

CENTERVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

We all share a common goal of creating a safe learning environment where suicide is prevented. Related to that goal, House Bill 198 requires that each school system adopt a policy that addresses student suicide prevention. Gwinnett County Public Schools uses *Lifelines Prevention*, an evidence-based curriculum, to educate students in grades 5, 7, and 9 on the facts about suicide and students' role in suicide prevention. The program curriculum includes developmentally appropriate class discussions, student handouts, videos, and corresponding activities. The program curriculum was submitted and reviewed by the Community Health Education Advisory Committee. The purpose of the Lifelines Prevention program is to provide accurate and relevant information about youth suicide, learn how to respond to suicidal friends, and where to go for help.

During the months of January and February, our school counselors will offer lessons from the *Lifelines Prevention* curriculum in our fifth-grade classes. Because one of the main objectives of this curriculum is to encourage our students to identify trusted adults in their lives to whom they can turn if they have concerns about themselves or their friends, we want to provide you with an outline of the four sessions to make it easier for you to talk with your child about these important lessons.

Lesson 1: Suicide Isn't Silly

Although most students have heard about suicide, the word still carries a mysterious and somewhat scary meaning because it deals with death. It's not unusual, then, that many younger students make jokes about it. This session began with discussion about what the students already know about suicide. This was followed by an activity that demonstrates how the assumptions we make about something like suicide can influence both our ability to understand it and how we solve problems related to it. Basic information about suicide is provided with a focus on help-seeking when you are worried about yourself or a peer.

Ask your child:

- What did you learn in class about suicide? Was this new information or did you already know it?
- I know the title of the lesson was "Suicide Isn't Silly." What did your class have to say about that?
- What's one thing you could tell me to help me better understand suicide?

Lesson 2: Friends Help Friends

Because so much of today's communication among youth takes place online or through smartphones, this lesson focuses on the differences between in-person communication and communication through texting or online messages, especially when it concerns potential suicide risk. Students will explore developmentally relevant signs that a peer may need help. They will begin to explore interventions to help troubled friends.

Ask your child:

- I know you talked about how the way people react to texts or online messages can be different from the way they react to the same messages in an in-person conversation. What did you think about that?
- Do you ever see things online that worry you? What are some of the things someone who needs help might say? Tell me one thing you could do if you were worried about a friend.
- Can you tell the difference when someone online is making a joke and when they are serious? Is it easier to do that in an in-person conversation? Tell me why.

Lesson 3: Asking for Help Takes Courage

Through an activity that explores different life situations that require courage, the topic of being courageous enough to ask for help is introduced. A classroom activity will help students identify the qualities of helpful people. School-based resources will be reviewed so students know where and how to get help for themselves or a peer when they are in school.

Ask your child:

- Tell me about some of the things you talked about that require courage.
- Would you add anything else to that list? What?
- Why do you think it takes courage to ask for help?
- What are some of the qualities you think makes a person helpful?
- Who are the people you can go to in the school if you need help? Do you think you would go to them, or would you go to someone else? Who?

Lesson 4: Practicing What We've Learned

In the last lesson, the ideas students have learned in the previous three sessions are demonstrated in video segments of youth dealing with a peer who may need help. After a discussion, students are asked to sign a help-seeking pledge, promising that if they are ever worried about themselves or a friend, they will go to a trusted adult for help. They also receive a small card where they can write the names and contact information of their trusted adults.

Ask your child:

- Tell me about the videos you saw in class. What did you think of them?
- What did you think about the way the kids handled the situation? (Situation: A peer sent a worrisome text message to his friends. One of the girls who was involved finally told her mother and one of her teachers.)
- What is the help-seeking pledge?
- You don't have to tell me who they are if you don't want to, but were you able to name some of the trusted adults in your life? If your child answers "no," suggest: Let's talk about this some more and see if we can't come up with at least one person you might consider a trusted adult.

If any of your child's answers to these questions worry or confuse you, please reach out to our 5th grade counselor, Ms. Anita Baker, at 678-639-3722. She would be happy to talk with you.

If you prefer that your child not participate in the *Lifelines Prevention* lessons, please write and sign a note indicating your preferences and send it to your child's school counselor. Unless written documentation is received, your child will have the opportunity to participate in the lessons.

Sincerely,

5th Grade Counselor