



Sample Mental Health Protocol

Teachers and schools play a key role in the identification and support of students suffering from depression. Teachers are often the first to know when a student is suffering from depression. They spend many hours with students, giving them a good sense of the norm for a particular age group.

Every school should have a protocol to establish a culture of mental health in the school and to get students the help they need if they are suffering from depression or another mental illness. Every staff member should know what to do if they think a student is suffering from depression or another mental illness.

Every school should establish a Mental Health Task Force whose mandate is to:

- Educate faculty and staff about depression, mental illness and mental health.
- Develop and/or strengthen procedures to assist teachers and other staff to identify students who may be suffering from depression or another mental illness.
- Help faculty and staff develop a support system for students who are suffering from depression or another mental illness.
- Develop and/or strengthen procedures to offer academic and therapeutic assistance to students who are suffering from depression or another mental illness.
- Develop and/or strengthen procedures for immediate intervention with students who are at risk of harming themselves or others.
- Develop anti-bullying policies and procedures.
- Establish a culture of mental health in the school.

The task force should include health and/or mental health staff, administrators, health teachers, and classroom teachers. It should:

- Train faculty and staff to recognize signs of depression. The Erika's Lighthouse Programs are a good tool for staff to become acquainted with depression from a student's point of view.
- Adopt a Student Mental Health Checklist for teachers to use to identify students who may need help.
- Communicate appropriate ways for faculty and staff to start a conversation with students of concern using a shared vocabulary and, if necessary, connect them to school support services using a common Student Intervention Language for Teachers.
- Establish a Student Assessment Protocol to address the concerns of a faculty or staff member about a student.
- Help classroom teachers develop a support system within the classroom for students suffering from depression.
- Develop a protocol for taking immediate action if a student is in danger of taking their life, self-injury or injury to others.
- Provide a "safe haven" (e.g., the school nurse or mental health office or the principal's office) for students who are experiencing emotional difficulties during the day.

If you need to speak with someone immediately, please text LISTEN to 741-741 or call 1-800-273-8255.
If this is an emergency, please call 911.

- Develop policies and procedures to address bullying, including cyberbullying. Communicate the protocol to teachers, students and parents.
- Evaluate the stress level at the school.
- Develop ways to ensure continuous communication and collaboration among school staff about mental health issues.
- Develop opportunities to discuss mental health issues, such as teacher and parent workshops, book discussions, and panel programs.
- Help students establish a “teen voice” by planning activities throughout the year to encourage conversations about mental health issues.
- Promote stigma-busting activities at the school to help fight the stigma surrounding depression and mental illness.

Every teacher should:

- Understand the basic facts about depression. The Erika’s Lighthouse Programs are a good tool for staff to become acquainted with depression from a student’s point of view.
- Follow the school protocol if a student has expressed in writing or verbally or is reported by peers to be thinking about suicide, self-injury or injury to others.
- Use the Student Mental Health Checklist if they are concerned about a student.
- Use the Student Intervention Language for Teachers if information discovered from the Student Mental Health Checklist warrants a conversation with the student.
- Establish a support system in the classroom to help students suffering from depression:
 - Document the behaviors you are seeing and follow the school’s procedures to address the situation.
 - Tell the student that you notice that they seem to be struggling and ask if there is anything you can do to help.
 - Ask the student if they would like to speak to the school nurse or mental health staff.
 - Ask the student if they need to sit in the front of the class to help with attention.
 - Ask the student if they need a safe place to go in the school when things get difficult (e.g., the school nurse or mental health office or the principal’s office).
 - Ask the student if there are any temporary accommodations that can help during this difficult time—homework extensions, additional test time.
 - Be sensitive to the student’s situation. Watch how you phrase things when talking to the student.
 - Make corrections in private, rather than in front of the class. Children with depression often feel very vulnerable and don’t want to be singled out in front of other students.
 - Be patient—the student can’t just snap out of it. Healing will take time.
 - Understand and follow the school protocol on bullying, including cyberbullying.

Teachers can go a long way towards helping a student who has depression by noting what they see, consulting with the school’s health staff, and treating the student with respect and sensitivity. But it is important to note that teachers are not responsible for either diagnosing or treating a student who has depression. Only a trained mental health professional can do that.

Supports and resources for underlined items are available in the Erika’s Lighthouse Resource Portal.

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