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**To : The News Editors**

**From : The Mpumalanga Department of Education**

**Date : 17 November 2015**

**Subject : Psychological Guidance for Learners and Parents**

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Learners in the province, continue to work hard as we move towards the end of the 2015 examination period. Majority of the learners continue to burn the midnight oil in the quest to do well in their final examinations. This is also the time for the grade 12 class to prepare themselves for life beyond secondary schooling.

Their eagerness to succeed in the examinations may come with other pressures which can result in psychological challenges. These can also cause depression, which may trigger suicidal thoughts.

Depression is a feeling of sadness or feeling down and at times a person feels lifeless and empty. It comes as a major risk factor for suicide because it is a deep feeling of hopelessness.

Depression or stress related disorders are caused by a number of reasons ranging from learners failing to live up to their academic abilities, low-self-esteem, none discovery of true potential, learning disabilities, choosing wrong subjects , peer and family pressures.

*However, worth noting is the fact that while in the face of hardship and disappointments; it takes strength, courage and sheer determination to rise above the odds and regain victory.*

*Learners must realize that when they feel depressed or suicidal, it not a character of weakness but, a sign of deep-seated pain or intense emotional pain and they must learn to deal with stress in a very healthy way. Said the MEC Reginah Mhaule.*

The Department has established a trauma and counseling services and we would to urge all the learners who experience stress or related disorders to contact the departmental toll free line at **0800 203 116** they will be linked with a specialist who will be able to gladly assist them with their challenges.

### **Common signs and symptoms of depression:**

- Physical pains (headache, back pain, aching muscles, stomach pains)
- Sleeping disorder (short-lived sleep or oversleep)
- Negative thoughts
- Eating disorder (loss of appetite or can't stop eating)
- Irritability (short-tempered/ aggressive)
- Non-participation in routine activities

## **Warning signs of suicide**

- Talking about killing or harming oneself
- Acting recklessly
- Calling or visiting people to say goodbye
- Belittling oneself
- Switching from unhappiness to happiness (with a short space of time)

## **Coping strategies (stimulating a positive mind)**

- Find someone to talk to (preferably face to face)
- Engage in daily routine activities
- Avoid being alone
- Self promise of positive thinking, don't keep bad feelings to yourself
- Make your surrounding place safe
- Get out in the sun or into the nature (+30min a day)
- Exercise (= 30 min a day) just to boost your mood
- Make time for things that bring you joy
- Don't do things that will make you feel worse (e.g. watching action movies, listening to sad music etc)
- Reject rejection
- Take blame ( stop blaming game, otherwise you will not learn from your mistakes)
- See failure as temporary
- Set realistic expectations relating to your strengths

Issued by the Mpumalanga Department of Education

For more information, please contact Gerald Sambo at 081 526 7802 or [g.sambo@education.mpu.gov.za](mailto:g.sambo@education.mpu.gov.za)

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