



# Erika's Lighthouse Family Workshop: We All Have Mental Health

For Parents, Caregivers and Families

## Facilitator's Guide

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.

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## Table of Contents

### **Part 1: What is Mental Health?**

Slides 3-8

### **Part 2: Understanding Feelings**

Slides 9-16

### **Part 3: Setting a Supportive Environment**

Slides 17-19

### **Part 4: Being a Trusted Adult**

Slides 20-27

### **Video:**

We All Have Mental Health: [Link](#)

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## Part 1: What is Mental Health?

In Part 1, families will learn about mental health, risk factors and what it means to be resilient. This session will emphasize that mental health is as important as physical health and engage in discussion about the difference between everyday feelings and overwhelming feelings. This part focuses on a short video introducing two students, Sasha and Andre and how they cope with their feelings.

### Slide 1: Introduction Script

“Welcome to our workshop. Before we begin, please scan the QR code on the slide and take the brief pre-test; we appreciate it. (Give participants a few moments to complete the pre-test) Today we are going to begin a conversation about mental health and understanding how mental health can impact your child/children. This information may help you with your child(ren) or someone you know.”

### Slide 2: Agenda

“This workshop will discuss what mental health is, the risk factors that could stand in the way of good mental health, understanding the difference between everyday feelings and overwhelming feelings, how to foster a supportive environment around mental health at home and what it means to be a trusted adult.”

**Icebreaker** (*Optional*): Share your favorite...

For this icebreaker, ask everyone to share their favorite movie, song, or T.V. show, etc. This icebreaker helps parents/caregivers/staff get to know each other even more and build community.

### Slide 3: What is Mental Health? (title slide)

“So, what is mental health? We hear a lot about taking care of our mental health, but what exactly does that mean?”

### Slide 4: What is Mental Health?

“Mental health is about our feelings, thoughts, and moods. Mental health is important for a happy, healthy, productive, and balanced life. Just as we brush our teeth every day to take care of our teeth, we need to make sure our brains get taken care of, too. Just like taking care of our bodies, there are ways for us to take care of our minds, too. Looking after our mental health is just as important as looking after our physical health.”

*Physical health = taking care of body; mental health = taking care of our mind*

### **Slide 5: Good Mental Health**

“Having good mental health can help us in many aspects of life. It allows us to function better at work or in school. Good mental health allows us to feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions. Achieving and maintaining good mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood through adulthood. Good mental health will allow children to overcome obstacles, get along well with others and stay well.”

### **Slide 6: What Gets in the Way of Mental Health?**

“Often, what stands in the way of good mental health is unmanaged stress. Stress is a normal part of life, it helps motivate us to get things done and do our best. BUT too much stress can cause problems for our bodies and our minds. Our children experience real stress, usually caused by academics, family and social pressures.

When we have too much stress we often experience physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches. It can also lead to mental health problems like depression.

What causes you stress? There are many ways you can handle stress. It is important to know how YOU react to stressful situations in your life so that you can better manage these reactions.”

(Optional: use [Managing Stress handout](#))

### **Slide 7: Risk Factors**

“Some of life’s challenges are out of our control and these challenges can be a risk to mental health. Some of the factors that may put children at risk for mental health challenges are:

- Family conflict
- Health/mental illness
- Social rejection
- Major transitions or change
- Learning disabilities
- Trauma or neglect
- Tragedy or loss
- Poverty

### **Slide 8: What does it mean to be resilient?**

“Think about this quote: “The road to success is often bumpy.” What this means is that all of us will experience challenges and roadblocks in life. But that is not a negative.

Overcoming obstacles is how a child grows strong. This is called Resilience - and it matters. Every parent/caregiver wants their child to lead a happy, healthy and productive life. We want them to have the skills they need to deal with life's inevitable challenges. According to research, resiliency is the most important characteristic that a person can possess."

### **Slide 9: Ways to Build Resiliency Skills**

"So, we've learned that kids have real stress and that some kids may have circumstances that are out of their control that make managing their mental health more difficult. So, what can we do to help our kids? The key is balance, the more risk factors a child has, the more protective factors are needed to be resilient. And, the good news is there is a lot we can do to build protective factors to help our children become resilient! Here are some of the factors that build resilience."

**Flexible Thinking:** Teach them how to "reframe" a disappointing moment or experience. The goal is to acknowledge the disappointing thing and then turn it into something positive.

Example-Your child's baseball game gets canceled. You can say - "I know you were excited to play and it's disappointing that it was canceled because of the rain. Why don't we think of a different activity to do instead"?

**Impulsive Control:** Play a board game: Board games are good for impulse control because they teach the skill of turn-taking. Board games also require the use of executive functioning skills: planning, working memory, and mental flexibility.

**Expressing Emotions:** Allow your kids to express all emotions so that they feel comfortable asking for help in difficult times.

**Self-efficacy:** Embed choices into your child's day-to-day activities. This allows children to have a feeling of control and self-efficacy

## **Part 2: Understanding Feelings**

### **Slide 10: Understanding Feelings**

"Now that we have an understanding of what mental health is, let's take a look at understanding feelings, specifically everyday feelings and overwhelming feelings."

### **Slide 11: Video**

"We are going to watch a short video called We All Have Mental Health. This video is about two friends, Sasha and Andre'. Let's take a look. (play [video](#))

### **Slide 12: Mental Health and Feelings**

"Our children experience a range of feelings and we want them to be able to express their feelings in healthy ways. Feelings can be big or small and everything in between. They can

be everyday feelings or overwhelming feelings. It is important to know that everyday feelings come and typically can be handled easily. Usually, something simple can help our child deal with their everyday feelings of stress, anger, sadness and anxiety. Being happy and excited are everyday feelings, too. Overwhelming feelings are also normal, but they hang around for a long time, change the way we feel and behave and may require seeking additional support like talking to a mental health professional.”

### **Slide 13: Feelings**

“What are some examples of everyday and overwhelming feelings that you notice in your child(ren)?”

### **Slide 14: Important Things to Know**

“Families are often the first to notice a change in mood, feeling or behaviors in their child(ren) which is why it’s important to know that childhood and adolescent mental health struggles are common, in fact, 15-20% of young people will struggle with depression before adulthood. These struggles are serious and can be hard to see, 90-98% of suicides are a result of a diagnosable mental illness – the vast majority being depression. They are treatable. We want young people to know that everyone deserves good mental health and we carry the message that you are not alone and that there is always hope.”

### **Slide 15: What Is Stigma? How Does It Impact Us?**

**Stigma Exercise (Optional):** [Stand Up/Sit Down Stigma Exercise](#)

“Sometimes, we may need to reach out for help. However, asking for help can be hard. Stigma can get in the way of asking for help for ourselves or our children. What is stigma? Stigma is a mark of shame associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person. Kids ages 9-12 are deeply aware and impacted by stigma, making it even more difficult for them to ask for help, if they need it. We need to help normalize conversations around mental health and remember that you wouldn’t be ashamed if you broke your arm or needed a doctor for a physical condition. There is nothing to be afraid or ashamed of if someone is having a mental health challenge.”

## **Part 3: Setting a Supportive Environment**

### **Slide 16: Setting a Supportive Environment**

“We learned what mental health is, what can get in the way of good mental health and have a deeper understanding of stigma. Now, let’s look at how we can help our children take care of their mental health and what we can do at home to create a supportive environment around mental health.”

### **Slide 17: Foster a Supportive Environment**

“There are a number of easy things we can do to help promote good mental health strategies. Here are some things to do: Focus on creating healthy meals and snacks. Good nutrition plays a big role in mental health. Encourage opportunities to exercise and be sure to get enough sleep. Young people need at least 8 hours of sleep. Practice Coping Strategies: listening to music, mindfulness activities -there are tons of apps for this- journaling, playing with a pet or talking with a friend. Remember, we all need to practice coping strategies, including you. Taking time to practice self-care and positive coping strategies is a great way to model what behaviors you would like your children to do.”

### **Slide 18: Practice Good Mental Health at Home**

“Erika’s Lighthouse offers some great family activities that promote good mental health and conversations around feelings at home. For example, the feeling thermometer is a tool that helps us measure the intensity of our emotions. As we climb in temperature, from green to yellow to red, our feelings become more uncomfortable. When that occurs, maybe we need to try some breathing exercises to help regulate ourselves back to “green”. The inhale/exhale worksheet is a great way to practice breathing. Alternatively, you can use the conversation starters worksheet to start normalizing conversations around mental health in your home. As you start feeling more comfortable asking questions and checking in, so will your child.”

## **Part 4: Being a Trusted Adult**

### **Slide 19: Being a Trusted Adult**

“Erika’s Lighthouse classroom programs emphasize and encourage students to identify who is their trusted adult and how to engage a trusted adult if they are worried about themselves or a friend. Let’s learn about what it means to be a trusted adult, some of the barriers that prevent young people from reaching out for help and how to have a conversation with your child if you are concerned about them.”

### **Slide 20: What is a Trusted Adult?**

“When young people are asked to think about a trusted adult and what comes to mind - some of their responses include being a good listener, offering advice, showing empathy, or not making you feel silly for coming to them - someone they feel a connection with. A trusted adult is reliable and dependable. A young person might identify a trusted adult at home: a parent or caregiver, a grandparent or a family member. Maybe it is someone at school- a teacher, coach, school counselor or school social worker. A trusted adult could also be someone in the community- a mental health provider, religious leader, or instructor. The important piece is that a young person feels as though they have at least

one trusted adult and that this person can listen non-judgementally, is trustworthy and caring, and if necessary, get the young person to a professional who can help them.”

### **Slide 21: What to Say?**

“If you observe changes in your child’s mood, thoughts or behaviors that are causing you to be concerned, you might want to find a quiet, private and protected time to speak with them. These conversations may be hard and emotional. It is helpful if you follow a simple language to guide your conversation.

#### **I notice.**

*“Is everything okay? I’ve noticed you have been...”*

#### **I care.**

*“I’m concerned because I know this isn’t normal for you.*

#### **How can I help?**

*“What can I do to help? Let’s come up with a plan together.”*

We want to end with an action - even if your child says everything is fine, you are leaving the door open for future conversations. It’s also helpful to remind your child that it is OKAY if they want to talk to someone other than you. While that could be hard to hear, you are opening a door for your child to be open and get any help they might need.”

### **Slide 22: Listen to Them and Trust Your Gut**

“Remember, young children may experience difficult situations and emotions. It is important to be there to listen first and not necessarily to try to solve a problem for them. Trust your gut instincts - if you suspect there may be a problem or suspect your child is struggling, even if they can’t express that to you - something may be out of balance and needs your attention. Here are some helpful tips for supporting your child when having a conversation:

- Be prepared for the truth and remain calm, it’s okay not to know what to do
- Validate your child’s feelings – It can be hurtful when your feelings are minimized or not taken seriously
- Take action - if you need help your first step should always be to see a doctor to rule out anything physical, followed by a proper assessment. The correct diagnosis is key, as this illness can look like a learning disability, a thyroid condition or even mono.
- Let your kid drive the ship – let them come up with what they would like to do (within reason), give them options. This is important developmentally and teaching advocacy skills. If you have to tell someone, let them be involved or lead the conversation. No shame, no blame. Parents tend to feel guilty. Guilt and shame will prevent you from

being the kind of parent you need to be to help your child. An illness is no one's fault."

### **Slide 23: What Should I Do if I'm Concerned About My Child**

"If you are concerned about your child, the first step is to talk with them. Let me know that you care about them and want to hear about what they are going through. Next, you want to connect them with care, often, this is a mental health professional. It can be difficult to find a mental health professional, however there are many places that can offer a referral. You can call your pediatrician or primary care provider, your child's school may offer referrals or if available, your health insurance company may have a list of providers. The next step is to schedule an appointment with a mental health provider and see what they recommend."

### **Slide 24: Talk to a Mental Health Professional**

"It can be challenging to know what to say when you first call to make an appointment with a mental health provider. You may want to make some notes about behaviors you have noticed or things that your child has stated to you, and then you can share them with the mental health professional.

Some ideas are:

- I think there is a problem because
- I heard my child say
- I saw my child do
- My child is feeling
- This is not my child's usual behavior
- I've seen this change in my child's behavior over the past

### **Slide 25: Looking For More Resources?**

"For even more resources and information, scan the QR code on the screen or visit [erikaslighthouse.org](http://erikaslighthouse.org). Erika's Lighthouse offers a 3-part family workbook series where you can learn more about mental health, adolescent depression, getting help and more. All of the resources are available at no cost and in English and Spanish.

Good mental health also means experiencing negative emotions. It is not always about being happy. Remember that there are many ways to care for our mental health and often very small changes in nutrition, sleep and exercise can help set our mental health back into balance. As an adult, what you need to care for your mental wellbeing is often similar to what your children need.

STOP and THINK - what do you need to maintain good mental health? As adults, we have a chance to be role models for good mental health for young people"

## **Slide 26: Thank You**

“Thank you for joining us today. Please take a moment to scan the QR code and complete the post-test. Be sure to reach out to Erika’s Lighthouse if you have any questions.”