

## Strengthening Ongoing Support (SOS) for African American Teen Suicide Prevention

Mary Sewell, MSW

Meg Milligan, Ph.D.

SOS is often used to signal that there is some form of distress going on somewhere. Right now, in the African American Community, the Alarm has sounded, and the community is under distress due to increasing rates of suicide among their youth. In 2019, the Congressional Black Caucus established an Emergency Taskforce on Black Youth Suicide, and one of their conclusions was that many contemporary best-practices and screening tools were not culturally sensitive. Mental health professionals need to fill this need, as well as disseminate information to key stakeholders, that is peers, parents, educators, and faith leaders, who can be influential in the fight to reduce death by suicide rates among this at-risk population. The African American community has several different leaders who are already available, but many may need additional training on how to recognize warning signs and have difficult conversations on mental health. These influential leaders often are the first to note if something is wrong, but often do not have the training or the tools they need. The presenters describe their foray into providing resources, which they call the Strengthening Ongoing Support, SOS, approach.

### Program Description

The purpose of this session is to increase knowledge about suicidality among African-American teens, describe the critical need to address this, identify important stakeholders and their roles, and discuss our approach to prevention, which we call Strengthening Ongoing Support (SOS). SOS strives to provide resources to the African American community, and to more effectively leverage peers in this process.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Describe the critical issue of increasing rates of suicidality among African American youth.
2. Identify key stakeholders and their roles in ameliorating African American teen suicidality.
3. Discuss the Strengthening Ongoing Support (SOS) program.

### Presenter Expertise:

MSW, Master of Social Work, ROSS Coordinator for the Phenix City Housing Authority, former Phenix City, Alabama police officer, Mother, Grandmother of five African American teens.

Ph.D. in counseling psychology, clinical experience, licensed psychologist, research on suicidality, associate professor of psychology.