Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Supports

**MESSAGE TO FAMILIES:**

COVID-19 has impacted students and families over the past year in a multitude of ways. For some, the pandemic has chipped away at their resiliency and mental health, creating a sense of helplessness, and at times, hopelessness. As a school district, we will strive to support students, families and staff in every way possible as we navigate the coming months.

Although there are brighter days ahead, with the gradual rollout of the vaccine and in-person learning, we must continue to watch out for one another. This means being tuned in to the emotional needs of those around us and being aware of the warning signs of [depression in children](https://www.webmd.com/depression/guide/depression-children#1), [depression in teens](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/teen-depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20350985) and [thoughts of suicide](https://www.childrenshospital.org/conditions-and-treatments/conditions/s/suicide-and-teens/symptoms-and-causes). Although we strive for a culture of kindness and compassion, there is a stigma attached to suicide, which makes it hard to talk about. Research shows, however, that when struggling individuals are asked if they are having thoughts of suicide, they are less likely to move forward with a plan to harm themselves; asking directly increases their safety. If someone is in crisis, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 1-800-273-8255.

To further OSD's efforts to prioritize mental health, the Olympia School District Education Foundation (OSDEF) has launched a mental health initiative to expand its support in this area. These include mental health courses for staff and students, Teaching and Learning Grants aimed at funding mental and physical health initiatives, and a mental health resource library for students, families and staff.

The stressors and isolation associated with distance learning are real. The transition to hybrid learning brings with it many positives, as well as the potential for new challenges around child care arrangements, transportation, possible change of teacher, etc. The refrain that we have been hearing since nearly a year ago has been, “We are all in this together”. Now is the time to increase the volume on that message, turn our eyes and ears to each other and remember to utilize the school district counselors, psychologists and social workers, all of whom can provide support, guidance and referrals to community providers. Please take a moment to review the resources below:

[Resources for families from the OSD website](https://osd.wednet.edu/families/resources_for_youth_and_families)