

Dear Families and Friends of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown:

As a school system, we are committed to creating and sustaining a comprehensive, coordinated effort to improve the overall safety and well-being of our students, educators and administrators.

To do this, we believe this must involve community-wide programs and initiatives involving parents, teachers, administrators, local law enforcement, mental health & wellness professionals and elected officials to take meaningful action to protect our students.



On January 14th, 2019 the “Safe2Say Something” (S2SS) anonymous reporting system was launched in schools across Pennsylvania. This program, which is mandated under PA state law / Act 44, teaches students, teachers, and administrators how to recognize warning signs and signals, especially within social media, of individuals who may be a threat to themselves or others and *Say Something* to a trusted adult OR use its anonymous reporting system.

Specifically, the program educates participants to:

- *Recognize the signs and signals of at-risk behaviors – especially within social media*
- *Take every sign and signal seriously; act quickly to get help by talking to a trusted adult OR*
- *Report it anonymously through the S2SS Office of the Attorney General 24/7 Crisis Center, mobile app, or website*
- *Respond to and manage the submitted tip via a school-based multi-disciplinary educator and administrator teams*
- *Sustain the curriculum and awareness via student clubs, in-school activities and call-to-action weeks*

Our students often are aware of the problems their peers are facing, so we must empower them to know the danger signs and give them the tools to help each other with the assistance of trained and caring adults. As you know, most conversations are taking place on social media, therefore it is critical that we teach our students to be looking out for one another as these digital conversations are taking place. S2SS teaches them what to look for in text, video and photos while empowering them to act quickly to help a fellow student.

The S2SS program is being provided through Sandy Hook Promise (SHP), a nation-wide non-profit organization. SHP’s programs are in 50 states – with 10,000+ schools and over 5.5 million students and adults trained. They have a track record, reputation, and knowledge of how to work effectively with youth, parents, and teachers to improve school safety and culture. The program is age-appropriate and research-based. They also have funding to provide and sustain the program at NO COST to our schools within our diocese (and all schools statewide).

We anticipate that S2SS will help stop school shootings, suicides, and gun threats; it will help reduce bullying and cyberbullying; help intervene upon cutting, drug use, racial conflicts, and other violent and victimization acts. To learn more, please visit: <https://www.safe2saypa.org/>.

If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo-Ann Semko".

Jo-Ann Semko
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cindy O'Connor".

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