



# **Level II:**

# **Depression Awareness**

## **Lesson 1: Signs & Symptoms of Depression**

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 1: Signs & Symptoms of Depression 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 1 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 that depression is a mood disorder
- Describe the signs & symptoms, risk factors, and resources for depression
- Identify a reliable and 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
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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 & TRAUMA-INFORMED

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)

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

## Level II: Depression Awareness - Lesson 1

*A Lesson for Grades 5-9*

### OBJECTIVE

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

### Students will:

- Define that depression is a mood disorder
- Describe the signs & symptoms, risk factors, and resources for depression
- Identify a reliable and trusted adult at school

### OVERVIEW

In Lesson 1, 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.

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.

### TEACHER PREPARATION

Review all of the Level II: Lesson 1 program materials.

- Read the facilitator guide script
- Review the slide deck
- Watch the Level II Lesson 1 video
- Look through student vignettes
  - Determine if your students will select two 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, you might want to consider selecting the two Student Stories for your students to watch. This way they can watch different stories next year.
- Determine how to share the pretest link with students (QR Code or Hyperlink, both available on the slideshow). There is a separate post-test for when the program is complete.
  - Pre-test: <http://elhms.info>
  - Post-test: <http://elhmspост.info>

Make copies of the [Student Workbook](#), [Student Bookmark](#) and [Self-Referral Card](#) for each student. These resources are also available in Spanish on the Resource Portal.

- There are two options for the student bookmarks:
  - Ahead of time, fill out the contact information for the school mental health professional (i.e School Counselor or School Social Worker) on the bookmark template (available through Canva on the Resource Portal)
  - Have students fill out their own bookmarks.
- Coordinate a process for collecting Self-Referral Cards and student referrals with the school mental health staff.

## SCRIPT

### Slides 1: Title Slide

"Today we are going to watch a video and talk about depression and mental health.

Before we begin the lesson, each of you will take a quick pre-test to determine what you already know. Use the QR code or link on the slide or in your Student Workbook to start your pre-test."

### Slides 2: Objectives of Lesson

"Today you're going to learn that depression is a mood disorder. You'll learn the signs and symptoms, risk factors and resources for depression. You'll be able to identify a reliable trusted adult."

### Slides 3: Overview of Erika's Lighthouse

"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.

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."

### Slide 4: The Video

"Now we will watch a 3-minute video. As you watch the video, you can take notes and begin answering the questions in your Student Workbook. Be prepared to participate by sharing what you have learned."

### Slide 5: Discussion Questions

As a whole group, ask and discuss the following questions & have students answer in their Student Workbook:

1. Depression is a common and serious mood disorder that can happen to anyone. It is not your fault if you have it and you are not alone. How common is depression in teens?  
Answer: 15-20% of young people will experience depression before they reach adulthood. This is about 5 students in a class of 25
2. Depression is not like a rash on your skin. Can you tell by someone's appearance that they have depression?  
Answer: No, You can not tell by someone's appearance if they are depressed because depression occurs on the inside and among all ages, genders, races and cultures.
3. Depression is marked by a chemical imbalance in the brain that impacts mood, thoughts, and behaviors. Sometimes genetics can play a role in whether or not someone gets depression. If there is a history of depression in your family, does it mean you will develop it?  
Answer: No. If there is a family predisposition for depression it means that you are at higher risk but it does not mean that you will definitely

inherit depression. It is always smart to know your family's mental health history. Don't be afraid to ask.

4. Sometimes stress in the environment can trigger depression. Does this mean anyone who experiences stress will be diagnosed with depression?

Answer: No, not everyone who experiences stress will get depression. Everyone experiences stress differently. Some people can tolerate stress well and others are more sensitive to stressful events. However, continual stress is not good for anyone's mental health. If you are experiencing intense or continual stress, try to do things that usually help you feel better. If that does not work, tell a trusted adult.

5. Depression is serious. Is depression a risk factor for suicide?

Answer: Yes, depression is the number one risk factor to suicide. While depression is common, suicide is rare. Suicide can happen if someone's depression is intense, not identified or they are not receiving the proper support.

6. Depression is more than a feeling of sadness. In order to have a diagnosis of depression you need at least five symptoms present most every day for at least two weeks. However, it is possible to have moments of enjoyment with depression. What are the signs and symptoms of depression?

Answer: 5 or more of these symptoms must be present every day for at least 2 weeks or more:

- Depressed mood, sadness, or irritability
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Change in weight or appetite
- Change in sleep
- Feeling sped up or slowed down
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or acts of self-harm

### Slide 6: Break into Small Groups

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

"We're going to break up into small groups and watch two short videos. In your Student Workbook, there are descriptions and QR codes for each of the student stories. Select which two stories your group would like to watch and then, while you watch, write down in your workbook the signs and symptoms that the students in the videos experienced."

<p><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.</p>	<p><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".</p>
<p><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.</p>	<p><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.</p>

<p><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.</p>	<p><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.</p>
<p><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.</p>	<p><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.</p>

### Slide 7: Signs & Symptoms Discussion Questions

While students are in their small groups, ask and discuss the following questions. Have students answer in their Student Workbook:

1. Student Story #1: What were the signs & symptoms of the first student you watched?
2. Student Story #2: What were the signs & symptoms of the second student you watched?
3. Did you notice any similarities or differences between the students' experiences?

### Slide 8: Symptoms

"As we just discussed, there are various signs and symptoms of depression. Some of the students in the videos described feeling sad or irritable, a change in their sleep pattern, their appetite and general hygiene. As you see on the slide, these are symptoms of someone who is experiencing depression. It's important to note that to be diagnosed with depression by a doctor or mental health professional, a person has to have at least 5 symptoms present for most of the time for at least 2 weeks."

### Slide 9: Trusted Adult

"It's important for you to know that if you aren't feeling well or if you're concerned about yourself or a friend, you should tell someone.

When I say the words "trusted adult", what characteristics or traits come to mind?"

(You 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.)

When a person or source is **valid**, it means it offers correct information and can be trusted. When a person or source is **reliable**, it means it can be accessed easily and consistently.

### Slide 10: Bookmark

"I'm going to hand out some bookmarks for you. On one side you'll see the signs and symptoms of depression and on the other side, you will find tips for taking care of your mental health. I want to ensure you know who you can talk to at school. Write down where in school you can go should you have concerns about yourself or a friend (teacher, counselor's office, school social worker's office, etc.) and answer the two questions in your Student Workbook."

- Describe how you know that the trusted adult you put on your bookmark is valid and reliable.
- How can you access/find a trusted adult?

#### Slide 11: 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 12: Self-Referral Cards

“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. And 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. On the card it gives you three options. 1. to talk to a mental health professional here at school in the next 24 hours 2. Talk to a mental health professional here at school within a week 3. That you do not need to talk to a mental health professional. Each of you should select one of these options, fold it in half and hand it back to me.”

\*Note to school staff: It can be helpful to explain to students what happens when they choose “I would like to talk to a trusted adult within the next 24 hours” or “I would like to talk to a trusted adult in the next week.” For example, who will I talk to? Does the school notify a parent or guardian? Will this be a private, confidential conversation? Giving the students this information ahead of time may ease uncomfortable or anxious thoughts and feelings when filling out the Self-Referral Card. Check out [THIS](#) resource.

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