



Adolescent Depression

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.

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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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Level II Depression Awareness: [Link](#)

Level III Depression Education and Suicide Awareness: [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 what is good mental health, what stands in the way of good mental health and how to promote resilience in adolescents.

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 are going to watch the teaser from the Level II program. In this segment you will meet real teens who talk about their experience with depression. The lessons and activities are designed to increase teen's knowledge of depression, decrease negative attitudes of depression and its treatment, increase self-advocacy and peer to peer intervention and increase engagement in good mental health behaviors.

Slide 11: (optional) QR codes for full video of Level II or Level III

We are going to watch the full video from the Level II/Level III program. In this video you will meet real teens who talk about their experience with depression. The lessons and activities are designed to increase teen's knowledge of depression, decrease negative attitudes of depression and its treatment, increase self-advocacy and peer to peer intervention and increase engagement in good mental health behaviors.

Slide 12: Core Messages

These core messages are what we want students, teachers and families to take away: depression is real, it's common (in fact, 15-20% of young people will struggle with depression before adulthood), it's serious (90-98% of suicides are a result of a diagnosable mental illness – the vast majority being depression) and it's treatable. Just as important as the signs and symptoms of depression, we teach our young people that everyone deserves good mental health and we carry the message that you are not alone and that there is always hope and that's key for our students, our educators, and families to understand.

Slide 13: Warning Signs of Depression

Depression looks different for everyone, but in order for there to be a diagnosis of depression, there are particular symptoms that must be present. The symptoms must include at least either feeling sad or having a depressed mood OR loss of interest or pleasure in activities that someone used to enjoy, along with at least 4 of the others on the list. The signs/symptoms are going to be a change from what's "normal" for that particular individual and they will have lasted for at least 2 weeks.

Slide 14: Depression in Adolescents

Depression in adolescents looks different from adult depression - more irritable and often a self-defeating attitude. For some it might look like a more aggressive reaction to things or acting out. Again, these are going to be different for each individual but if it's a noticeable change in that child, you'll want to make note and consider that something might be going on.

The key is to understand what is normal at different developmental stages and what is normal for a particular child and their personality and temperament.

- **Irritability** – Teens are good at making people not want to be around them.
- **Self-defeating attitude** – Hearing them say things like “I’m not good enough, smart enough, good looking enough” etc.
- **Bizarre sleep patterns** - More time in bed but less time sleeping (isolating).
- **Substance use** – Widely available at this age.
- **Aggression** – This looks like getting into fights.
- **Acting out** – This takes the form of running away, disrespect, etc.
- **Risk taking** – Doing anything that could knowingly cause harm, i.e. trying to beat a train and racing over train tracks
- **Problems in school** – Cognition problems are the first signs, even if grades are fine, work takes longer.

Other Facts

Depression has a higher rate in girls because estrogen is rich in serotonin receptors.

Boys may be more likely to suicide because they are less communicative and more impulsive

Slide 15: 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 16: 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 17: Coping Strategies

Along with the term stigma, students will learn the term self-care which goes along with other coping strategies that we can use to stay mentally healthy. Self-care is the practice of taking action to improve one's health. This includes physical, social and emotional health. Any activity that your child finds soothing and calming is an example of coping strategies/self-care.

Slide 18: 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 19: 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 20: 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 21: What's "Typical" Anyway?

So, what is typical behavior and how do you know when something concerning is going on? Let's go through a few examples...

- **Your child prefers to be by himself/herself.** For the child who prefers to hang out by themselves sometimes, this just may be an individual who is more introverted and needs to recharge by being alone. This could also be a sign that your child is pulling away from others and is isolating, a concerning behavior for a teen.
- **Your child wants to drop an activity that they have participated in for years.** A teen who wants to drop an activity because they have less time due to new interests is normal, but this could also indicate loss of pleasure in life's activities, which is concerning.
- **Your child has trouble sleeping one night, which results in trouble getting up for school the following day.** A certain level of anxiety is normal, your child may have a big math test the next day or be in a fight with a friend. But, if this is happening routinely, it could be a larger issue.
- **Your child bursts into tears for what seems to be no reason at all.** Anyone who has raised a teenage girl will tell you, this is normal! And, given hormone changes, it may be. But if it's interrupting their daily functioning, it could be a serious emotional issue worth a look.

The bottom line is there is a wide range of what is considered "normal" during the teen years. And, any of these situations really depends on a lot of factors. What it really boils down to is knowing your child. For some kids, any one of these behaviors could be outside of the realm of what is considered normal, and for others, it could be part of their temperament or growth.

When talking to families who are concerned about their child, **I ask these three questions:**

- Have they always been like this or is this a change?
- If so, could it be caused by something in the environment? School, friends and family?
- And finally, is this behavior interrupting daily functioning? School, activities, friends, family, etc.

During these teen years it's about being observant, asking questions and trusting our gut.

Slide 22: 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 this 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 23: Listen to Them and Trust Your Instincts

Quick Tips:

- Ask questions and LISTEN – children want your attention, not your advice
- Be prepared for the truth and remain calm, it's okay not to know what to do
- Validate your child's feelings – the most hurtful thing is when feelings are minimized or not taken seriously
- Listen to your gut – it's the best tool you already have
- Take action - if you need help your first step should be to see a doctor to rule out anything physical, followed by a proper assessment. The correct diagnosis is key, as depression can look like a lot of other childhood conditions.
- Let your child drive the ship – let them come up with what they would like to do (within reason), give them options. This is important developmentally and teaches advocacy skills. If you have to involve a professional, let your child be involved.
- No shame, no blame. Guilt and shame will prevent you from being the kind of support your child needs. An illness is no one's fault.

Slide 24: Mental Health Checklist

When your gut is telling you that something doesn't seem typical for your child you can begin to document what you are seeing. This mental health checklist will be helpful here. The first 9 checks are the DSM V diagnostic list for depression. Below that are signs you may notice at home like a drop in school performance, frustration, lack of motivation. Document changes in behavior for 2 weeks and then have a conversation with your child using the "talk to your child" language that we discussed on the previous slide. If your child is talking about self harm or thoughts of suicide, do not wait 2 weeks to seek help.

Slide 25: 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.

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 26: 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 27: Talk to a Mental Health Professional

It is a good idea to keep a journal or make some notes on your observations, maybe consider using the mental health checklist. Then you can share with a mental health professional.

Slide 28: Educate Yourself

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

Slide 29 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 30: 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 31: 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 Family Handbook at www.erikaslighthouse.org.

Slide 32: QR Codes for Full Videos

You are welcome to scan the QR code for the full Level II or Level III video if you are interested in learning more or watching the video with your child.