

Second Curriculum developed by YSPF recognized as “Best Practice”

Middle school students in Washington State are experiencing stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal behaviors in alarming numbers. The good news is that now there is a curriculum that not only teaches 6th, 7th and 8th grade students about these issues, but also gives them skills to help a friend in need. The private, not-for-profit organization, Youth Suicide Prevention Program of Washington State, with funding from OSPI, developed the curriculum called **LOOK LISTEN LINK**. This week **LOOK LISTEN LINK** earned recognition as “Best Practice” - the first middle-level suicide prevention curriculum in the nation to be granted that status.

Harry Brown, Mercer Island Youth and Family Services counselor, based at Islander Middle School explains, *“I wanted the **LOOK LISTEN LINK** curriculum taught at my school because I see firsthand the struggles that the kids have with managing their own stress and dealing with depression while at the same time not wanting to talk about it. I especially like that the curriculum gives practical skills that empower young people to know what to do if they are worried about a friend.*”

LOOK LISTEN LINK consists of four 45-minute lessons, designed for middle school teachers to easily embed into their health, social skills or family like curricula during the school year. Students engage in interactive exercises, classroom discussions, role-play practice and observation through an accompanying DVD that was produced for YSPF by the Spokane-based company, North By Northwest.

During the 2008-2009 school year, YSPF coordinated a pilot study of the curriculum with 33 teachers in 32 schools and over 700 middle school students from across the state. The evaluation, conducted by Marc Bolan Consulting, an independent research firm, concluded that as a result of the lessons students were significantly more knowledgeable about stress and depression and that they were much more comfortable in their ability to talk with depressed friends and link them to a trusted adult.

Middle school teacher, Carrie Hatfield from McMurray Middle School on Vashon Island, reported that *“During and shortly after implementing the curriculum in my classroom, I had several students come forward to talk with me and our school counselor. It was initially difficult for me as their teacher because I felt like I was causing the children pain. But I realized then that I was actually helping them to identify and work through their emotions and that they were doing exactly as **LOOK LISTEN LINK** curriculum ad intended by ‘linking’ to a trusted adult.”*

A middle school student in the Kent School District who received the curriculum stated, “I would tell an upset friend – ‘you’re my friend and I care’. An adult could help them. If you don’t link them, then they might just commit suicide.”

According to the results of the 2008 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, almost 25% of 8th graders reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing their usual activities. Nearly 16% of 6th graders reported having seriously considered suicide.

Twenty percent of 6th graders and 27% of 8th graders reported that they did not have nor were not sure whether they had adults to turn to for help.

A listing on the Best Practices Registry means that the curriculum has been rigorously evaluated and passed federal standards. The registry is maintained by The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC). SPRC was created in 2002 to provide prevention support, training, and resources to assist organizations and individuals to develop suicide prevention programs, interventions and policies.

LOOK LISTEN LINK was developed as a result of a partnership between the Legislature, OSPI, the Washington State Department of Health and YSPP. For a relatively small amount of state taxpayer dollars, a nationally recognized curriculum has been developed and is now being recognized as the first of its kind.