



# Los Alamos Public Schools

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

## Mental Health Awareness Month



Conversations that change lives.

Every year, May is recognized nationally as Mental Health Awareness Month. The statistics are clear: approximately one in five children and adults in the US will experience a mental health challenge every year, and the national rate of suicidal ideation in teens is on the rise. Staff and students in the Los Alamos Public

Schools have been strengthening the community's network of support by taking part in a new training opportunity.

Three of the most effective ways that a community can increase support for mental health are to:

1. know and be able to recognize the warning signs that a person may be facing a mental health challenge,
2. increase the ability to reach out to people in distress and connect them to supports, and
3. decrease the stigma around talking about mental health and asking for help.

For the past two years, the Los Alamos Public Schools have invested prevention funding in the Kognito mental health awareness and suicide prevention program. Kognito is an online role-play simulation that teaches people how to recognize the signs of distress, use conversations to approach the person and discuss concerns, and, if necessary, connect them with support. The program offers opportunities to practice these challenging conversations through role-play with emotionally-responsive virtual students. Participants can request suggestions from the digital coach and are able to undo responses and try another approach. The program includes a version for teens called "Friend2Friend" that builds awareness, knowledge, and skills about mental health while reducing stigma. It prepares youth to recognize signs of distress, reach out to a friend they are concerned about, and help identify a trusted adult for support.

During this time, nearly 300 training modules have been completed by LAPS staff and community members, while 520 9th grade students have participated in the peer support training. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

"The timing of this training was perfect," one staff member responded in the post-survey. "Two days later a student came to me with a concern and the images from the simulation kept coming into my head. Even with my background and experience, the training helped me be prepared for the conversation."

Students offered the following reflections. "The training was realistic and relevant. It actually showed you what to ask a friend and how to go about the conversation without seeming intrusive." Another student said, "This was a really good course. I feel like I can help friends better than I would have before taking this."

LAPS will continue offering Kognito training through the 2019-20 school year. A new module called "Step In, Speak Up!" has been added to the training options and focuses specifically on supporting LGBTQ students.

LAPS engages in a spectrum of prevention activities that are provided by school staff and community partners with ancillary funding support from Los Alamos County. If you would like to know more about this training,

please contact Kristine Coblentz, LAPS Healthy Schools Initiative Director, at [k.coblentz@laschools.net](mailto:k.coblentz@laschools.net) or 505-663-2263.

If you or someone you know needs immediate assistance with a mental health crisis, please seek support by contacting one of the following:

- New Mexico Crisis and Access Line - 1-855-662-7474
- New Mexico Peer-to-Peer Warm Line - 1-855-466-7100
- NM Crisis Line for Speech and/or Hearing-Impaired Callers: 1-855-227-5485
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255
- Text HOME to 741741
- List of local therapists - <https://losalamosmentalhealth.org/therapistlist/>
- If you are in a life-threatening emergency, dial 911.

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For more information, please contact:

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