

Suicide prevention specialist to talk teen mental health at Dakota HS

Family Night Out provides mental health warning signs, resources



Dakota High School will host a Family Night Out event focused on teens and mental health on Feb. 1. The speaker will be Lisa Matway, a board chair on the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (PHOTO COURTESY OF STEPHANIE LANGE)

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Genetics, diet, trauma and stress are just a few of the factors that can affect teen mental health. They will be explored via a Dakota High School Family Night focused on youth suicide prevention.

The Dakota High School Family Night Out program “It’s Real: Teens and Mental Health,” will be held on Feb. 1 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Dinner will be served. The program will take place in the Dakota High School atrium at the school, 21051 21 Mile Road in Macomb Township.



Chippewa Valley Schools throughout the district, including Dakota High School in Macomb Township, will have access to additional counseling and mental health services through Ulliance starting Jan. 1, 2023. (FILE PHOTO — THE MACOMB DAILY)

Dakota High School Student Assistance Specialist Stephanie Lange has seen more students recently seeking some type of mental health resource, particularly in the wake of pandemic-related life disruptions.

“I would say that, from my perspective, there are a large amount of students speaking out to ask for help,” Lange said.

However, she added she does not necessarily view more students seeking mental health resources as a negative thing, but as more students recognizing they can benefit from methods of self-care.

“I have always had the mindset that anyone can benefit from mental health counseling no matter where they are on life’s journey,” Lange said.

The free program is open to the community as a whole, but is designed for adults and youth no younger than seventh grade. It is sponsored by the Dakota High School Student Assistance Program and the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families. RSVP is needed by Jan. 31, and can be obtained via a QR code that can be found at facebook.com/people/Dakota-High-School/100063691445379/. Questions can be directed to Lange at 586-723-2872, or slange@cvs.k12.mi.us. Registering early is encouraged, as Lange said the program has already generated plenty of interested attendees seeking to discuss youth mental health.

Lange said this year a partnership was formed with American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, an organization she worked with previously, and upon recently reaching out to them, discovered their board chair is a community resident.

Lisa Matway, the board chair of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, will discuss mental health topics, ranging from warning signs of someone in need of help to self-care and how to help others. Tips and strategies will be presented for having a conversation with someone who has raised cause for concern, as well as how to take care of your own mind, body, soul and surroundings. Resources will be offered as well as advice for teens on how to reach out to trusted adults for mental health management.

Those who attend the event will participate in small group discussions led by Dakota Student Assistance Program students. The students obtained additional training for the mental health focused program.

“We train them about 90 minutes before the event. They come in early and get training within small groups, usually two to three students at each table,” Lange said. “And they’re given all the information to keep the discussion going. And they are also told when there are red flags, for instance, if someone mentions they are currently thinking of hurting themselves or someone else, they get me or another school employee who is present at the event.”

At the conclusion of each small table discussion, a representative from each table will briefly report on the main things discussed by their group.

The event also ties in with a recent district-wide partnership with Ulliance in Chippewa Valley Schools. Ulliance offers K-12 school districts access to counseling and mental health services. Lange said the partnership puts the district in a better position to be able to offer more services and resources.

“We will talk about Ulliance at the event, and make sure there are fliers and information for families that participate,” Lange said.

Superintendent Ron Roberts said last month the district's decision to obtain the services of Ulliance was in response to a fall parent survey, and was approved by the Board of Education in the fall. Over 1,300 parents were surveyed on the issue of student mental health, and they showed interest in enhanced school-based support and greater access to student mental health services.

Ulliance offers support in addition to help provided by school counselors, social workers, teachers and staff. The district partnership with Ulliance offers support to students at no cost to them, providing 24/7 access to care and counseling services. Students in grades K-12 in the district are eligible to use the program. Information including phone numbers and links can be found at chippewavalleyschools.org/for-parents/mental-health-services—ulliance.

Ulliance provides district students with a variety of services, including short-term counseling, crisis intervention, and identification of community resources. One service offered through the program is a 24-hour crisis phone line, offered by state-licensed counselors. A student/parent portal including videos, articles and information to address many areas of well-being is offered. Another option through the program is short-term mental health services, five sessions offered via phone, secure video or in person.