



K-12 Mental Health & Wellness Learning Standards:

A Guide for Supporting Self-Awareness, Emotional Literacy, Healthy Relationships, Resilience, and Advocacy for All Students

Erika's Lighthouse is a not-for-profit depression and mental health education organization that educates 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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Standard 1: Understanding Mental Health

Rationale: This standard focuses on building a foundational understanding of mental health as it relates to emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and how it influences our emotional and behavioral development. This standard highlights risk and protective factors that influence mental health, understanding the difference between mental distress, mental health challenges, and mental health disorders. This standard also encourages students to examine how digital experiences and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools can influence thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and overall mental well-being.

- 1.1** Define and understand the importance of mental health as a part of overall health
- 1.2** Define and understand the importance of mental wellness as a part of overall health
- 1.3** Identify and analyze risk and protective factors that impact mental health, including digital influences
- 1.4** Differentiate between mental distress, mental health challenges, and mental health disorders
- 1.5** Practice using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to understand how they influence mental health and emotional development

Standard 2: Emotional Literacy and Self-Awareness

Rationale: This standard focuses on strengthening students' emotional literacy and self-awareness. This standard highlights the importance of identifying and naming emotions, recognizing the connection between our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, understanding how digital experiences and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools can influence mental health and emotional development, knowing common signs that someone is struggling emotionally, and applying self-regulation strategies to manage emotions.

- 2.1** Identify and communicate a wide range of emotions using appropriate and healthy strategies
- 2.2** Recognize and describe common signs that may indicate someone may be struggling emotionally, including changes in digital behavior or online communication
- 2.3** Demonstrate and apply self-regulation strategies to manage stress, frustration, and intense emotions
- 2.4** Analyze and explain the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- 2.5** Practice using artificial intelligence (AI) tools while recognizing their limitations and the importance of human interaction

Standard 3: Mental Health Knowledge and Stigma Reduction

Rationale: This standard focuses on understanding common mental health disorders, recognizing signs and symptoms, and promoting awareness that they are treatable. It highlights the importance of identifying risk for harm to oneself and others, describing how the brain influences emotions and behavior, understanding mental health challenges, addressing stigma, and encouraging help-seeking. This standard also emphasizes the role of digital communication and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools.

- 3.1** Recognize the physical, emotional, and behavioral signs and symptoms of common mental health disorders, including:
 - Addiction
 - Anxiety
 - Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
 - Bipolar
 - Depression
 - Eating Disorders
 - Grief and Loss
 - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- 3.2.** Identify warning signs when someone may be at risk for suicide, self-harm, or harm to others, including concerning online behaviors, and understand when and how to seek help
- 3.3** Understand that mental health challenges are treatable and identify artificial intelligence (AI) tools and resources
- 3.4** Describe the structure and primary functions of the brain and how they influence emotional and behavioral development
- 3.5** Define stigma, recognize its impact on help-seeking strategies, and distinguish facts from myths about mental health
- 3.6** Practice analyzing artificial intelligence (AI) tools and the influence it has on mental health and stigma
- 3.7** Examine how language - including digital communication - matters in reducing stigma, promoting understanding, and encouraging care and connection

Standard 4: Relationship Skills and Healthy Boundaries

Rationale: This standard focuses on the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to develop and maintain healthy relationships with peers and trusted adults. This standard highlights the importance of communication, establishing and respecting boundaries, demonstrating respect and empathy, and recognizing when and how to seek help. This standard also addresses digital awareness, use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, and maintaining healthy boundaries.

- 4.1** Identify and describe characteristics of a healthy friendship or relationship, both in-person and digitally
- 4.2** Identify and define various communication styles: passive, aggressive, and assertive
- 4.3** Identify sources of conflict, including miscommunication, boundary violations, and unmet expectations
- 4.4** Demonstrate the use of I-Statements to effectively communicate feelings and establish healthy boundaries
- 4.5** Explain the importance of establishing and respecting boundaries in relationships, both in-person and digitally
- 4.6** Demonstrate empathy and respect when interacting with others
- 4.7** Recognize the roles, limitations, and boundaries of a peer and a trusted adult, including artificial intelligence (AI) tools
- 4.8** Identify when and how to seek help for oneself or a peer for a mental or emotional health concern, including overcoming barriers
- 4.9** Demonstrate offering non-judgmental support to peers and encourage them to seek help when needed
- 4.10** Demonstrate digital awareness by setting healthy boundaries with technology to support mental well-being

Standard 5: Coping Skills and Resilience

Rationale: This standard focuses on the ability to describe and apply healthy coping strategies to a variety of situations and understand resilience as a skill that can be cultivated through practice. This standard highlights recognizing and managing emotions, handling stressful situations, identifying stressors and developing strategies to build resilience in everyday life. This standard also addresses the use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) tools, and maintaining healthy boundaries.

- 5.1** Describe and apply positive coping strategies to a variety of situations
- 5.2** Define resilience and practice ways to build resilience in everyday life
- 5.3** Identify personal stressors at school, at home, in the community, and with peers, and apply coping strategies to restore balance and reduce stress
- 5.4** Demonstrate coping strategies to manage stress, frustration, and strong emotions
- 5.5** Identify personal strengths and coping strategies, and identify a trusted adult or a peer to talk to when oneself or a peer is facing emotional challenges
- 5.6** Use technology and artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support mental well-being by establishing healthy screen habits, taking breaks from screens, building self-awareness, and using positive coping strategies

Standard 6: Mental Health and Connectedness

Rationale: This standard focuses on the importance of fostering a sense of connection and belonging, which supports overall mental well-being. This standard highlights the value of building respectful relationships, recognizing the factors that contribute to feeling connected and mental health, and understanding how technology and artificial intelligence (AI) tools can both support and challenge mental health and connectedness.

- 6.1** Explain how the feeling of a sense of belonging can support or harm someone's mental health
- 6.2** Describe how connectedness influences decision-making and relationships
- 6.3** Demonstrate respectful communication and positive interactions with peers in-person and online
- 6.4** Demonstrate ways to foster belonging and connectedness at school, at home, and in the community
- 6.5** Identify factors that affect someone's sense of belonging and connection
- 6.6** Identify strategies to increase connectedness at school, at home, and in the community
- 6.7** Identify ways technology and artificial intelligence (AI) tools can both support and challenge mental health and connectedness

Standard 7: Social Awareness and Empathy

Rationale: This standard focuses on understanding and recognizing others' perspectives and responding in ways to best support the feelings and needs of others. This standard highlights the importance of empathy, effective communication, active listening, and identifying social cues. This standard also explores how artificial intelligence (AI) tools can support the understanding of others, improve communication skills, and help understand social interactions both in-person and online.

- 7.1** Explain how empathy and effective communication skills contribute to healthy relationships
- 7.2** Differentiate empathy from sympathy and demonstrate ways to support others in a healthy way
- 7.3** Identify social cues, including body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, nonverbal literacy, and digital communication signals
- 7.4** Demonstrate active listening skills, digital engagement, and identify the emotions of others
- 7.5** Demonstrate ways to recognize and support peers by showing empathy and intervening as an upstander
- 7.6.** Analyze artificial intelligence (AI) communication and distinguish how it differs from human interaction

Standard 8: Help-Seeking and Advocacy

Rationale: This standard focuses on identifying trusted adults and understanding when and how to seek help for oneself or a peer. This standard highlights advocating for personal boundaries and well-being, knowing the characteristics of a trusted adult, and practicing non-judgmental peer support to encourage others to seek help if needed. This standard also includes the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support mental health, digital awareness, and practicing safe and effective help-seeking in both in-person and online settings.

- 8.1** Identify a trusted adult at school, at home, or in the community
- 8.2** Identify characteristics of a trusted adult
- 8.3** Identify when and how to seek help for oneself or a peer regarding mental or emotional health
- 8.4** Practice offering non-judgmental support to peers and encourage them to seek help when needed
- 8.5** Recognize situations that may cause strong or uncomfortable feelings and explain how to ask for help from a trusted adult
- 8.6** Advocate for personal boundaries, digital awareness, and safety, and well-being for oneself and others
- 8.7.** Demonstrate use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools related to mental health and navigating the digital world