

Parent Information Letter

Mental and Emotional Health Education

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The State Board of Education issued Rule 6A-1.094121 requiring all students in grades 6-12 receive 5 hours of instruction in the areas of mental and emotional health education, including instruction in the areas of general mental health, substance abuse, and suicide prevention. Polk County high school teachers will be providing this education during the month of January 2020. These lessons are scheduled to be taught at Harrison and Lakeland on Tuesday, January 14. During this instruction, the following topics will be discussed:

- Stress and anxiety
- Depression
- Suicide prevention
- Stigma of mental illness
- Self-care strategies
- Vaping prevention
- Opioid/prescription medication awareness

The goal of this program is to help our students become healthy and responsible adults who are able to deal positively with their mental and social development. We invite your participation in these lessons by following up at home with your teen, with the suggestions listed below:

1. **Start the conversation.** Consider asking your teens what they learned during the classes. Use this opportunity to discuss the mental health topics with your teens and your feelings and experiences regarding them.
2. **Really listen.** Listen without trying to fix, offering solutions or telling them how they should feel. Teens, as with all people, want to be heard and understood.
3. **Keep an open mind.** Let them share their struggles, challenges, fears and concerns with you, without judgment or criticism. The goal is to understand, not necessarily to agree with each other.
4. **Do regular check-ins.** Check-in with your teens on a regular basis to monitor their emotional and mental health. Ask questions, such as "I've noticed you're in your room a lot; what's going on?"
5. **Be aware of the warning signs.** Restlessness and agitation, declining school performance, changes in appetite or sleep, withdrawing from friends and activities, lack of enthusiasm, energy or motivation, self-harm, and substance abuse could indicate that your teen is experiencing mental health problems.
6. **Trust your instincts.** If you think something is wrong, you are probably right. If you suspect your teen might be thinking about suicide, talk to them immediately. Don't be afraid to use the word "suicide." Talking about suicide won't put ideas in your teen's head. If your teen is in immediate danger, call 911. You can also contact the Peace River Crisis Line at 1-800-627-5906 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.
7. **If you think your teen needs more support, ask for help.** Reach out to your school's mental health professionals, such as school counselors, social workers, psychologists or mental health facilitators. They can direct you to resources, services and providers in your community.

If you have any questions or want more information regarding the curriculum content, please contact Audrey Kelley-Fritz at the Mark Wilcox Center at (863) 291-5355.

Respectfully,

Kevin LeVine
Principal (Acting)
Harrison School for the Arts