



March 3, 2009

Dear Parents and Guardians:

We are writing today to inform you of a serious issue in our county about which we need your help. In recent months, the county has seen an increase in the number of suicide-related threats and suicides.

It is critically important that all of us are on the lookout for the warning signs that may indicate suicidal thoughts or behaviors, particularly among our children. These include, but are not limited to, anxiety, anger, mood swings, becoming withdrawn, and substance abuse. It also is important for parents to be aware of the online activity of their children. A child who may be visiting online memorials for deceased youths, for instance, may be more at risk for suicidal behaviors. Technology has allowed our children to build relationships and friendships with people across the world. A child's friends are no longer contained within his or her school or residential community, so knowledge of your child's activities is of paramount importance.

Anne Arundel County, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, the County Department of Health, the Anne Arundel County Mental Health Agency, the Anne Arundel County Crisis Response System, the County Police Department, and several state agencies are working collaboratively and proactively to provide resources and assistance to families and youth that require it. A list of some of the resources can be found on the back of this letter. In any emergency, however, please remember that a call to 911 is the quickest option and can put you in touch with the necessary resources.

It is important not to overreact to any situation, but it is equally important in this instance to be keenly aware of your child's activities and behavior. Early detection of issues can avert serious consequences. Please do not hesitate to call on any of the agencies listed above or to utilize the resources on the back of this letter for assistance at the first sign that there may be a problem. In addition, please encourage your children to ask questions and talk to you or other responsible adults if they have any concerns about the behavior of their friends. It is often a friend who detects the first sign of trouble.

This important issue is one in which all of us – parents, schools, health agencies, and police – must work together to protect our children. This is a societal issue, and we must join together to combat it. Please do not hesitate to call on any of our agencies and resources if you need help at any time.

Sincerely,

John R. Leopold
County Executive

Kevin M. Maxwell
Superintendent of Schools

James Teare, Sr.
Chief of Police

Douglas L. Hart
Acting Health Officer

Frank Sullivan
Anne Arundel County
Mental Health Agency

Katherine Rovendro
Anne Arundel County
Crisis Response System

JRL/KMM/JT/DLH/FS/KAR/bm