



We All Have Mental Health

For Parents, Caregivers and Families

Facilitators 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.

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

Part 1: What is Mental Health?

In Part 1 families will learn about mental health and child developmental norms. 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 1-2: Introduction Script

"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.

We will learn about the basics of what is good mental health, what might get in the way of good mental health, and discuss how important resiliency is."

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?

"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 everyday 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 4: 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. Achieving and maintaining good mental health is important at every stage of life from childhood through adulthood."

Slide 5: 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.”

(use Managing Stress handout)

Slide 6: 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 7: 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 8: Resiliency Skills

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! Take a look at some of the factors that build resilience.

Part 2: What is my child learning?

Slide 9-10: Video

We will now watch a video about two young people with two different experiences with mental health challenges.

Slide 11: 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 may require seeking additional support like talking to a helping professional.

Slide 12: Feelings

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

Slide 13: Children ages 6-12

It is important to have an idea of the typical developmental tasks that children ages 6-12 often demonstrate. By becoming familiar with what children often experience during this age span, we can be comforted to know that our child is within the range of expected behavior.

Slide 14: An Exercise in Stigma

Facilitator reads the statements on the slide.

I'm going to go through the statements on the slide. Please keep track of what you would be comfortable sharing with a stranger or coworker if the statement was true.

The statements you did not agree with, why not? Why is it different to talk about depression and mental health versus diabetes? Imagine in 20 years when teens that learned about depression and mental health in school are in your seats. Will their responses be different from yours? Breaking down the stigma around mental health is

what we want to see happen in school and at home. If you are uncomfortable talking about mental health, your children may be as well.

Slide 15: Understanding Stigma

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 when we are afraid people will judge or think negatively about us. There is nothing to be afraid or ashamed of if someone is having a mental health challenge. You wouldn't be ashamed if you broke your arm or needed a doctor for a physical condition.

Slide 16: Who is a Trusted Adult?

Everyone needs and should have a trusted adult that they confide in when they need help or support. Characteristics of a trusted adult might include a good listener, someone who offers advice, shows empathy, or won't make you feel silly for coming to them - someone there is a connection with. A trusted adult is reliable and dependable.

Trusted adults may be found at home, in school or in the community. It may not necessarily be a parent. But our role as a parent or caregiver is to listen and help our child to get the help they deserve to feel better.

Part 3: What can I do to help my child?

Slide 17: What can I do to help my child?

Now we will talk about some of the ways a parent or caregiver can be there to help a child who may be in need of our attention and loving support.

Slide 18: Listen to them and trust your instincts

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.

Slide 19: Keep an eye out

So, we have learned that stress is a normal part of life, but how do we know when our children are experiencing overwhelming feelings that are actually causing a problem for them. You know your child better than anyone else. Take some time to learn what you can about what is typical at their stage of development and then watch for changes that don't seem typical for them. When you see changes in your child that concern you

ASK YOURSELF THIS...

- Has there been a change?
- Is there a cause for this change?
- How is my child functioning?

Slide 20: Foster a Supportive Environment

There are a number of easy things we can do to help promote good mental health strategies. Focus on creating healthy meals and snacks. Good nutrition plays a big role in mental health. Encourage opportunities to exercise, take a quiet mindful moment and be sure to get enough sleep. Young people need at least 8 hours of sleep.

Seek out opportunities to have conversations around feelings and here is a tool that is useful to use.

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.

For example, I may be having a great morning but on my way to work I experience a traffic jam and now I am running late to a meeting. My mood has just elevated from level 1 to level 4. I get to the meeting and realize I forgot my phone at home and now my mood is at a level 7. I will need to ask myself what I can do to make sure I don't escalate into the red. This thermometer may be useful in helping our children explore how their emotions can rise and how to interrupt an escalating pattern before reaching the red. It may be an opportunity to discuss with our children what helps them when they are having tough feelings or a tough day.

This tool teaches children how to name their feelings and increases their awareness of their own emotions. When children can identify what they are feeling and how intense, or big, that feeling is they can begin to recognize when their feelings are becoming uncomfortable. This awareness helps children know when to use a coping skill to manage their feelings or ask for help.

-- Have parents/caregivers check in on where they are on the feeling thermometer.

(If you used the icebreaker "Share Your Favorite," you can have parents connect their answers to the feeling thermometer. This is a great opportunity to explain how music, movies, etc. influence our emotions and if we know a song makes us sad/angry etc. to be aware of that when we may be having overwhelming feelings vs. a song that makes us feel peaceful or calm.)

Slide 21: Talk to your child

If you observe some 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. Remind your child that it is OKAY if they want to talk to someone other than you. That could be hard to hear but you are opening a door for your child to be open and get any help they might need.

Slide 22: Get Them Help

Parents and family members are usually the first to notice if a child has problems with emotions or behavior. Your observations with those of teachers and other caregivers may lead you to seek help for your child. If you suspect a problem or have questions, contact a mental health professional.

Slide 23: Talk to a Mental Health Professional

It is a good idea to keep a journal or make some notes on your observations. This then you can share with a mental health professional.

Slide 24: Educate Yourself

For additional information you are able to download a copy of the Erika's Lighthouse Parent Handbook on Childhood and Teen Depression, a free resource available at erikaslighthouse.org.

Slide 25: Take Care of Yourself

We all need coping skills. Coping means to face and deal with responsibilities, problems, or difficulties in a calm, appropriate and successful manner. We use coping strategies sometimes without paying attention. It is what we do to make ourselves feel better when we are upset. Coping helps us tackle our problems and find solutions like asking for help or processing strong feelings for difficult situations we cannot change.

Some examples of healthy coping include talking to a friend, exercise, journaling, meditating, simply doing something you love that brings you joy.

Slide 26: Overview

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 a role model for good mental health for the young people in our lives.

Slide 27: Wrap-Up

Facilitator can share with parents about community-based organizations or resources along with what the school can offer. It might be good to introduce a school social worker or counselor to families so that they know who they can contact should they have any questions. Don't forget to check out the FREE Parent Handbook on Childhood & Teen Depression at www.erikaslighthouse.org.