



# **Level II: Depression Awareness**

## **Lesson 2: Help-Seeking** 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](http://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 2: Help-Seeking**

### **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.

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### **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.

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**Lesson 2 of the program consists of an engaging and interactive lesson designed to be taught to provide students with the following learning objectives:**

#### **Students will:**

- Define what stigma is
- Learn that depression is treatable
- Demonstrate how to reach out for help for themselves or a friend
- Effectively communicate to a friend in need that I care and can share who to talk to (Reliable trusted adult at school)

#### **National Health Education Standards Alignment:**

- Standard #3: Access valid and reliable resources to support health and well-being of self and others
  - Standard #4: Use interpersonal communication skills to support health and well-being of self and others.
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## 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."

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## 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/>

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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.

But 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.

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### **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 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](https://988lifeline.org))

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PLEASE CONTACT US AT ANY TIME AT  
[info@erikaslighthouse.org](mailto:info@erikaslighthouse.org)

## **Level II: Depression Awareness - Lesson 2**

*A Lesson for Grades 5-9*

### **OBJECTIVE**

To identify a reliable and trusted adult and seek help if needed.

### **Students will:**

- Define what stigma is
- Learn that depression is treatable
- Demonstrate how to reach out for help for themselves or a friend
- Effectively communicate to a friend in need that I care and can share who to talk to (Reliable trusted adult at school)

### **OVERVIEW**

In this lesson, students will learn what stigma is, how to access help and how to help a friend.

The remainder of this lesson will include two role-plays which reinforce to students how to ask for help and how to intervene with a friend.

### **TEACHER PREPARATION**

Review all of the Level II: Lesson 2 program materials.

- Read the facilitator guide script
- Review the slide deck
- Watch the Level II Lesson 2 video: Help Seeking
- Look through student vignettes
  - Determine if your students will select which two student vignettes 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.

Hang Chart Paper around the room with markers at each station

Make copies of the Student Workbook

## SCRIPT

### Slides 1: Title Slide

"Today we are going to talk about depression and mental health. We will do some activities and watch a video.

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 how stigma prevents people from seeking help. You'll learn that depression is treatable. You're going to demonstrate how to reach out for help for yourself or a friend and learn how to effectively communicate if you're concerned about yourself or a friend."

### Slides 3: Stigma Activity

"We're going to do a quick activity. I'm going to read some statements aloud. If you agree, stand up (or raise your hand) and stay seated if you disagree.

- I like math.
- I enjoy music.
- I participate in a sport or club
- I believe good mental health is for everyone
- I know someone who struggles with depression

Now imagine you've just been diagnosed with asthma. Stand up if you would feel comfortable sharing that information with someone other than a close friend or family member.

Have a seat. Now imagine you have just been diagnosed with depression. Stand up if you would feel comfortable sharing that information with someone other than a close friend or family member.

Many of us believe that everyone deserves good mental health. And even know people who struggle with depression. However, if faced with depression ourselves, many of us would not feel comfortable sharing that with others.

Why would someone be more comfortable talking about asthma than depression?

(Students' expected answers: asthma is a real illness, depression is not. People may judge you. Depression feels more personal.)

The truth is that though depression and asthma seem different, they are more similar than different. For instance, they are both common illnesses. They both can be the result of family genetics. They can both be managed with lifestyle changes and treated with medication. The major difference between asthma and depression is stigma. We are much more educated about physical illness than mental illnesses, such as depression, which makes them easier to talk about.

Today, we will continue to increase your knowledge and comfort level on the topic of depression because it is a common and treatable illness with nothing to be ashamed of. Understanding stigma is important because it is a main reason why people do not seek help."

#### Slide 4: Stigma

"Although depression is incredibly common, 80% of people with depression do not seek treatment. Why?

Depression is an illness that carries a stigma. Stigma is a mark of shame associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person."

#### Slide 5: The Video

"Now we will watch a 4-minute video that talks about seeking help for yourself or a friend.

#### Slide 6: Break into Small Groups

(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.

<b>Lindsey</b> 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.	<b>Henry</b> 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".
<b>Jasmine</b> 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.	<b>Catharine</b> 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.
<b>Alan</b> 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.	<b>Mason</b> 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.
<b>Edgar</b> 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.	<b>Callie</b> 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, answer the following questions in your Student Workbook:

- Who did the students in the vignettes go to for help?
- Where could you find help in your school or community?



### Slide 7: Group Activity

"With your group, go to a station with chart paper. On the paper, list as many trusted adults and resources you know about in your school and community."

(Give groups 5 minutes to make their lists. Then have the groups share.)

"As you can see, there are a variety of valid, reliable, dependable adults and resources in our school and community that can help someone in need."

### Slide 8: Signs & Symptoms of Depression

"As a reminder from the last lesson, depression has specific signs and symptoms. It might be feeling sad or irritable, a change in sleep pattern, appetite and general hygiene. What everyone needs to know about depression is that it is not someone's fault, a sign of weakness, or a character flaw. It is a very common and treatable illness. And a person with depression deserves to feel better."

### Slide 9: Talk to a Trusted Adult

So, we have been talking about the importance of telling someone if you think you have depression. But, how do you do that? Asking for help can be challenging. You might feel nervous because you're unsure of how to start the conversation or because you're afraid of what the other person will think of you.

However, asking for help for something like depression is the first step to getting better and, believe it or not, many of us have already had success with similar conversations in the past. Think about a time when you have been sick with the flu and had to ask for help. Usually, it involves talking to a parent about your symptoms, stating what you have already tried to do to feel better, how long the symptoms have been going on and asking for medicine or to see a doctor. Asking for help for depression is really no different. Using these same ideas, we can be effective in getting others to understand what we need in order to move on to a healthy, happy and productive life - something we all deserve.

If you are worried about yourself, first explain to a trusted adult the changes you feel, what you have tried to do to make it better and what they can do to help you find a mental health professional.

### Slides 10: Let's Role Play (Parent and Teen)

"Here's a conversation between a teen and a parent that will give you a better idea of what it might sound like to ask for help for yourself. (Teacher reads the role of "Parent" and the student can read the role of the teen.)"

## Role Play 1

<b>Teen</b>	Hey, can we talk?
<b>Parent</b>	Sure. What's going on?
<b>Teen</b>	Lately, I haven't been feeling like myself. I feel sad and angry all the time. I'm constantly tired and I can't focus in school.
<b>Parent</b>	I've gone through periods like this when I was your age. Hang in there and I'm sure things will get better with time.
<b>Teen</b>	Well, usually when I'm down I feel better when I go for a run or talk to someone. This time I can't seem to shake it. It's been like this for weeks now. I even took a depression test online and it reported that I should see a doctor to get checked out.
<b>Parent</b>	Really?
<b>Teen</b>	Yeah, I think I need to talk to someone. Can you help me set up an appointment with a doctor?
<b>Parent</b>	Sure, I think that's a great idea.

"When asking for help from an adult, some may not understand depression or know what to do. The good news is that there are many other helpful adults out there. It may just take talking to a few to find the right one."

### Slides 11: Let's Role Play between a Teen and a Friend

"But, what if it's a friend you are concerned about? Friends often see changes in friends before parents and other adults do, so it is important to know how to handle a situation with a friend who may be experiencing depression.

The best approach is to communicate to your friend the changes you have noticed, that you care for them and ask how you can help them take action towards talking to a trusted adult.

Let's do a role play of this exchange between two friends to better understand what this kind of conversation may sound like." (Teacher can read the part of Sam and have a student read the friend role, or two students can volunteer to read each role).

### Slide 12: Let's Role Play between a Teen and a Friend

<b>Sam</b>	Hey, can we talk? Over the past few weeks, I've noticed that you've been hanging back a lot - not calling or texting me much anymore and skipping out on me and our friends. Recently, you've even missed quite a few play practices. In general, you seem down. This isn't like you. What's going on?
<b>Friend</b>	I'm sorry. I've been feeling weird lately.

<b>Sam</b>	I can tell something's different. I'm worried and care about you.
<b>Friend</b>	You don't have to worry. I'm sure I'll snap out of it eventually.
<b>Sam</b>	You deserve to feel better now and who knows, it could be something as serious as depression. Have you told an adult yet?
<b>Friend</b>	No.
<b>Sam</b>	An adult should know so they can help you find a professional to check it out. Who do you feel comfortable talking to?
<b>Friend</b>	I guess, Mr. Clark.
<b>Sam</b>	I think he's a great choice. Would you like me to come with you? It might make you feel more comfortable.
<b>Friend</b>	Uh sure. Yeah, I'd like that.

### Slide 13: When to Notify an Adult

"Keep in mind that each situation with a friend is different and may require a slightly different approach and different action steps. You'll see in your Student Workbook some important points to remember.

If a friend tells you that they are thinking of suicide or hurting themselves, an adult must be notified immediately. A friend may ask you to keep this information a secret, but when it comes to matters of safety, keeping a secret can cost a life."

### Slide 14: Be a Good Friend

"One word of caution. It is important to take care of yourself and understand there are limits to the kind of support a friend can provide to a friend with depression. Often, a person can take on too much responsibility for helping a friend and this can begin to cause stress and bring that person down. Remember, a friend's job is to listen, show compassion and help a friend to find professional help."

### Slide 15: 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."

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