



Level III: Depression Education & Suicide Awareness

A One-Day Lesson Designed for Grades 8-12

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 III: Depression Education & Suicide Awareness A One-Day Lesson Plan for Grades 8-12

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 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. Depression Education & Suicide Awareness was designed to be taught in classrooms for grades 8-12, 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 depression and suicide
 - self-advocacy and peer-to-peer intervention
 - ability to identify and access Trusted Adults
 - awareness of how they can support their own mental health and well-being
 - understanding that self-harm and suicidal thoughts are symptoms of depression that must be taken very seriously
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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, feel free to share with Erika's Lighthouse!

Crisis Text Line
(text HELP to 741741)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(dial 988)

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

Level III: Depression Education & Suicide Awareness

A One-Day Program for Grades 8-12

OBJECTIVE

To raise awareness of depression and suicide 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 of depression and suicide. They will list trusted adults/resources to help themselves and/or a friend. They will also discuss how to help a suicidal friend in need.

Each student should receive a self-referral card at the conclusion of the lesson, providing an opportunity for students to reach out for help confidentially. Review [Self-Referral Cards: What Students Need to Know](#).

OPTIONAL: Distribute bookmarks for all students summarizing the lesson and emphasizing the importance of trusted adults. Bookmarks and self-referral cards can be found at <https://www.erikaslighthouse.org/resources/>.

SCRIPT

Slides 2-3: Overview of Erika's Lighthouse and the lesson

Teacher reads the information slide about Erika's Lighthouse.

Teacher says: "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, identify trusted adults in your life, and think about general good mental health practices. We will also describe that self-harm and suicidal thoughts are symptoms of depression that we just take very seriously.

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 Level III 18 minute video found on [erikaslighthouse.org/resources](https://www.erikaslighthouse.org/resources)

Slide 5: Discussion - Signs & Symptoms

Teacher asks: "What are some of the signs and symptoms of depression?"

Expect answers to include: depressed mood, sadness or irritability, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts

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. It's important to note that a diagnosis of depression must be given by a mental health and/or medical professional.

Slide 7: Discussion - Stigma

Prompt students with the question: "When I say the word STIGMA, what comes to mind? What are some examples of stigma that some of the teens in the video experienced?"

Expect answers to include: Jasmine did not want to speak up because of the stigma in her community and family. Mac felt that way as well.

Slide 8: Stigma Definition

Read the definition of stigma to students. Students can give examples of the teens in the video if they haven't already done so.

Slide 9: Select a Story

Teacher selects one or more of the Student Stories for the class to read on their own. Lead the discussion utilizing the discussion questions at the end of stories that focus on good mental health, stigma and self-care. The goal is to have students read and process stories from the video to learn more about each teen's experience with depression.

Ideally, students are broken up into groups to read stories (as time permits) and answer the follow-up questions (existing discussion questions include good mental health, stigma and help-seeking)

Slide 10: Follow up Questions

Follow up questions after reading the story/stories.

- What was going on in their life when the teen experienced depression?
- Why was it so hard for the teen to talk about their depression?
- What self-care strategies did the teen use?
- Who did the teen seek support from?

Teacher should ask students what self-care strategies work for them. Who do the students seek support from?

Slide 11: Question - If a friend at your school felt depressed, list two people (or resources) that would be trustworthy and reliable?

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. There also may be resources such as community organizations, websites, and/or books that are trustworthy and reliable resources for the students.

Slide 12: Suicide & Self-Harm

Introduce the terms suicide and self harm (refer to the slide).

Teacher asks: What are two signs to look for in yourself or friends regarding depression or self-harm?

Review the warning signs and symptoms from slide 6 if necessary.

Slide 13: Question - What would you do if a friend was feeling suicidal and turned to you for help?

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 and/or considering self-harm and/or having suicidal thoughts. 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."

Teacher says: "If you think a friend is showing signs of suicide or hinting at suicide, you should know that it is okay to ask them, "Are you talking about suicide?" or "Are you hinting at suicide?" This will not put the idea in their head. It will actually help them feel cared for because you are showing them that you are paying attention and that you want them to feel better. Just know that you should always get additional help from an adult if a friend tells you they're feeling suicidal."

Slide 14: 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 of you should fill one out, fold it in half and hand it back to me. (Optional: Hand out bookmarks as well)

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 _____."

