

Elevating Youth Voice for Mental Health and School Safety



with the National Work of
Mental Health Literacy Collaborative &
Sandy Hook Promise



Voting Day Conference November 4, 2025

Annie Slease, M.Ed.

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Today's Topics

-  Introductions & Background
-  Mental Health Literacy Collaborative
-  MHLC Initiatives & Opportunities
-  Sandy Hook Promise
-  SHP Initiatives & Opportunities



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Preferred Outcomes

1. Identify the four components of the Mental Health Literacy (MHL) framework and their intended benefits for school communities.
2. Demonstrate increased confidence in discussing mental health and violence prevention, and identify ways to promote these initiatives.
3. Recognize opportunities to amplify youth voice in MHL education and SHP programming.
4. Understand the mission and key outcomes of MHLC and SHP, and identify ways to get involved.



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Crisis Support Resources



988Lifeline.org

CrisisTextLine.org: 741-741

TheTrevorProject.org



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Annie Slease, M.Ed. [she/her]

CEO of the MHLC

- 25-Year Classroom Teacher
- Policy and Advocacy Leader
- Parent with Lived Experience



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The Mental Health Literacy Collaborative

Our mission is to make the education framework of mental health literacy foundational in schools and communities.

Our Vision

We envision a world where all individuals understand mental health and can make informed choices, respond mindfully, embrace healing, and thrive.

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What We Do

Educate & Advocate: We promote the framework of Mental Health Literacy (MHL) to build understanding, reduce stigma, and strengthen mental wellbeing

Facilitate Collaboration: We connect leaders across states and sectors to design and implement effective MHL strategies

Guide Schools & Communities: We help reframe school mental health to prioritize Tier 1 MHL education



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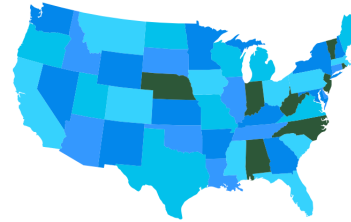
Reframing School Mental Health

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, “97% of public schools provide mental health services, yet only 48% of schools believe their services are effective ” (NCES, 2024)



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Prioritizing Mental Health Education



Over 30 states have some kind of mental health education policy in place

These states require K-12 mental health education: Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont

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What is Mental Health Literacy (MHL)?

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Foundations in Health Literacy

The American Medical Association states that:

“Health literacy is a stronger predictor of an individual’s health status than age, income, employment status, education level, and racial or ethnic group.”



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Mental Health Literacy

A framework for effective mental health education



How to foster positive mental health



Common mental health disorders and treatments

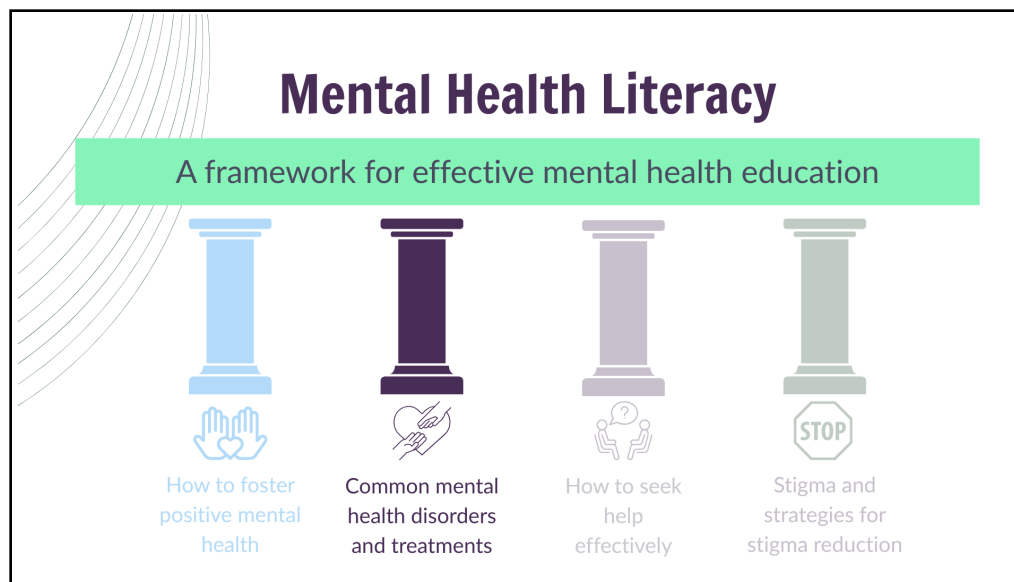


How to seek help effectively

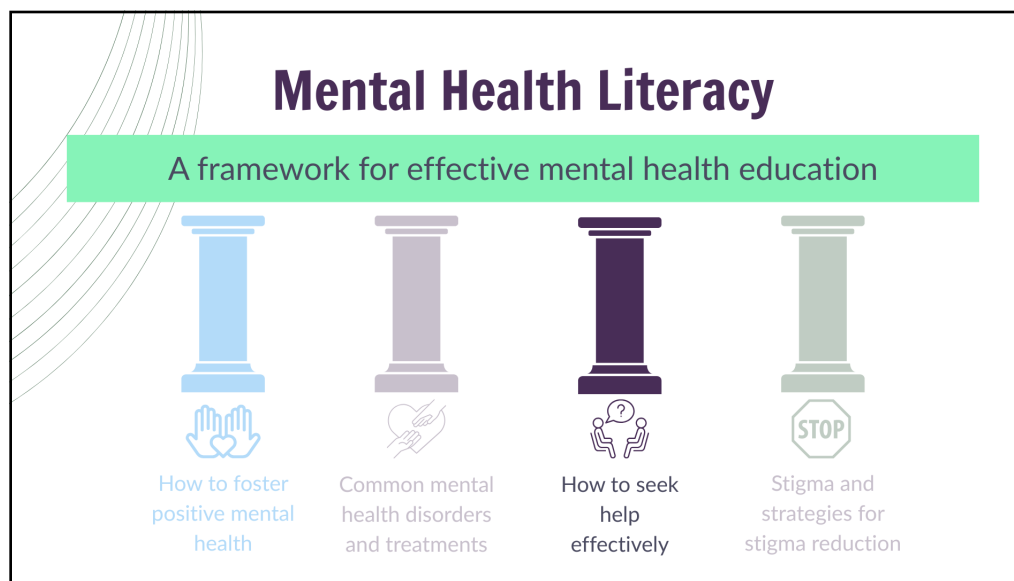


Stigma and strategies for stigma reduction

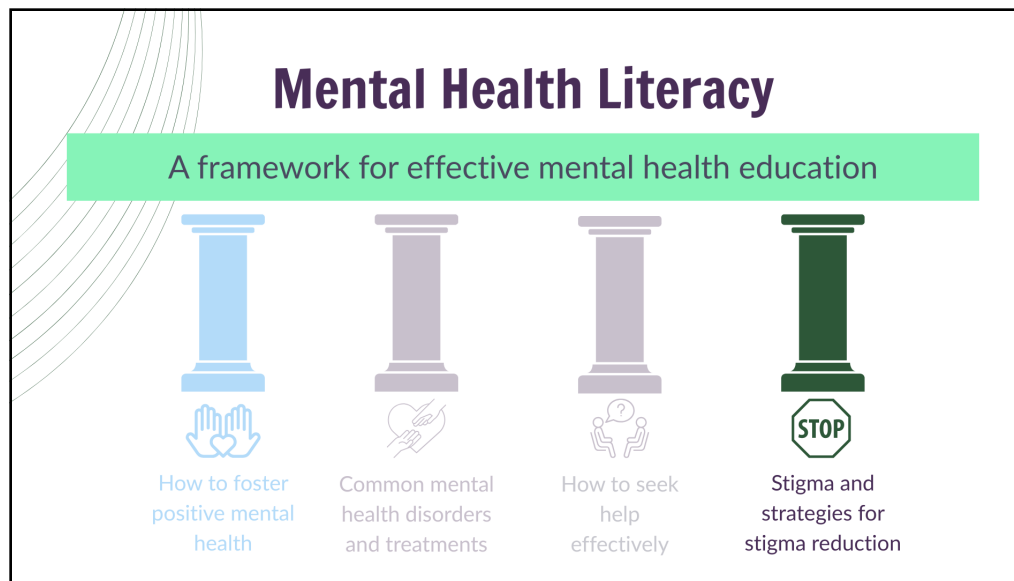
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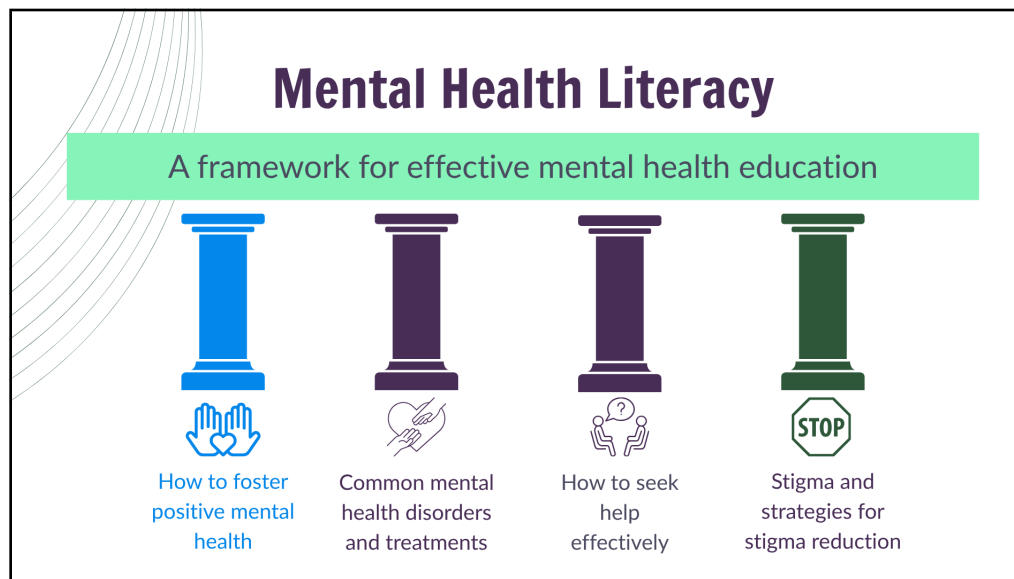
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Mental Health Literacy is Education

not therapy

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Some Benefits of MHL



Accuracy of
Referrals



Early
Intervention



Classroom
Relationships

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Some Benefits of MHL



Accuracy of
Referrals



Early
Intervention



Classroom
Relationships

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Some Benefits of MHL



Accuracy of
Referrals



Early
Intervention



Classroom
Relationships

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SEL Framework	MHL Framework
• Develop healthy identities • Manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals • Feel and show empathy for others • Establish and maintain healthy, supportive relationships • Make responsible and caring decisions	• Understand how to foster and maintain positive mental health • Understand common mental health disorders and treatments • Understand effective help-seeking strategies for self and others • Understand stigma and strategies for stigma reduction



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SEL Framework	MHL Framework
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The Human Mind is Hungry

2 in 3 teens believe schools should teach about mental health
(NAMI, 2022)

83-84% of TikTok videos tagged **#mentalhealthtips** or **#mentalhealthadvice** were found to be misleading or inaccurate

31% of Tik Tok videos contained outright false, harmful information about mental health
(PlushCare, 2025)



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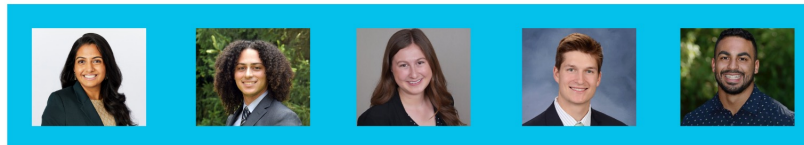
Young Adult Perspectives on MHL Education

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MHLC Young Adult Advocacy Council



Council Leadership



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Meet the Team!

Mental Health Literacy
Young Adult Advocacy Toolkit

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Young Adult MHL Advocacy Toolkit

By Youth, For Youth—Centering Real Voices, Real Action

- Created by youth & young adults
- Building confidence to advocate for self, peers, & systems
- Designed to be clear, hopeful, and action-oriented



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What's Inside the Toolkit

Some Key Components:

- *Individual Advocacy*
- *Community Advocacy*
- *Government Advocacy*
- Includes: Reflection exercises, scripts, planning tools, resource lists



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Why It Matters

- Meets youth where they are (relatable, not clinical)
- Encourages “little-a” advocacy as much as big systems change
- Invites educators, peers, and policymakers to listen and collaborate
- Stayed true to the youth-driven mission until the end



<https://tinyurl.com/MHLC-YA-Toolkit>

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Empowering our Next Generation of School Professionals

Our Clinton Global Initiative Commitment to Action offers cost-covered training to pre-service school professionals plus free classroom resources for professors



www.themhlc.org/initiatives/cgi-initiative

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Building Confidence around MHL

MHL Aware increases educator confidence



~1000 educators trained and a 4.9/5 star rating

www.theMHLC.org/resources

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Possible Next Steps

Download the MHLC Young Adult Advocacy Toolkit

Elevate the MHLC CGI Commitment to Action

Advocate for MHL Education in Schools

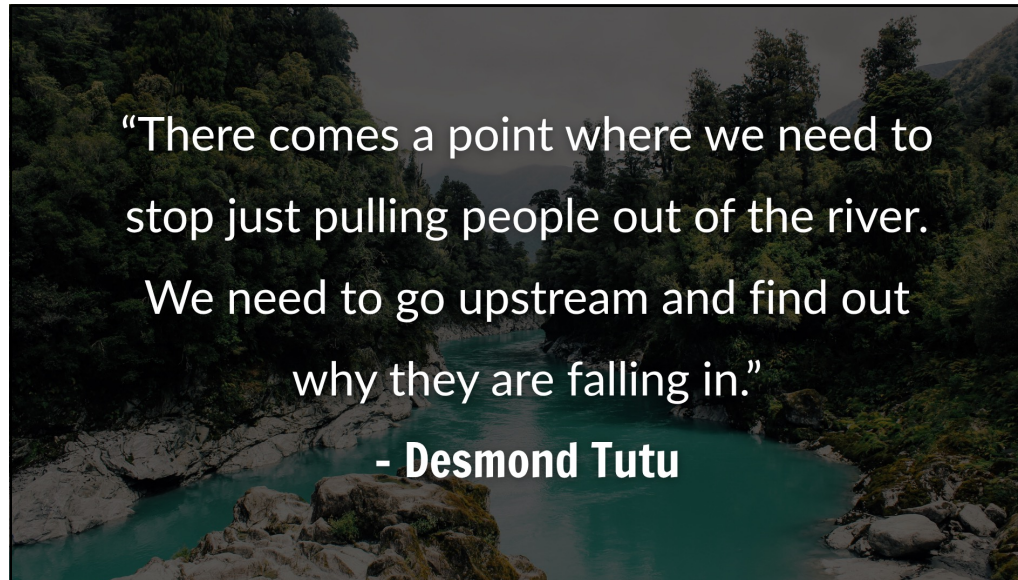
Facilitator Guide/ MHL Aware



www.theMHLC.org

annie@themhlc.org

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“There comes a point where we need to
stop just pulling people out of the river.
We need to go upstream and find out
why they are falling in.”
- Desmond Tutu

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https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/5_9_2024.asp

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<https://plushcare.com/blog/tiktok-mental-health>

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Stretch Break



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Sandy Hook
PROMISE

Sandy Hook Promise Presentation



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Sandy Hook Promise

Who we are

Sandy Hook Promise is a nonprofit organization led by several family members who lost loved ones at the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting on December 14, 2012.




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Sandy Hook Promise

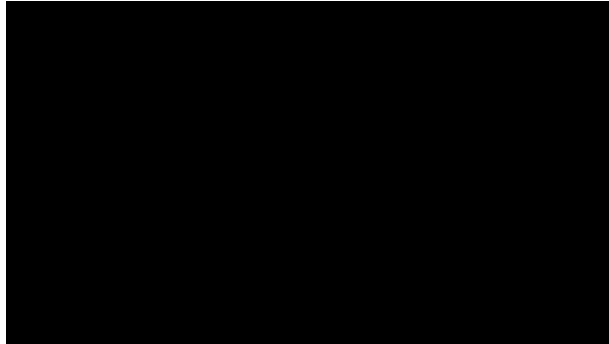
Our mission is to educate and empower youth and adults to prevent violence in schools, homes, and communities.

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Through our proven, evidence-informed
Know the Signs programs, and sensible, bipartisan
school and gun safety legislation,
we teach youth and adults to recognize, intervene,
and get help for those who may be socially isolated
and/or at risk of hurting themselves or others.

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The Promise



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Sandy Hook Promise

What we do

Teach the warning signs of potential violence and how to get help.

Research how to create more inclusive, supportive school cultures.

Advocate for policies designed to increase students' safety in their schools, homes, and communities.



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Sandy Hook Promise



Protecting Children

Sandy Hook Promise envisions a future where children are free from shootings and acts of violence in their schools, homes, and communities.

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Sandy Hook Promise

Mini Quiz – Question #1

Which of these is not a Sandy Hook Promise program?

- Say Something
- No One Eats Alone
- Sources of Strength
- Start with Hello

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Sandy Hook Promise

Mini Quiz – Question #2

How many youth have been saved from suicide by Sandy Hook Promise's programs?

- Over 200
- Over 500
- Over 700
- Over 1,000

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Sandy Hook Promise

Start With Hello

Teach children and youth how to minimize social isolation, empathize with others, and create a more inclusive and connected school culture.

SEE SOMEONE ALONE

REACH OUT + HELP

START with Hello

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Sandy Hook Promise

Say Something

Train students to recognize warning signs and threats – especially on social media – of someone at risk of hurting themselves or others, and when and how to tell a Trusted Adult.



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How It Works



STEP 1
Youth or Adult Submit a
Tip using our App,
Website, Hotline and Text

STEP 2
Tips are Triageed, Categorized,
and Delivered to the
District by Our Crisis Center

STEP 3
School and/or Law
Enforcement Assess and
Intervene as needed

CRISIS COUNSELORS:

- Undergrad Degree
- 500+ Hours Training



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SAVE Promise Club

SAVE Promise Clubs are youth-led organizations that encourage young people to take charge of keeping their friends, schools, and communities safe. They offer a powerful approach to preventing violence because they recognize the unique role that young people play in making their schools and communities safer. A SAVE Promise Club can be a stand-alone club or embedded into an existing club, such as SADD, Student Council, FCCLA, or another student leadership, civic, or kindness club.



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Expanded Programs



Prevent Suicide

- Prevent Suicide expands on the core Say Something program to teach the warnings signs and risk factors specific to suicide.
- Teaches youth and adults how to support someone in crisis.
- Includes a mental health self-assessment that screens students for depression and suicide.
- Training and educational materials are available for faculty, staff, and parents.



Be a Trusted Adult

- Being a Trusted Adult workshops aim to create a supportive safe space for students to approach them with warning signs and mental health concerns.
- Workshop participants attend a one-hour virtual or in-person workshop.
- Access to training videos, worksheets, and activities to grow the program in their community.
- A 25-minute advanced professional development for educators teaches how to be an effective Trusted Adult if their school uses the Say Something program.

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Our Impact

38M	More than 38 million have participated in <i>Know the Signs</i> programs.
5k	More than 5,000 SAVE Promise Clubs nationwide in elementary, middle, and high schools.
344k	344,000+ anonymous tips received from students and adults.
5.7k	Over 5,700 students helped during mental health crisis interventions.
1,051	At least 1,051 youth saved from suicide.
19	At least 19 credible planned school shooting attacks prevented.

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Know the Signs programs include...

- Training options: DIY, pre-recorded, and virtual live
- Educator Guides
- Videos
- PowerPoint slides
- ... all developed with experts and available on-demand online



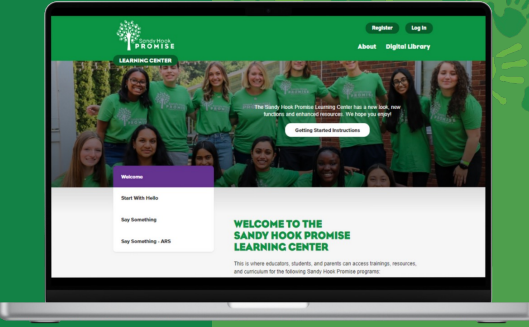
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Sandy Hook Promise Learning Center



sandyhookpromiselearning.org



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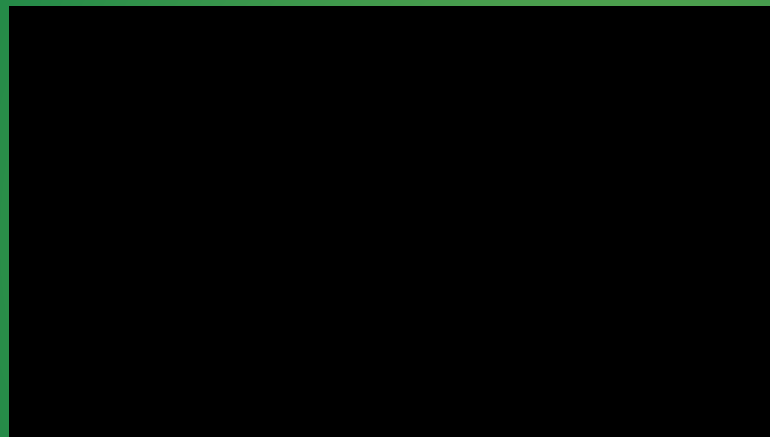
Sandy Hook Promise

Warning Signs

- ☐ Suddenly withdrawing from people and activities
- ☐ Regularly bullying or intimidating others
- ☐ Extreme mood or personality changes
- ☐ Victim of constant social rejection
- ☐ Talking about plans or making plans to harm themselves or others
- ☐ Hanging out with negative role models
- ☐ Bringing a weapon to school or talking about bringing a weapon to school
- ☐ Talking or writing about committing acts of violence toward others
- ☐ Cutting or burning themselves
- ☐ Bragging about or warning others of an upcoming attack or act of violence
- ☐ Recruiting others to join in a planned act of violence
- ☐ Warning students to stay away from school or events
- ☐ Expressing a fascination with weapons
- ☐ Expressing a fascination with school shootings
- ☐ Expressing hopelessness about the future
- ☐ Extreme, prolonged sadness or distress
- ☐ Expressing or showing feelings of isolation
- ☐ Bragging about access to guns
- ☐ Cruelty to Animals
- ☐ Talking about wanting to die or making a plan to die

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Award-Winning *Evan* PSA



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of school shooters planned the attack in advance.



In almost every documented case of active shooters, **warning signs** were shown.

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Rigorous Research Proves These Programs Work

University of Michigan Study Findings:

- Increased willingness to speak up about warning signs
- Better attitudes about school
- Significantly fewer aggressive behaviors
- Stronger relationships between students and teachers



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Mini Quiz – Question #1

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Mini Quiz – Question #2

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The mission of Sandy Hook Promise is to educate and empower youth and adults to prevent violence in schools, homes, and communities.

The Sandy Hook Promise Action Fund is nonpartisan, working to advance federal and state legislation that promotes gun safety, youth mental health, and evidence-based violence prevention training.

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Federal Policy Highlights

Schools

- STOP School Violence Act (2018)
- STANDUP Act (2022)
- PLAN for School Safety Act (ongoing)

Homes & Communities

- Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (2022)
- Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act Reauthorization (2022)
- Kid PROOF Act (ongoing)



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State Policy Highlights

Schools

- Safety and Violence Education for Students (SAVE Students Act)
- Distinguishing Active Shooter Drills from Active Shooter Simulations (Students Safe at School Act)

Homes & Communities

- Crisis Aversion & Rights Retention (temporary transfer of firearms)
- Secure Storage of Firearms
- Closing the stranger-to-stranger loophole (in private firearm sales)



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What You Can Do

Get involved with SHP

- Make the Promise to protect kids at www.sandyhookpromise.org/promise
- Share our mission and message with your networks and friends
- Become a Promise Leader to volunteer with SHP: <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/volunteer>

Our Hearts Are Broken. Our Spirit Is Not.

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Sandy Hook Promise



Follow Us!

-  www.SandyHookPromise.org
-  @SandyHookPromise
-  @SandyHookPromise
-  @SandyHook
-  @SandyHookPromiseOrg

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Thank you!

-  SandyHookPromise
-  SandyHookPromise
-  SandyHookPromiseOrg
-  SandyHook

SandyHookPromise.org

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