



St. Lawrence County Youth Bureau

80 State Highway 310, Suite 4
Canton, NY 13617
315-379-9464

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2022

Sextortion & Youth Suicide Prevention Campaign and Art Contest Led By Teens

CANTON, NEW YORK-

The St. Lawrence County Youth Bureau has launched a teen-led campaign on sextortion and teen suicide prevention which supports a two-pronged message:

1. You don't know who you are really communicating with on social media, and you should not send images or texts that you do not want shared with others.
2. If something goes wrong, even terribly wrong, in social media interactions (or any interactions), all is not lost. There are people who can help and friends to support you.

Since 2020, seven teens have died by suicide in St. Lawrence County. This includes two teens who suffered the horror of being extorted for money online because compromising images were shared.

"We know that teens ultimately try to solve problems on their own and then go to their peers for help. During times of crisis, teens are more prone to over-react and make very quick, impulsive decisions on the premise that there's no way out. We want to change that mindset by sending a clear message that all is not lost. Don't react, rethink, and there are adults who can help," said Alexa Backus, St. Lawrence County Youth Bureau Director.

Youth Committee teens, serving as their high school ambassadors, will be leading the campaign with support from assigned law enforcement and human service agency partners. These adult partners will visit their assigned school to support round table discussions, presentations, and hands-on activities focused on how to spot online predators, how to disengage from them, reporting, and going to an adult for help. Recognizing signs when a person is in crisis and how to lead him/her to help will be discussed as well.

Middle and high school students can submit artwork and videos educating, advocating, and preventing teen suicide and sextortion as part of this campaign. Teens should consider the following when developing art work and videos:

1. Be courageous because you can get out of any situation.
2. Reach out for help.
3. Find an adult.
4. There's always hope.
5. Don't react; rethink.

Videos can be no more than three minutes in length. A winning art design and video will be chosen separately for sextortion and teen suicide prevention at both the middle and high school levels. Deadline for artwork and video submission is Friday, May 6th.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number is **800.273.8255**. Locally, **Reachout** is a free, confidential, non-judgmental crisis and information hotline serving residents of St. Lawrence County and can be reached at **315.265.2422**.

Please direct questions to Alexa Backus, St. Lawrence County Youth Bureau Director, at ABackus@stlawco.org or call 315-379-9464.

XXXX

Alexa Backus
Director
abackus@stlawco.org

Rebekah Zuhlsdorf
Secretary I
rzuhlsdorf@stlawco.org