

OLSS EMOTIONAL/MENTAL WELL-BEING PROGRAM

Here at OLSS, we feel that emotional and mental well-being are just as important as academic learning and will help promote a more healthy learning environment for students to focus on their education. Addressing mental health and promoting emotional and mental well-being in school leads to improved performance, provides hope to children, increase in success, and a brighter future for our children.

Just as we would treat and address a physical injury or broken bone with rushing our kids to the doctor or emergency room for physical injury, we also need to care for their social/emotional/mental health in this manner as well. We need to break the stigma on talking about mental and emotional health with our children. Reach out, ask questions, and utilize resources to help us keep our students healthy both physically and mentally.

“The number of adolescents reporting poor mental health is steadily increasing. Building strong bonds and connecting to youth can protect their mental health. Schools and parents can create these protective relationships with students and help them grow into healthy adulthood.” (youth.gov, 2021) The past two years with the struggles of coping with the stressors of the pandemic and adjusting to new norms, shifts between in school learning and virtual learning, has caused increased stress not only on adults but also on our youth. According to the CDC, the suicide rate for people aged 10 to 24 increased 57.4% from 2007 to 2018. 54%, more than half of people who died by suicide did not have a known mental health condition at the time. Mental Health America reports that suicidal ideation is highest among youth, and over 77,000 adolescents frequently thought about suicide from January to September 2020.

According to recent statistics, more than two thirds of parents who sought help since the start of the pandemic said they had witnessed a decline in their child’s emotional well-being (72%), behavior (68%), and physical health due to decreased activities/exercise (68%). Below are the most common emotional and mental health related challenges parents have sought help for:

Anxiety (40%)

Depression (37%)

Seeking help for problem behavior (30%)

ADHD (30%)

Other learning challenges (23%)

(Child Mind Institute Children’s Mental Health Report 2020)

You are not Alone! OLSS is happy to announce we will be implementing a Mental and Emotional Wellness program in our school to benefit our students to promote a holistic approach to their education, learning, and health. Students grade K-8th will have access to a session of learning about the different types of health (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual). They will also benefit from group activities to promote improved communication among peers, how to handle emotions, stress, and healthy ways to strengthen their mental health.

We are also excited to announce that we have partnered with Caitlin Langreich, M.A., LCPC, CCTP *Mental Health Therapist* from St. Jerome's Counseling Program to provide in-house services to our students. Parents can contact the school nurse at schoolnurse@olss.org if they are interested in services being provided to their student. Students may also be identified as benefiting from sessions

with Ms. Langreich, and an email will be sent to parents from St. Jerome's to offer these services and set up sessions during the school day. Students grade 4-8th will also be offered a free mental health screening (with parent consent). For more information on St. Jerome's Counseling please utilize the following link Counseling Program - St. Jerome Catholic Parish - Hyattsville, MD (stjeromes.org). Families can always pursue other resources outside of school if they would prefer.

I encourage families to visit <https://www.childrensmentalhealthmatters.org/> This resource provides a "Family Tool Kit" under resources and downloads, it also provides age-appropriate activities from elementary to middle school to complete with your children to promote their social-emotional health and well-being. The website gives guidance on where to start and who to call in addressing any mental health related concerns you may have.

If you have questions, or need assistance on guidance or resources, please do not hesitate to reach out for assistance. I am very excited to be able to offer these additional resources to our students right here at our school. I will also be happy to help guide you and your student to resources not only here but also in our community.

Sincerely,

Brandi Hutchins, RN, BSN, OLSS School Nurse
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Information on Depression Screening

Depression and mental health issues in adolescence is increasing at an alarming rate.

In a 10 year span from 2002 to 2018 the numbers of adolescents reporting depression symptoms has increased by over 70% from 8.3% to 14.4%. In the last two years with the addition of the stressors of the pandemic, isolation from the result of online learning, and increased usage of social media, there have been even higher spikes in depression symptoms and mental health struggles in students age 5-17. Suicide is now the second-leading cause of adolescent death. (futura.org, 2021)

While physical assessments, hearing and eye exams, and required vaccinations to maintain physical health are mandatory in many states and school, there is little to no screenings or assessments occurring on the mental health of our students. Just as we quickly address a physical injury or ailment to prevent further complications, we should also be focusing on prevention and early detection and treatment for our children's overall mental health and well-being. We would not wait until adulthood to treat a broken ankle or address a fever or sore throat, so why are we waiting to assess the mental well-being of our youth?

It is important to remember that screening for depression and mental health struggles is only an initial step and **is not a diagnosis**. Further evaluation by a health care provider is needed for any children and adolescents identified through a screening process. Further evaluation is also warranted for children or adolescents who exhibit depressive symptoms but who do not screen positive on a mental health screening evaluation. If your child is exhibiting any of signs or symptoms of depression below or other mental health struggles, they should be promptly evaluated by a health care provider.

The following symptom may indicate depression in adolescents, particularly when they last for more than 2 weeks:

- Poor performance in school
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Feelings of sadness and hopelessness
- Lack of enthusiasm, energy, or motivation
- Lack of pleasure in performance of acts that would normally be pleasurable
- Feelings of anger and rage
- Overreaction to criticism
- Feelings of being unable to satisfy ideals
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt
- Indecision, lack of concentration, or forgetfulness
- Restlessness and agitation
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Substance abuse
- Problems with authority
- Suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts) or actions

If symptoms of depression are present, talk with your health professional. Get help. You don't need to fight depression alone. Depression can get better with help. (brightfutures.org, 2000)

CONSENT FOR CONSENT FOR ACCESS TO COUNSELING SERVICES AT OLSS & MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING

Our Lady Star of the Sea School understands the importance of social, emotional, and mental well-being and will be offering a free mental health screening for students in grades 4-8 and in house counseling services in coordination with St. Jerome's Counseling Program, Caitlin Langreich M.A., LCPC, CCTP *Mental Health Therapist*

Information about counseling access:

- Students will have access to an in school counselor to address various needs related to their mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being.
- Students learn to talk about their social/emotional/mental health, which is a valuable life-long skill
- Students counseling sessions are not shared or stored with academic records
- Students, parents, and staff may reach out to refer a student to speak with a counselor. A consent form must be completed prior to initiation of services.
- Parents or guardians will be contacted by St. Jerome's Counseling to set up a profile in their client portal and will email the necessary paperwork. Once the paperwork is completed Caitlin can then set up an appointment with your child during school hours.

Information on screening:

- Students complete a brief questionnaire about their health, feelings and behaviors in a confidential setting utilizing the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children.
- Students results on the screening are not shared with staff members or stored with academic records
- The results of the screening will be given directly to the school nurse or school therapist for review
- Parents or guardians are only contacted if the screening reveals potential needs regarding your child's social/emotional/mental health
 - Students will have access to in house counseling services in coordination with St. Jerome's Counseling Program, Caitlin Langreich M.A., LCPC, CCTP *Mental Health Therapist*

Every student in grades 4-8 has the opportunity to participate in an educational session regarding mental health. Parental consent is required for the child to participate in the mental health screening and counseling.

Please initial one of the following:

____ I WOULD like my child to be screened for depression as part of the mental health well-being initiative being implemented at OLSS.

____ I DO NOT WANT my child to be screened for depression as part of the mental well-being initiative being implemented at OLSS.

____ I would like more information on screening/counseling before I make my decision and would like to have the school nurse call me.

Student's name (Print): _____

Date of Birth: _____

Parent/Guardian name (Print): _____

Best Parent/Guardian Phone Number: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

***Please complete the attached School Counseling Consent form to provide ongoing access to in school counseling for your student(s)**