

UCLA Geffen Academy and Ross Szabo Equip Teachers with Mental Health Tools in Response to the Los Angeles Wildfires

UCLA Geffen Academy and Ross Szabo Launch Mental Health Initiative for Teachers Impacted by Los Angeles Wildfires

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, January 16, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The devastating Los Angeles wildfires have left scars across the community, impacting not just homes and landscapes but the emotional well-being of countless individuals. In response, UCLA [Geffen Academy](#) and [Ross Szabo](#), its Founding Wellness Director and educator, are launching a comprehensive initiative to provide teachers with the tools they need to address mental health challenges in the classroom.

Ross Szabo, an award-winning mental health advocate, educator, and author of *Behind Happy Faces* and *A Kid's Book About Anxiety*, has been a leading voice in normalizing mental health discussions. Recently featured on CNN and FOX 11 LA, Szabo shared his mission to support educators, students, and parents in navigating trauma with practical strategies and empathy.

"Teachers are often the ones managing so many responsibilities after events like the wildfires, including their own emotions," Szabo explained in a recent interview. "It's like the oxygen mask analogy—you have to take care of yourself before you can help others. This initiative is about giving teachers the language, tools, and resources to care for their students while ensuring they prioritize their own mental health."

Key Components of the Initiative

Central to this effort is the release of a specialized resource, *Classroom Tips to Talk About Mental Health*, which provides educators with actionable strategies, including:

Building a Common Language: Define mental health as more than a "problem"—it's how we navigate challenges in life. Having a shared understanding helps reduce stigma and supports productive conversations in school communities.

Recognizing Diverse Emotional Responses: Teachers are equipped to validate a wide range of emotions, from sadness and anger to apathy, while understanding that they don't have to solve everything.

Using Personal Storytelling Effectively: As Szabo emphasizes, personal stories are powerful tools to normalize mental health. Teachers are encouraged to share stories with universal learning

objectives while maintaining boundaries.

Fostering Resilience: Simple steps like encouraging routines, helping students identify what they can control, and grounding techniques can empower both educators and students.

Szabo also recently addressed the faculty and staff at Palisades Charter High School, offering insights on how teachers can create safe spaces for students to process their emotions. “The reality is that kids are often on the frontlines of mental health—supporting each other through texts and conversations late into the night. Teachers don’t have to fix everything but can provide a foundation of stability and understanding,” he said.

Extending Support Beyond the Classroom

This initiative also highlights the role of parents in supporting their children’s mental health. “Parents are often unsure how to respond,” Szabo noted.

“Listening is powerful. You don’t have to fix everything. Create routines and recognize when professional help may be needed.”

UCLA Geffen Academy’s commitment to wellness ensures that resources like this initiative will continue to address the evolving needs of educators, students, and families, especially in times of crisis.

For more information or to access Classroom Tips to Talk About Mental Health, please visit <https://www.geffenacademy.ucla.edu/mental-health-education-institute>

About UCLA Geffen Academy

UCLA Geffen Academy is a university-affiliated school committed to fostering academic excellence and emotional well-being. Under the leadership of mental health advocate Ross Szabo, the Academy provides innovative tools and resources to help educators and students thrive.

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