



Level II:

Depression Awareness

Lesson 3: Coping Strategies

A Lesson Designed for Grades 5-9

Erika's Lighthouse is a not-for-profit depression and mental health education organization that educates upper elementary, middle school and high school communities about teen depression, eliminates the stigma associated with mental health issues and empowers teens to take charge of their mental health. For more information and other programs and resources, go to www.erikaslighthouse.org.

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This program was written for educators, professionals and other adults working with adolescents to educate them regarding the issues surrounding depression. While Erika's Lighthouse consults with clinical, therapeutic, legal, and child development experts, nothing in this program should be construed as specific or general medical or psychological advice. Erika's Lighthouse assumes no responsibility for any actions taken as a result of the material or information contained in the program. Every child's and family's situation is unique, and Erika's Lighthouse urges children, adolescents, parents, and educators to seek and find competent professional advice appropriate for specific individuals and actions.

Welcome to Level II: Depression Awareness

Lesson 3: Coping Strategies

A Lesson Plan for Grades 5-9

Maintaining good mental health is among the most challenging issues affecting today's youth, and the stressors young people face can be intense. Depression is an important—and often a required—topic for schools to address with their students. At Erika's Lighthouse, we have a strong track record of creating mental health and depression education classroom programs that are teen-centered, effective, impactful and hopeful.

This program was inspired by a young person named Erika.

Erika was a bright light who, sadly, lost her battle with depression in 2004 at age 14. Erika's Lighthouse was founded in her honor and is dedicated to helping other young people learn about depression and overcome the stigma surrounding mental health disorders. Level II: Depression Awareness was designed to be taught in classrooms for grades 5-9, led either by a teacher and/or a school mental health professional. The lessons provide opportunities for students and staff to engage in open and safe conversations about depression and good mental health.

Lesson 3 of the program consists of an engaging and interactive lesson designed to be taught to provide students with the following learning objectives:

Students will:

- Demonstrate how to help themselves or others when experiencing depression
- Discuss what we can all do to support good mental health
- Demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to support health and well-being of self and others

National Health Education Standards Alignment:

- Standard #4: Use interpersonal communication skills to support the health and well-being of self and others.

CLASS NORMS/GROUP AGREEMENTS

If this program is being offered as part of an existing health education program, you will probably already have established norms or group agreements. If this is the case, this is a good time to review existing group norms with your students and refine them in preparation for this curriculum.

This curriculum addresses sensitive topics. In order for students to feel safe and be fully engaged in the lessons, it is important to establish group norms and/or agreements. Group norms are ways that groups of people can work together in a thoughtful, respectful, safe and productive way. If you have already established group norms, be sure that each of the following guidelines have been addressed.

If you have not developed group norms, here are some guidelines you may find useful in helping students come up with them:

- Everyone should be involved in creating the group norms.
- Use guiding questions to help students identify the norms that will achieve a safe and caring classroom:
 - How can we be sure that people will be able to safely share private information and feelings?
 - How can we be sure that everyone has a chance to freely share and that they are heard?
 - How can we be sure that people are not forced to say or do something that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe?

Some examples of group norms that are brainstormed may include:

- Listen to others' perspectives
 - Maintain confidentiality
 - Participate
 - Right to pass
 - Respect differences
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HOW TO ANSWER DIFFICULT QUESTIONS PROTOCOL

Sometimes when covering sensitive content such as emotions, social influences, and personal topics, questions may arise that are difficult to answer. Sometimes, the question may relate to personal values that are not universally shared. Or the question might have more than one answer depending on a person's values, beliefs, and personal history.

It may be helpful to follow this protocol when responding to difficult questions:

1. ***Affirm that the student's question is legitimate.*** Restate it for clarification and acknowledge that others might also wonder about this. "Thanks for asking that. I am sure other people would like to know about..."
2. ***Identify if there is a belief/value that is inherent in the question.*** Point out anything about the question that might be opinion-related. It is

important to express the range of opinions without identifying that any single opinion is the right one. "Some people might believe...while others believe..."

3. **Answer the factual part of the question.** "Here is what is known to be true..."
4. **Refer to a trusted adult.** "This would be a great question to ask your (aunt, dad, caregiver, etc.)"
5. **Check back.** "Did I answer your question?"
6. **Leave the door open.** "If you have any other related questions, I hope you will feel free to ask."

SENSITIVE & PERSONAL ISSUES

Any time a sensitive topic is addressed in the classroom, it is important to ensure that all students are protected from potential trauma, particularly those who may have had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Social, emotional and mental health education may deal with issues of interpersonal relationships, suicide and substance use.

The teacher's capacity to listen non-judgmentally, with empathy, and to demonstrate a comfortable attitude in dealing with students' beliefs and feelings associated with mental health and emotions is crucial to the curriculum's successful implementation. Students come to the classroom with many different values, cultural and religious beliefs, and ideas about these topics. Teachers should keep in mind that because their students come from many backgrounds and traditions, some may have difficulty sharing ideas and discussing these issues with their peers.

When a student has experienced trauma of some sort in their life, it may have an impact on their ability to thrive and be healthy. These resources will provide guidelines and suggestions for helping to avoid further trauma to students affected by ACEs.

<https://www.weareteachers.com/10-things-about-childhood-trauma-every-teacher-needs-to-know/>
<https://www.weareteachers.com/video-every-teacher-needs-know-childhood-trauma/>

Teachers can go a long way towards helping a child who has depression by noting what they see, consulting with the school's health staff, and treating the child with respect and sensitivity.

It is important to note that teachers are not responsible for either diagnosing or treating a child who has depression. Only a trained mental health professional can do that.

TEACHING THIS PROGRAM

Erika's Lighthouse wants educators to be successful when teaching this program. Here are a few suggestions to ensure that.

1. Review all of the materials before teaching: it is suggested that each teacher reviews all parts and the accompanying materials before teaching.
 2. While teaching the program, take notes on how the lesson went in different classes. Take notes on how you might adapt the lesson in the future. If you have a suggestion for an edit or adaptation, feel free to share with Erika's Lighthouse staff.
 3. If you have student work samples that stand out from any worksheets, please share with Erika's Lighthouse!
 4. If any of the content leads to a high level of distress or emotional discomfort for you or your students, please reach out to a mental health clinician.
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988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
(Text or Call 988 or Chat 988lifeline.org)

PLEASE CONTACT US AT ANY TIME AT
info@erikaslighthouse.org

Level II: Depression Awareness - Lesson 3

A Lesson for Grades 5-9

OBJECTIVE

To increase student engagement and communication in activities that promote good mental health.

Students will:

- Demonstrate how to help myself or others when experiencing depression
- Discuss what we can all do to support good mental health
- Demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to support health and well-being of self and others

OVERVIEW

In Lesson 3, students will learn about stress and factors that can improve mental health.

The lesson will give students the opportunity to practice their communication skills and content knowledge around supporting a friend in a series of scenarios. This lesson will also provide time to discuss good mental health strategies.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Review all of the Level II: Lesson 3 program materials.

- Read the facilitator guide script
- Review the slide deck
- Watch the Level II Lesson 3 video: [Level II - Coping Strategies](#)
- Look through student vignettes
 - Determine if your students will select two student vignettes ([YouTube](#) or [Vimeo](#)) to watch or if you will select for the class
 - Consideration: If the Level II: Depression Awareness program is being taught to more than one grade at a school, you might want to consider selecting the two Student Stories for your students to watch. This way they can watch different stories next year.

Make copies of the Student Workbook

SCRIPT

Slide 1: Title Slide

"Today we are going to talk about depression and mental health. We will watch a video and talk about why it's important to take care of your mental health and how to support yourself and/or a friend.

If anything shared today prompts a feeling that you need to talk to someone, make sure to go to a trusted adult or visit the mental health worker's office here at school which is located _____. Please feel free to ask questions at any time."

Slides 2: Objectives of Lesson

"Today you're going to learn and demonstrate how to help yourself or a friend when experiencing depression, discuss what we can do to support our mental health, and practice communication skills to support health and well-being of self and others."

Slide 3: How to Talk to Trusted Adult

"In the last lesson we discussed what a trusted adult's role is and listed some examples from our school and in the community. Asking for help can be tough. Remember, if you are worried about yourself or a friend, please reach out to a trusted adult. Tell them what changes you feel, what you have tried to do to make it better and what they can do to help you take action towards getting professional help."

Slide 4: Helping a Friend

"I want you all to imagine that a friend comes to you and shares that they haven't been sleeping, they have no appetite and don't have much energy. They are feeling down. What might you say to them? You may remember we talked about this in the last lesson. Take a look at your Student Workbook for reminders on what to say when you're reaching out for help for yourself and when you're helping a friend. Who would like to share what you could say to your friend?"

When helping yourself, say:

- What you **feel**.
- What you have **tried** to do to feel better.
- How someone can **help** you find a mental health professional.

When helping a friend, say:

- What you **notice** in the friend.
- That you **care** about them.
- How you can **help** them tell a trusted adult.

Slide 5: Scenario Activity

"Now let's put some of this into action. You're going to be working in groups or pairs for the Scenario Activity. As a group or pair, choose one of the four scenarios in your Student Workbook and answer the questions related to your scenario. If you have extra time, choose another scenario. Each scenario has the same two questions:

If you were _____, what action would need to be taken first?

If you were _____, how could you use the language from the lesson to help yourself?

Scenario 1: Catharine Catharine is managing her anxiety, but now she's not sleeping or eating well. She has no interest in participating in the activities she used to love and feels like all she wants to do is cry. She feels mad and frustrated at the world and doesn't understand why she feels this way. She is close with her older sister and her school counselor.	Scenario 2: Henry Henry feels anxious often and worries about a lot of things. He often feels like he's in a dark room alone and the room is closing in. His brother and dad both experienced depression, so he knows that depression is in his genetics. He doesn't feel like being active, which he knows is a big change for him. He feels like he is pretending to be happy. He is close with his school counselor.
Scenario 3: Lindsey Lindsey finds it difficult to get out of bed, doesn't want to brush her hair or teeth, and has difficulty eating. She feels like she has "little tornadoes" in her head. Her parents are from Vietnam, and she feels like they won't understand what she is feeling. She feels close to a teacher at her school.	Scenario 4: Edgar Edgar just doesn't feel himself lately. He can't really explain why, just that he doesn't feel right. He just moved away from his family and he misses them. He doesn't have the same level of energy or interest in hanging out with his friends. He's very close to his mom and grandma.

In 10 minutes, the class will come together to discuss the exercise. Be prepared to share your scenario and response with the class."

Slide 6: The Video

"Now we will watch a 3-minute video on coping strategies. We'll discuss and go through the Discussion Guide questions in your Student Workbook after the video."

Slide 7: Discussion Question #1

"What are four ways to practice good mental health?

Answer: Nutrition, Sleep, Exercise, Coping strategies, and more

Slide 8: Discussion Question #2

"Mental health is balance, the ability to manage stress and achieve one's potential. Is it possible to be free of mental illness, and yet, not mentally healthy? Why or why not?"

Answer: Yes, mental health is much more than the absence of mental illness. Mental Health is balance, the ability to manage stress and achieve one's potential through a lifestyle of good nutrition, sleep, exercise and practicing healthy coping skills.

Slide 9: Discussion Question #3

"Stress is normal, but too much stress increases the risk for health issues, like depression. What is stress? What are some things that can cause stress?"

Answer: Stress is the body's natural reaction to a situation that is worrisome or threatening, and results in a feeling of being hypervigilant or on-edge. The body releases a chemical called cortisol to activate the "fight, flight or freeze response" needed in a threatening or high pressure situation. Stress can be helpful in motivating us to work effectively to solve a problem. However, too much stress can have a negative impact on our mind and body and even trigger depressive symptoms. What is considered too much will look different from person to person. Many things can cause stress and those things differ from person to person. For some people it could be the pressure of school, trying to fit in or the break-up of a relationship. For others, it may include being bullied, having family trouble or experiencing a serious trauma. Stress is a certainty for all of us from time to time. Therefore, we all need to practice daily mental health habits to manage it.

Slide 10: Discussion Question #4

"How do you know you are stressed-how do you experience it in your body? Why is it important to be aware of your own personal stress indicators?"

Answer: Accelerated heart rate, shortness of breath, excessive sweating, headaches, chest pain, dry mouth, sleep problems, change in eating, lack of concentration, irritability, tension or jitters. The sooner you realize you are under stress, the sooner you can make changes and find coping strategies to make you feel better.

Slide 11: Student Stories - Coping Strategies

(Optional: You can also simply stay as a large group or students individually choose videos)

"We're going to break up into small groups and watch two short videos. Each group will get to choose which two student stories they want to watch. In your Student Workbook, there are descriptions and QR codes for each of the student stories.

Lindsey is a first-generation student from Illinois whose depression started at six years old. She says her depression felt like "little tornadoes in my head". Lindsey loves to read, is a dedicated student and is very involved in clubs at school.	Henry is from Knoxville, Tennessee. He loves to write, play sports and hang out with his friends. Henry describes feeling anxious, worried often and "never really feeling happy".
Jasmine is an African American student who moved from a small town to a big city. Her move and experiencing community violence contributed to her depression. She is passionate about church and her family.	Catharine is from Ohio and is a sports enthusiast; she loves ice skating and tennis. Catharine felt that she needed to be "perfect" at everything: sports, school, friends. She was first diagnosed with anxiety, but then her symptoms of depression began.

Alan loves his band and his girlfriend. His depression began during his parents' divorce. He describes his depression as a "big, sinking feeling" in his chest.	Mason is an Asian-American student who experienced anxiety and perfectionism. He loves his family, friends and sports. His dad also experienced depression and is very supportive of Mason.
Edgar recently moved from Mexico City to the United States. He left behind his friends and many of his family members. Edgar loves soccer and music.	Callie is from Chicago. She loves to run track and hang out with her friends. Struggles with her peers impacted her experience with depression and she felt very isolated during this time.

Select which two stories you'd like to watch and while you watch, write down in your workbook what coping strategies the students used. We'll discuss it as a group."

When you listened to the student's stories, what coping strategies did they use? How did they take care of their mental health?"

Answers: Being active, Eating well, Getting enough sleep, Writing, Reading, Listening to music, Going out with friends

Slide 12: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

"Remember, if anything shared today prompted a feeling that you need to talk to someone, make sure to go to a trusted adult, talk to your counselor, or visit the social worker's office here at school, which is located _____. You can also call or text 988 to speak or text with someone at the suicide and crisis lifeline if you are ever concerned about yourself or a friend."

Slide 13: Post-Test QR Code/Link

"Since we are at the end of the program, each of you will now take a quick post-test. Use the QR code or link on the slide to start your post-test."

<http://elhmspost.info>

For additional resources and support materials, check out the Optional Program Additions and School Policy & Staff Development sections of our [Resource Portal](#).