



# **Level III: Depression Education & Suicide Awareness**

A One-Day Lesson Designed for Grades 8-12

## ***Student Stories***

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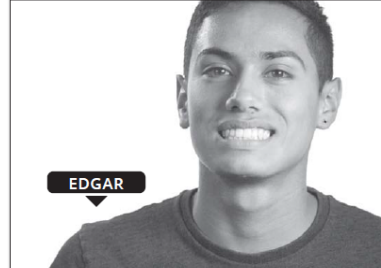
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# Overview of Student Stories

Callie experienced bullying and her parents' divorce also had an impact on her. She also lost a friend to suicide, which was something that contributed to her depression. Callie learned about the self-care strategies that work best for her when she is experiencing depression.



CALLIE



EDGAR

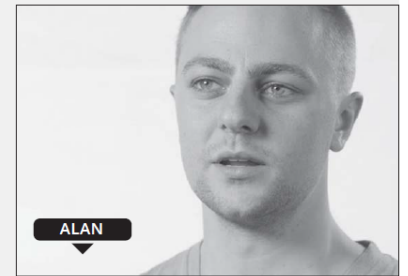
When Edgar was a teenager, he moved from Mexico City to the United States. His experience moving and having to leave some of his family behind in Mexico contributed to his depression. His story shows how he came to understand his depression and how family and mentors can play an important role in getting help.



MASON

Mason experienced depression and struggled with anxiety while in high school. He also learned that depression runs in his family. He found comfort in knowing his friends stood by him and never judged him for his depression. Mason shares how finding the right fit in a therapist and having a plan after hospitalization is important.

Alan's story involves his parents' divorce and the impact it had on him. His experience helps us understand what it might feel like when someone is struggling with depression. He learned a lot about the power within himself and relies on practicing mindfulness to help cope with his depression and suicidal thoughts.



ALAN



JASMINE

Jasmine experienced depression after being affected by community violence. She also faced some challenges when trying to get help, but connecting with a therapist provided a safe space for her to talk about her feelings.

## STUDENT PACKET

## CALLIE

Today you'll work in small groups and read more about one of the students from the video. In your small group, take turns reading aloud each part of your student's story. When you're finished reading, discuss the reflection questions posted on the wall and jot down your group's answers on the chart paper on the wall.



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Callie experienced bullying and her parents' divorce also had an impact on her. She also lost a friend to suicide, which was something that contributed to her depression. Callie learned about the self-care strategies that work best for her when she is experiencing depression.



CALLIE 1

**RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION** My depression comes from a lot of different situations that piled up on top of each other. My parents' divorce was a main factor in my depression. I think a big part of that was I felt like an item, going back and forth between house to house.

I had some bad experiences with peers and people I thought were friends at the time. They were really mean to me and pushed me away and ostracized me. Something that's important to know is that bullying can look like a lot of different things, it's not necessarily what you imagine, like a kid getting picked on in the hallway or books being shoved down. Especially now with technology, a lot of it is behind screens and people just being mean and manipulative.



When I was a freshman in high school, I had a really good friend who was a senior. I really looked up to her. It was Thanksgiving and I was with my family, and I got a call from another friend telling me that my friend had taken her own life. The first thing I experienced with that was just shock.

For a while, I had depression but wasn't familiar with what it was, I didn't really have a name for it. I had some symptoms of depression, but I didn't know what it was or how to classify it.

**IMPACTING DAILY LIFE** I lost my passion for things I really cared about. [My depression] also definitely impacted school. I felt like I was sitting in class, trying to do a math problem, but I had so much more on my plate and so much more to deal with.

**SEEKING HELP** The first person I went to was my mom. I said, *"Hey, this is what I'm feeling"* and she kind of shut me down a little bit. She was a little defensive, she didn't want to believe that I was dealing with depression so she was kind of like *"Nope!"* I think inside she did really understand it, but she shut it down to me. I was a little discouraged, and was like *"Is this not how I'm feeling or am I mislabeling how I'm feeling?"*

I finally decided to go talk to someone else and I decided to talk to our school counselor, and she was awesome, so finally I was like, *"Good. I can actually use this to get better."* I talked to her about everything, and that was an amazing experience to be able to open up and have someone really say, *"The way you feel is not your fault, and we're going to help you get better from here."* So therapy was definitely really big for me.

**FINDING SUPPORT** School was [also] an incredibly supportive environment. I found love and peace and comfort in my teachers and coaches. I felt that I was in a safe haven within the walls of my high school, and I am incredibly grateful for that. I found support in my friends and I did find support in my family. My mom is definitely supermom. Sometimes this support was confusing and not exactly how it was needed, but I know that everyone around me meant well.

**COPING SKILLS** I love running. Running just kinds of brings me away from all the struggles that I'm dealing with and lets me get away from it. When I'm running, I'm not thinking about how hard of a day I had, I'm thinking about how great it feels to be out there running. It kind of just lets me connect with myself and turn inward and just exist

[My friend's suicide] kind of taught me that we don't know how much time we have left, so to make the best of the time that we do have. I decided to make sure I took advantage of all the time that I have because she doesn't have any time left, and I can't bring her back, but I can live the best life that I can, to try to take advantage of that time.

[Because of my depression] I definitely learned about myself that I'm a lot stronger than I thought I was. I'm learning that I'm capable of getting through a lot. I think the capability to deal with difficult situations has always been there, I just didn't know it. It's important for us all to know that we are capable of overcoming and that we will overcome.

It can be really scary to open up to someone. Telling someone that you have depression makes it more real, it makes it difficult to say to someone that you are depressed because that makes it a really real thing. **But if you're feeling scared or worried about it, I think it's really important to know that there are so many people around you that care about you, whether it's parents, teachers, a coach, a relative, there are a lot of adults who can help and want to help.** It's all about taking the first step and deciding you are going to get help.

**LOOKING FORWARD** My depression does not define me. No one's mental health struggles define them. We are all more than our struggles. We all have stories to tell.



## Reflection Questions

1. What was going on in her life when she was experiencing depression?
2. Why was it so hard for her to talk about those feelings?
3. When she told her mom about her depression, how did her mom react?
4. Who was the second person she talked to?
5. If a friend at your high school felt depressed... list two people or resources (websites, organizations, books, etc.) that would be a valid/ reliable resource.

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## STUDENT PACKET

## EDGAR

Today you'll work in small groups and read more about one of the students from the video. In your small group, take turns reading aloud each part of your student's story. When you're finished reading, discuss the reflection questions posted on the wall and jot down your group's answers on the chart paper on the wall.



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When Edgar was a teenager, he moved from Mexico City to the United States. His experience moving and having to leave some of his family behind in Mexico contributed to his depression. His story shows how he came to understand his depression and how family and mentors can play an important role in getting help.

EDGAR 1



**RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION** I come from Mexico City [and] a really loving family, a lot of support.

The first interaction with depression I was about 14, 13. I was in Mexico. All of a sudden, **I felt something was wrong. I thought it was mostly because of my relationship.** I loved this girl with all my heart, but then for one reason or another, things didn't work out, especially with me moving to the United States, I knew that was going to be a tough transition.

Latinos, we know family, community. Leaving that behind, no matter where you go, even if you're leaving for the greatest thing, you're not going to have your family with you. That is the hardest part I think. That support. It's people who know when you're sad, when you're happy, they know everything about you. So not having that support [after you move], it's tough.

**IMPACTING DAILY LIFE** I knew that my grandma and my mom would have a hard time [with me leaving Mexico] because I'm their only son and their only grandson. So I knew that was going to be tough on them, so I was kind of sad for that reason too. **I felt slow, my mind was clogged. My mood wasn't as happy, or as energetic. My thoughts were of guilt, thinking I could have done things different to sustain my relationship [with my girlfriend in Mexico].** I was clumsy in my movements, I did not want to do as many activities.

My mom was a little angry and surprised. She had never seen [me depressed] like that, and she told me about how I was not focused. Coaches told me the same thing, my level of play wasn't as it used to be and they wanted me to perform well. The desire to learn wasn't as strong.



**SEEKING HELP AND FINDING SUPPORT** The inner struggle was that I was someone who I didn't think would have depression. I am outgoing. But it was happening to me. **[For me, getting help was] going to therapy, meeting with my therapist.** I miss her, she was a big part of my recovery from that state of mind. I remember the first sessions were just like basic stuff, getting to know me. After a while, that's when I really started opening up about the core of my depression.



I did cry. It got me. It really did. Because we all feel, and my message is, allow yourself to feel. When that happens, when something isn't as good as you want it to, like depression, talk about it, let it go. It's like putting weight away.

**COPING SKILLS** My goals, my family, the desire to do well for me and those around me [give my life meaning].

What I do to keep balanced is, I like to learn things all the time. I'm a curious person. Learning new things, they keep your mind positively occupied.



Depression will not look to your skin color, to your background, that will not matter to depression. What people misunderstand about depression sometimes is that [they think] if you have depression, you're weak, or something along those lines. Something about being less than the person next to you. That is not true. The point is anyone can have depression, we're all different of course so there are different reasons for what triggers depression.

A lot of people need to hear [about what it's like to be depressed] from someone who looks like them, in my case, in my culture, Latinos. I know what it's like, I know the struggles. I'm trying to get this message to everyone, but especially to my people, the people I know.

**LOOKING FORWARD** I learned that I'm stronger than I thought I was. Once you overcome depression, you feel like you can do anything. You've been on the low, but now it's time to enjoy when you're on the rise.

Love yourself at all times because you don't want to do anything that harms yourself. Do not hold onto feelings of hate. Take care of your body because it's who you're going to be for the rest of your life.

## Reflection Questions

1. What was going on in his life when he was experiencing depression?
2. Why was it so hard for him to talk about those feelings?
3. How did it impact his daily life?
4. Who did he seek support from?
5. What self-care strategies/coping skills did Edgar use?
6. If a friend at your high school felt depressed... list two people or resources (websites, organizations, books, etc.) that would be a valid/ reliable resource.

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## STUDENT PACKET

## MASON

Today you'll work in small groups and read more about one of the students from the video. In your small group, take turns reading aloud each part of your student's story. When you're finished reading, discuss the reflection questions posted on the wall and jot down your group's answers on the chart paper on the wall.



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Mason experienced depression and struggled with anxiety while in high school. He also learned that depression runs in his family. He found comfort in knowing his friends stood by him and never judged him for his depression. Mason shares how finding the right fit in a therapist and having a plan after hospitalization is important.

MASON 1

**RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION** My depression comes from overwhelming amounts of anxiety and pressures put on me by myself and others. Pressure to achieve was a lot on myself as well as a lot on my family. I think I assumed it was a lot more [from] my family than they really expected me to do. I mean I always wanted to be the best in sports, school, everything, so I always felt the need to do better and be better, and be the best.

With school and sports, I would be overwhelmed and because of that I created anxiety for myself. And all that anxiety building up led to me being too overwhelmed and leading toward my depression, I would say.

Anxiety feels like your body is moving really fast, internally, like you have all these thoughts racing through. When I feel anxiety, I can almost visually see my head spinning at times. **[Depression feels like] being really down at times, not necessarily being down 24/7, but a sense of hopelessness and feeling like you're never going to be happy again at times.**

**IMPACTING DAILY LIFE** My depression definitely affected my school life the most, socially and academically. It became a lot harder to focus or do anything. A lot of people at school still don't really understand what depression is and that was definitely a challenge.

**SEEKING HELP** I've gone through a few therapists. When I had my first big depressive episode, I was on my second therapist and I quickly realized after being hospitalized that she was not necessarily [the best fit], so I found a new therapist.

The most important things I've learned in therapy are my coping mechanisms, and also figuring out where my anxiety was coming from. I had so much anxiety I wasn't able to tell what caused it. A big part of therapy was figuring out what this anxiety was building off of and why, and how to reduce it. **Sometimes it takes longer to find someone who will work out and be a good match with you.**

**FINDING SUPPORT** When I really became depressed around my freshman year of high school, my dad sat me down and really told me what his depression was like. **My dad is [very] supportive and he can sense when I'm feeling down, he reminds me to see my therapist.**



**COPING TOOLS** My friends were a big part in my return to being healthy, just helping me cope with everything. They weren't necessarily a support [that] I talked to about my depression, but the fact that they were always there and never looked at me differently or treated me differently.

I feel most happy when I'm doing something that I love, when I lose time doing something because I'm having so much fun. For example, **like playing sports or making music with my friends really puts me in a happy spot.** It almost puts you in a different mindset where you're not processing what's happening in the outside world, you're just focused on what's happening right there, and when you're in that state of mind, that's the happiest.



[When I was feeling suicidal] I thought about how [suicide] would affect everyone. And even though I was extremely down, I realized it would affect so many different people in so many different ways. I thought about my close family, my sister, and how it wouldn't just affect her for a couple years but for her entire life.

The purpose of being hospitalized is to find a plan for the future because usually when you're hospitalized you're at your lowest point. **When you're at your lowest point, you want a plan to get back to being healthy again.** It's mainly to get that process started and figure out a way to keep getting treatment after you get out of the hospital.

Going through depression you assume you're weak because you're going through that, but afterwards, you learn that, one, it's not your fault, and two, that you're pretty strong that you went through depression. You're pretty cool.

**LOOKING FORWARD** I'm ready for so many more things in the future, I know how to handle myself in situations. I learned that I'm capable of doing a lot more than [I think] I'm capable of. Now I know that life isn't smooth sailing, but that I know how to handle those situations when they arrive.

[When you're going through depression] make sure you keep up with friends and socialize and don't put so much pressure on your school life. School is important, but having friends and being social and being able to get out and talk to people is just as important as learning in the classroom.

What I would recommend if I had a friend going through what I had gone through, I would say treat them how you've always treated them because they don't want to feel like they're any different. Don't feel like you have to be a therapist to them, they just want you to be there as a friend, to have someone to hang out with and do fun things with.

## Reflection Questions

1. What was going on in his life when he was experiencing depression?
2. Why was it so hard for him to talk about those feelings?
3. What has he learned in therapy?
4. What self-care strategies does Mason participate in?
5. If a friend at your high school felt depressed... list two people or resources (websites, organizations, books, etc.) that would be a valid/ reliable resource.

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## STUDENT PACKET

## ALAN

Today you'll work in small groups and read more about one of the students from the video. In your small group, take turns reading aloud each part of your student's story. When you're finished reading, discuss the reflection questions posted on the wall and jot down your group's answers on the chart paper on the wall.



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Alan's story involves his parents' divorce and the impact it had on him. His experience helps us understand what it might feel like when someone is struggling with depression. He learned a lot about the power within himself and relies on practicing mindfulness to help cope with his depression and suicidal thoughts.



ALAN 1



**RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION** When I was really young (between kindergarten and 5th grade), I had probably the ideal life as a young child. There were some dysfunctionalities, like there are with every family, but I wasn't really aware of them.

Once I got into 6th grade, everything started to really fall apart. My parents began to fight, and my brother and I were often brought in as ammunition for our parents to use against each other in arguments. With all of this, my mom primarily raised me. **My dad was around a little but he was around less and less as my parents' relationship worsened. I was also worrying about not having a family anymore, that's what it felt like.**

**IMPACTING DAILY LIFE** In 7th grade, when I didn't do well in my classes, my dad would get really hard on me. My parents, they were experiencing their own battle. They weren't really attentive to what I was going through and I don't blame them for that in any way. But because of that, if I didn't do well in school, my dad thought his role was to crack down really hard.

There's not a single good thing I can say about myself when I'm experiencing depression in its heaviest wave. Like *"I'm a failure."*

**I did have moments of thinking about suicide and self-harm. You have to understand, that's a really distorted place to be. There's nothing logical about that.**

**SEEKING HELP AND FINDING SUPPORT** [Therapy for me] looked like a psychologist, a therapist, who helped me notice how I was feeling and what was going on—becoming aware of myself and what was going on. **I like to look at psychologists or therapists as teachers, someone who is there to coach you.**

In getting better, it's not everybody's responsibility to get you better. In the end, it's in your head, it's in your experience, your own reflection of yourself, your self-talk, and for a long time, I think I just wanted other things or other people, like the medication or the therapist or people around me [to fix everything for me], and that was a barrier for a long time.

**COPING SKILLS** The things that I do personally to help manage my depression, the first one is mindfulness. I do a lot of deep breathing, centering into the moment. A lot of fear in general, depression comes a lot from thinking about the past, the future, interchangeably, and mindfulness is a great way to bring you right back into this moment. I couple mindfulness and gratitude together, if I'm sitting there, breathing, centering myself in the moment.



ALAN 2

I love [my girlfriend] Amanda—someone who is really close to me and understands me on a level a lot of people don't. I [also] found a lot of indirect support from my best friend and his family. I spent a lot of time over at his house and it served as a safe haven for me when I was in really bad binds. I also found help from other friends, and my brother and I became close.

The most difficult thing about being a male with depression is that you're not allowed to have it [as a male]. In our society, it's very important to "be a man," to not have feelings. There's a lot of pressure on men to be that way.

Some people would argue that emotions can get in the way of productivity or get in the way of whatever, but I think that regardless of whether they get in the way of anything, it's still real, and it's still there. Instead of saying *"You should just shove it under the rug and stop thinking about it and block it out,"* I think we should at the very least say, ***"Tell me everything about how you're feeling. Great, now how do we want to deal with it?"*** Instead of just saying, *"Let's kick it under the rug."*



The biggest way that depression has changed the way that I look at the world is that people are often going through a lot more than you think they are.

**I want to help people who may be experiencing what I have experienced in the past or what I'm experiencing on a daily basis, help them to see the light at the end of the tunnel and not feel trapped and lost—to feel encouraged. To give them hope that it isn't all bad, it doesn't last forever.**

I would tell someone who is having suicidal thoughts or impulses that they are worth keeping around. I would tell them that everything is going to be okay, that there are people who love you and care about you, that want you here. Even if you don't want you here right now, you will find later in life that it was a lot better to stick around.

**LOOKING FORWARD** The biggest thing I learned about myself through depression was that I'm awesome. But in that everybody's awesome. That we have so much more power than we give ourselves credit for. One of the things that depression really attacks is our vision of ourselves and our vision of what we can and cannot do. And what I have learned is that we can do anything, anything! We, I, all of us are really awesome.

## Reflection Questions

1. What was going on in his life when he was experiencing depression?
2. How did it impact his daily life?
3. What self-care strategies does Alan use?
4. If a friend at your high school felt depressed... list two people or resources (websites, organizations, books, etc.) that would be a valid/ reliable resource.

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## STUDENT PACKET

## JASMINE

Today you'll work in small groups and read more about one of the students from the video. In your small group, take turns reading aloud each part of your student's story. When you're finished reading, discuss the reflection questions posted on the wall and jot down your group's answers on the chart paper on the wall.



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Jasmine experienced depression after being affected by community violence. She also faced some challenges when trying to get help, but connecting with a therapist provided a safe space for her to talk about her feelings.

JASMINE 1

**RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION** I grew up with a parent who suffered from depression. As an only child in a single parent home, that can be very difficult because that's your only person, she was a single mother, so that's the only person that I really had communication with and to be cut off like that [because of her depression], I definitely picked up some of those traits. I go through bouts where I'm significantly sad.



[I also had an] experience with community violence [that] was definitely heartbreaking. That's what started me going down in a spiral because it was something I didn't understand, couldn't put an answer to. I feel like when we can't find answers, that's when we get the most confused. When you experience and witness these traumatic events, when you are constantly enduring these traumatic events, you can't help but to feel some type of way about it and to be hurt about it.

**IMPACTING DAILY LIFE** [When I'm depressed], I shut everyone out. I don't want people to necessarily know that I'm going through a hard time, sometimes especially if I can't identify why I'm going through this or why everything is very emotional for me and bothering me. I just shut down. **When you're feeling feelings of depression, it leaves you confused. It leaves you lonely. It leaves you upset. It leaves you broken feeling.**

I think in the black community we're told that we have to be strong, we have to be independent, and these things are drilled in our head constantly, so when there's something that's happened traumatically, we feel like we're not being strong ... we're not being independent ... we're letting down our families ... we're not being who we're supposed to be.

To think that you're anything less than another person because you're going through depression is really sad for me to hear, especially when so many people suffer from the same thing. With the stigma in my community about depression, we're all going through something, we're all hurting, but we don't want to say what we're going through, we want to act like we're not struggling with this. And it's just hard.

Stigma for me looked like, *"What goes on in this house, stays in this house,"* and it looked like that for a lot of my friends, too. So a lot of the hurt my friends went through I didn't find out about until years later, even though I was going through it with them, not knowing I was going through it with them.

**SEEKING HELP** I felt like I had a great connection with a lot of my teachers. They started to notice subtle changes in me and they reached out to me. I didn't want to share what I was going through, and I felt like I was embarrassed. I felt like I was being successful at hiding my depression, but apparently not.

**FINDING SUPPORT** Therapy for me was a lifesaver. It was a challenge with my family because they weren't supportive of my decision to continue therapy. However, after talking with my parents and grandparents about why this is important to me and how this is changing me, I was able to have some therapy sessions with them as well. So it definitely played a big role in me feeling better.

Something that surprised me about therapy was how much I loved it. I was just so addicted to being able to express myself, and just getting it off my chest, I didn't want to hold in those feelings anymore. It was definitely comforting to be able to talk to someone and not be afraid that other people were going to find out. It's non-judgmental.

**COPING SKILLS** Church and my spirituality definitely helped me overcome my hard times. I feel like church gave me hope, it was a place where I was amongst people who were going through something and I could see their pain and I could see them growing, and hope that knowing that, *"Yes, I'm going through something. I'm not alone. And God is going to look out for me, He's there for me."* I also started [living] a healthier life. I became invested in reading my Bible, I became invested in the things that I put into my body, I became invested in working out.



Something that I thought wouldn't help was sharing my story. [When I started to share my story] I was able to see how so many people have gone through something similar to what I went through and could use my life and the way I got through it as an example, and it really helped me.

**LOOKING FORWARD** If I had to say something to someone who was afraid to get help, I want to say that you're already on the right track. You're thinking about *"How can I change my life?"* or *"How can I overcome this?"* So congratulations. This is your life, and it's a precious gift.

I've learned that life throws everyone curveballs. No matter how rich, beautiful, popular, or another label that is desired, everyone goes through something or is born with something.

## Reflection Questions

1. What was going on in her life to trigger the depression?
2. Why was it so hard for her to talk about her feelings?
3. How did it impact her daily life?
4. How does Jasmine explain stigma? What is stigma?
5. What self-care strategies does Jasmine use?
6. If a friend at your high school felt depressed... list two people or resources (websites, organizations, books, etc.) that would be a valid/ reliable resource.

