



SOURCES OF STRENGTH

GRANT WRITING RESOURCES

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OVERVIEW & PROGRAM RATIONALE

[Sources of Strength](#) is a nationally recognized leader in upstream suicide prevention and mental health promotion, partnering with schools, communities, and organizations to build belonging, resilience, connection, and wellbeing. Through developmentally appropriate, strength-based programs, Sources of Strength serves students in grades K–12, adults in schools and universities, and community partners across the United States and Canada. Our adaptable approach supports the unique needs of rural, suburban, urban, and Tribal communities alike.

Since 1998, Sources of Strength has pioneered a proactive approach to prevention by focusing on the protective factors that help individuals and communities thrive. Our programs strengthen the relationships, skills, and resources that promote lifelong health and wellbeing while reducing risk for suicide, interpersonal violence, substance misuse, and mental health challenges. At the heart of our model are eight evidence-based protective factors, or Strengths: Family Support, Positive Friends, Mentors, Healthy Activities, Generosity, Spirituality, Physical Health, and Mental Health.



Drawing on neuroscience and influence through Social Network Theory, Sources of Strength programs empower students and staff to be active agents of change in their school and community, shifting social norms in the direction of health and wellbeing. Decades of implementation and research have demonstrated the simple yet powerful truth that when we invest in building Strengths, connection, and resilience upstream, people are better prepared to navigate adversity, support one another, and flourish throughout life's challenges.

Beyond K–12 education, Sources of Strength also supports higher education institutions, workplaces, and community organizations seeking to foster cultures of wellness, belonging, and support.

ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM MODEL (K-5)

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Sources of Strength Elementary Program is a social and emotional learning approach that provides a Tier I classroom curriculum for each grade level, kindergarten through fifth grade. Along with lessons specific to the eight strengths, the Elementary Program includes lessons on brain and body science, emotional regulation, navigating conflict through restorative practices, celebrating growth, and connecting to help. The model also includes a staff wellness component designed to strengthen adult social and emotional skill literacy, reduce stress and burnout, improve professional confidence and self-efficacy, and build connection and belonging among colleagues. Together, the student curriculum and adult wellness framework facilitate deeper and more trusting relationships: peer to peer, student to adult, and adult to adult.



Introduced to North American schools in Fall 2020, the Elementary Program is listed on the National Best Practices Registry by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC). Early emerging evidence demonstrates a promising impact on students, staff, and school culture. The Sources Elementary Program has been implemented in urban, suburban, rural, and Tribal settings and currently partners with over 1,100 schools in 28 states, Washington D.C., and Canada.

"Our use of the Sources of Strength program has been invaluable in building resiliency, coping skills, and compassion within both our student and staff populations. This program is user-friendly, resulting in high levels of "buy-in" from staff and fostering a supportive environment for all involved."

- Elementary staff member, OR

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS: Curriculum Delivery and Coaching Support

Successful implementation of the Sources of Strength Elementary Program relies on strong administrative support, active staff engagement, and the selection of one or two Coaches per school. To prepare for this role, these champions attend a comprehensive 2-day Coaches Training, which equips them to become fluent in the curriculum content, learn strategies to support staff in program implementation and delivery, and gain skills to implement staff wellness initiatives. Following the training, Coaches receive resources to support instructors in the curriculum implementation across grade levels, lead ongoing staff wellness initiatives, and facilitate 30-minute monthly staff wellness meetings. These small-group meetings (4-6 participants) provide a dedicated space for staff to build authentic relationships, strengthen personal wellbeing, and develop the resilience needed to support a thriving school community.

The Elementary Program includes 24–25 grade-specific lessons per year, developmentally scaffolded across grade levels and delivered through engaging 30- to 40-minute weekly classroom lessons. Each lesson is interactive, age-appropriate, and designed to help students apply what they learn to their everyday lives. Lessons include a social-emotional learning focus, instructor guidance, discussion prompts, games, teaching points, hands-on activities, real time skill practice, and opportunities for instructor reflection. The curriculum provides enough details, prompts, and scripting to empower any school staff member to deliver the lessons.

For more information about the Elementary Program, including staff wellness, please visit the Sources of Strength website.

"Our class-made Sources of Strength wheel and Regulation Railroad have become essential tools that we use almost daily, reinforcing emotional awareness and self-regulation. This program has truly empowered my students to strengthen their mental well-being while promoting a caring, supportive classroom community."

- Elementary teacher, OR



RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE BASE

The Sources of Strength Elementary Program is an evidence-informed program, with early research studies indicating promising outcomes. Sources of Strength Elementary aligns with the Secondary Peer Leader Program and is on the SPRC [Best Practices Registry](#). Outcomes measured to establish the Elementary Program's impact on students and school communities include:

For Students

- Increased sense of belonging
- Improved school climate
- Development of healthy coping strategies
- Increased skill in navigating difficulties
- Improved school climate
- Co-Regulation

For Adults

- Increased Self-Awareness
- Increased Self-Management
- Increased Relationship Skills
- Increased Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

A 2023 Article published in Student Mental Health examined the associations between self-reported student exposure to the Sources of Strength Elementary program and various student outcomes. The study found that greater exposure to the Sources of Strength Elementary program was associated with improvements in several key areas: positive classroom climate, school belonging, help-seeking attitudes, student well-being, resilience, and lower reports of emotional problems. These findings suggest that even amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Sources of Strength Elementary Program had a positive impact on students' social-emotional development. The research concluded that greater exposure to Sources of Strength may be considered a promising intervention for improving individual, classroom, and school-level protective factors in elementary school students.

PRICING & BUDGET SUPPORT

[Contact the Sources of Strength National Team](#) for personalized budget information related to the scale and scope of your planned implementation of Sources of Strength Elementary. Initial cost information for the Elementary Curriculum and all other programs and training is available on the [Sources of Strength website](#).



SECONDARY PEER LEADER MODEL (MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL)

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Sources of Strength [Secondary Program](#) is a best-practice, [evidence-based](#) youth suicide prevention project designed to harness the power of peer social networks to change unhealthy norms and culture. Sources fosters relational connection and belonging through play, Strengths-based storytelling, and strategic messaging campaigns to invite people to discover and share their own stories of Strength.



Sources of Strength utilizes Social Network Theory to recruit diverse and influential students, known as Peer Leaders, to model positive behaviors such as help-seeking, healthy coping, and identifying trusted adults. Sources of Strength partners these influential Peer Leaders with caring, connected, and positive Adult Advisors to instigate a public health initiative in their school or community. Through a series of messaging campaigns focused on increasing protective factors and resilience-promoting behaviors among their peers, Sources of Strength's evidence base shows that Peer Leaders can change population-level health norms. The SPRC lists Sources of Strength's Secondary Peer Leader program on its National Best Practices Registry, and there is more than 15 years of Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) research and publications supporting the program's efficacy. Sources of Strength has proven success in secondary schools, universities, LGBTQIA+ organizations, cultural community centers, faith-based groups, detention centers, the military, and more. Thousands of Sources of Strength teams are active in schools and communities across North America, including Hawaiian, First Nations, Native American, and Alaska Native and Tribal Nations, enriching local programs with local culture.

“Sources of Strength is the first universal suicide prevention program to demonstrate reduction in youth suicide deaths through randomized control trials. Larger statewide rollout trials are needed to confirm these promising results.”

- *Journal of Injury Prevention, 2023*

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS: Pre-Training, Training, Peer-Led Messaging, Transitions

The Sources of Strength Secondary implementation process can vary according to the school, community, or Tribal context. The Pre-Training Phase consists of educating administration, primary coordinators, and key community or coalition partners about Sources of Strength and obtaining leadership buy-in and support. The school or community conducts a brief protocol review for handling distressed students or students at risk for suicide, and the primary coordinator clarifies the contract, timeline, and leads for implementation. In this phase, teams recruit and nominate caring, connected, and positive Adult Advisors and diverse Peer Leaders for the program.

During the Training Phase, a Sources of Strength National Trainer or Certified Local Trainer conducts a three to six-hour training with Adult Advisors and a five to six-hour training with Peer Leaders. See “Training Description and Roles” below for more information on the training process.

During the Messaging Phase, the Peer Leader and Adult Advisor team holds regular meetings to plan for and implement five to six core messaging campaigns over the course of the school year. These targeted, Hope, Help, Strength-based messaging campaigns are Peer-led and focus on increasing protective factors in the lives of their peers and the school community. Sources of Strength provides each team with templated campaigns and ongoing support under the annual licensing agreement. Teams are encouraged to contextualize these intentional messaging campaigns through their music, writing, art, culture, and voices to create positive social change within their communities.

“Sources of Strength is the first suicide prevention program involving peer leaders to enhance protective factors associated with reducing suicide at the school population level.”

- *American Journal of Public Health, 2010*

During the Transition Phase, the team celebrates, evaluates, and shares their successes using fidelity measures and team assessments provided by Sources of Strength. As the team transitions into multi-year implementation, they recruit additional Peer Leaders and Adult Advisors, retrain with a National or Certified Local Trainer, and continue with regular meetings and messaging.



TRAINING DESCRIPTIONS AND ROLES

Adult Advisors: Adult Advisors are the coordinators for their Sources of Strength program and are the primary leads supporting and guiding the Peer Leader team. They are caring, connected, positive, and diverse mentors and Trusted Adults. Adult Advisors attend a three to six-hour training held in the local community or school, generally the day before or the morning of a Peer Leader training. This training covers the core philosophy of upstream and strength-based prevention, Social Network Theory, and safe messaging strategies. The training provides experiential learning, sets expectations and requirements of adult roles during a Peer Leader training, and outlines their ongoing role in the program. Adult Advisors receive access to a myriad of support resources, including exclusive online content. Adult Advisors also attend the Peer Leader training and consistently meet with their Peer Leader team.

Peer Leaders: Peer Leaders are young people nominated to participate in the Sources of Strength program for their influence within their specific, varied peer groups across their school or community. Ideally, the Peer Leader team should consist of 6-10 percent of the student body, typically 10-100 students, depending on the site size, with a ratio of 1:10 between Adults and Peer Leaders. The Peer Leader training is a five to six-hour, highly interactive training attended by both Adult Advisors and Peer Leaders. The training focuses on empowering Peer Leaders to leverage the power of their voice and social influence to become Agents of Change and Connectors to Help in their school and community. Peer Leader teams are requested to meet within 10 days of the training and complete their first peer-to-peer messaging campaign within the first thirty days following training. Peer Leader teams should meet regularly (ideally twice per month) to strengthen their skills in reflection, storytelling, and strength-based messaging, while planning and implementing campaigns to promote Hope, Help, and Strength throughout the school community.

Certified Trainer Process: Sources of Strength offers an optional four-day Train-the-Trainer Advanced Skills training (T4T) designed for sustainable, expanded implementation (2+ schools), certifying Local Trainers, and for those interested in investing more deeply in Sources of Strength. The robust T4T process protects the fidelity of the evidence-based model, increases sustainability, decreases long-term costs, and ensures proficiency in providing highly interactive and dynamic Sources of Strength training to local communities. Prior to becoming Certified Local Trainers, candidates are considered Provisional Trainers. They are required to complete the certification process, including co-training with a Sources of Strength National Trainer or approved Local Certifying Trainer at a minimum of two Adult Advisor



Trainings and two Peer Leader Trainings, or until they have modeled program fidelity.

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE BASE

The Sources of Strength Peer Leader Model has shown effectiveness in both preventative upstream and intervention outcomes. The program has been involved in several large RCTs, spanning 2010 to 2025, making it one of the most rigorously evaluated and broadly disseminated prevention programs in North America. Sources of Strength is considered the first suicide prevention program to demonstrate effectiveness using Peer Leaders to enhance protective factors associated with reducing suicide across a school population (American Journal of Public Health, 2010), and has demonstrated evidence of reducing suicide attempts (American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2025) and mortality (Journal of Injury Prevention, 2023).

"Sources of Strength reduced the overall odds of a new suicide attempt by 29% in this school-based, cluster randomized trial."

- *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2025*

Sources of Strength's Peer Leader Program is listed on the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's (SPRC) [Best Practices Registry](#), and is named in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2017 [Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices](#), and the 2022 [Suicide Prevention Resource for Action](#). Both feature Sources of Strength as an evidence-based peer norm program:

Evaluations show that programs such as Sources of Strength can improve school norms and beliefs about suicide that are created and disseminated by student peers. In a randomized controlled trial of Sources of Strength conducted with 18 high schools (6 metropolitan, 12 rural), researchers found that the program improved adaptive norms regarding suicide, connectedness to adults, and school engagement. Peer leaders were also more likely than controls to refer a suicidal friend to an adult (emphasis added). For students, the program resulted in increased perceptions of adult support for suicidal youths, particularly among those with a history of suicidal ideation, and the acceptability of help-seeking behaviors. Finally, trained Peer Leaders also reported a greater decrease in maladaptive coping attitudes compared with untrained leaders" (CDC, 2017).

The conclusion and designation of Sources of Strength as an evidence-based strategy is promoted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, and the National Institute for Mental Health.



For a detailed overview of the Sources of Strength research and evidence-base, please download the [Evidence Summary](#) at the Sources of Strength website. For access to a folder of published articles, please see [here](#).

Sources of Strength is committed to continuing research and has several partners providing ongoing funding and research opportunities.

PRICING & BUDGET SUPPORT

Contact the Sources of Strength National Team for personalized budget information related to the scale and scope of your planned implementation of the Sources of Strength Secondary program.