



Level II: Depression Awareness

A One-Day Program 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 A One-Day 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.

This one-day version of the program consists of an engaging and interactive lesson designed to be taught to provide students with increased:

- knowledge of key concepts related to identifying depression
 - self-advocacy and peer-to-peer intervention to promote help-seeking
 - awareness of how they can support their own mental health and well-being
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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

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 sensitive topics are addressed in class, 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.

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.

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.

Crisis Text Line
(text HELP to 741741)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(dial 1-800-273-8255)

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

Level II: Depression Awareness

A One-Day Program for Grades 5-9

OBJECTIVE

To raise awareness of depression and reduce negative attitudes of depression and its treatment.

OVERVIEW

In this one-day program, students will learn that depression is a common and serious mood disorder* and how to recognize the warning signs. They will learn what a trusted adult is and how to access one, if in need.

*Note: Since the launch of this program in 2014, the term “brain disorder” has been replaced with “mood disorder.” We recommend you use the term “mood disorder” in your discussions, although you will hear “brain disorder” in the video.

The lesson concludes with a bookmark handout for each student summarizing the lesson and where to find help. Finally, each student should receive a self-referral card, providing an opportunity for students to reach out for help confidentially.

SCRIPT

Slides 2-3: Overview of Lesson

“Today we are going to talk about depression and mental health. We will watch a video and talk about the signs and symptoms of depression, learn how to identify a Trusted Adult in your life, and think about general good mental health practices.

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 workers office here at school which is located _____. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.”

Slide 4: The Video

Show the full 18 minute video found on erikaslighthouse.org/resources

Slide 5: Discussion

Ask students: What are some of the signs and symptoms of depression?

Expect answers to include: Depressed mood, sadness or irritability,

Slide 6: Symptoms

Show this slide as the discussion progresses to ensure students can see the primary symptoms associated with depression. It's important to note that for a diagnosis of depression, at least 5 symptoms must be present for most of the time for at least 2 weeks.

Slide 7: Trusted Adult

It's important for students to know that if they aren't feeling well or if something is different, they should tell someone.

Prompt students with the question: When I say the words TRUSTED ADULT, what characteristics or traits come to mind?

Teachers might need to share the idea of a trusted adult by defining the term (an adult who is reliable, dependable, and trustworthy and who can help you) and engage students in identifying potential titles of trusted adults at home, school, and in the community.

Share bookmarks with students and have them write down where in school they can go should they have concerns about themselves or a friend (teacher, counselor's office, school social worker's office, etc.)

Slides 8-9: Introducing Role Play

Teachers says: 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 involved 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 make it better and what they can do to help you take action towards seeking professional help.

Slides 10-11: Role play Teen and Mom

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

After reading the script, teacher says: 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 few to find the right one.

Slides 12-13: Role play Teen and Friend

Teacher says: 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 depressed.

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 one and have a student read the friend role, or two students can volunteer to reach each role).

Slide 14: Good Mental Health and Coping

Teachers asks students: What are 4 ways to practice good mental health?

Positive coping strategies can help manage mental health. Expected answers can include developing good sleep habits, practicing self-care, good eating habits/nutrition, getting exercise.

Teacher might share the [Teen Toolbox](https://erikaslighthouse.org/teen-toolbox) on erikaslighthouse.org to have students look through the information or can hand out the [Managing Your Depression](#) worksheet for students to refer to.

Slide 15: Self-Referral Cards

Teacher says: Today we learned about depression and talked about how important it is to talk to a Trusted Adult if you are worried about yourself or a friend. Practicing good mental health includes knowing what kind of strategies work best for you.

I am now going to hand out the self-referral cards. Each student should fill one out, fold it in half and hand it back to the teacher.

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 _____.

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