"In the final clip you will watch students discuss how social media plays a role in mental well-being and how taking care of mental health is similar to taking care of physical health."

Show Video 3 & Guide Class Discussion

Q8: What are some positive ways to use social media that can be good for your mental wellness?

A: Encourage students to share their ideas- they are the experts on their own social media use! Additional suggestions include:

- Find connection with people who share your interests and accept you for who you are
- Keep in touch with friends and family members that make you feel good
- Share your goals and accomplishments, show your creativity, and celebrate others
- Follow and share inspiring accounts
- Connect with causes you care about or topics that interest you
- Connect to support groups and find resources

Optional Question:

What may be warning signs on social media and how would you address those warning signs?

- Social media posts that say things like, "There's no point anymore" or "I want the pain to stop" or "I don't want to try anymore"
- A friend who used to post a lot suddenly disappears from social media with no explanation
- You notice people posting mean things about your friend
- Note that friends may remain very positive online despite really struggling. No matter what you see online, if you notice changes in a person, ACT.
- It's the same as if you see warning signs in-person. You need to ACT!
- Note: friends often notice warning signs online when they are home at night. Go to a trusted adult immediately rather than waiting to see your friend at school the next day

Q9: How is mental health similar to physical health? What's an example of physical illness/injury that needs treatment?

A: Examples may include:

- Healthy eating
- Exercise
- Getting good sleep and making time to relax
- Avoiding alcohol, drugs, smoking
- Going to the doctor when sick

All of these examples apply to mental health too. Even when we take care of our physical health, sometimes we get sick. When that happens it's time to get help to feel better. The same can happen with mental health.

Q10: What can you do if you start noticing changes in your own mental health?

A: The ACT message works for you too. If you start to notice signs, acknowledge them. This means accepting that something serious is going on and that you need to address it. Take care of yourself. Remember to use your positive coping strategies and stay connected to people who care about you. Most importantly, tell a trusted adult. Help is always available.

Video Review

Allow time for students to ask any additional questions. Remind students of resources available on and off campus. Reinforce the ACT help-seeking message and ensure that students can name the three steps (Acknowledge, Care and Tell).

Depression Screening Introduction

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