

Signs of Suicide (S.O.S)

Healthy Schools Conference
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Background

- The S.O.S program was selected as a new initiative within the Awareness and Understanding component of Reclaiming Hope: Manitoba's Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy.
- S.O.S was selected because of its evidence base and its focus on increasing the public's awareness and understanding that suicide is an important community health issue, that it can be prevented and that everyone can play a part in providing support to youth at risk.

Overview of S.O.S Program

- Evidence-based, school- based suicide prevention program.
- Designed to reduce suicidal behaviour among adolescents through 2 mechanisms:
 - Educational component (facts about suicide, dispelling of myths)
 - Self-screening component (students assess and evaluate depressive or suicidal thoughts they may experience)
- Developed in the U.S.A by Screening for Mental Health
- First school-based suicide prevention program to demonstrate significant reductions in self-reported suicide attempts.

Overview of S.O.S Program

- 2 classroom period program to assist secondary students to recognize signs of depression and suicide in themselves and peers, follow steps to respond appropriately (ACT: acknowledge, care, tell)
- S.O.S program composed of; 25 minute “Friends for Life” video, brief self screen for depression, and classroom lesson plans.
- S.O.S encourages schools to develop community based partnerships with mental health professionals and other stakeholders (parents etc.)

Goals of S.O.S

- Decrease the incidence of self-injury, suicide attempts, unrecognized depression, and the number of youth who die by suicide
- Increase knowledge and adaptive attitudes about depression, suicidality, and self-injury
- Encourage individual help-seeking
- Link suicide and self-injury to mental illness that, like physical illnesses, require treatment
- Address risk factors for self-injury and suicide

Key Findings from Evaluations

- S.O.S has been rigorously evaluated in U.S.A contexts.
- 2 randomized control trials have been completed on S.O.S thus far.

Both evaluations conclude that after completing the program, participants in S.O.S:

- Were 40% less likely than control group students to report attempting suicide in the past 3 months.
- Demonstrated greater knowledge about depression and suicide than control groups.
- Had more desirable attitudes regarding depression and suicide than control groups.

Evaluation Summary

- School-based outcome evaluation showed S.O.S was effective in; increasing students' knowledge, adaptive attitudes, initiating help seeking and decreasing self-reported suicide attempts.
- Safe for students.
- Received and rated positively by users.

Overview of S.O.S Pilot in Manitoba

- In 2010, a pilot project was undertaken in 13 schools across various regions in Manitoba.
- Teachers/school personnel were trained in Mental Health First Aid for Adults who interact with Youth and were oriented to the S.O.S program and evaluation components
- A cluster randomized trial design was utilized to evaluate the effects of the program during the pilot
- Pre and post tests were administered to grade 9 students to capture and measure any changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.
- Qualitative data was also collected to inform moving forward (focus groups)

Key Findings of MB Pilot

- Increase in students' knowledge of suicide
- Increase in students' adaptive attitudes towards depression and suicide
- Reduction in student self-reported suicide attempts
- Increase in number of students who received treatment for feeling depressed or suicidal
- No evidence of iatrogenic effects

S.O.S in Practice

Teachers participating in the pilot project reported the following:

- The MB S.O.S training was very beneficial
- MHFA training was “a great refresher and a new learning opportunity”.
- MHFA curriculum was easy to follow and assisted when implementing S.O.S in the classroom
- Many support materials and resources from MHFA were used when implementing S.O.S.

S.O.S in Practice

- S.O.S program itself was very well organized
- Video used was clear and held the interest of the high school students
- Students were very receptive to the material
- The program helped students to come forward to speak about issues they were facing and get assistance

S.O.S in Practice

One teacher reported:

- Approximately 15% of the students that completed the program responded that they would like to meet with a guidance counselor.
- A group of students as a result of taking the S.O.S program, chose to work in a group setting with the counselor to work through issues
- S.O.S assisted in fostering connections between guidance counselors and students to determine what assistance/resources were needed.

Thank You Very Much!

