
LESSON 2 INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Lesson 2 of *The Erika's Lighthouse Program: Depression and Suicide Awareness for High School Students*.



Today you'll work in small groups and read more about one of the students from the video.



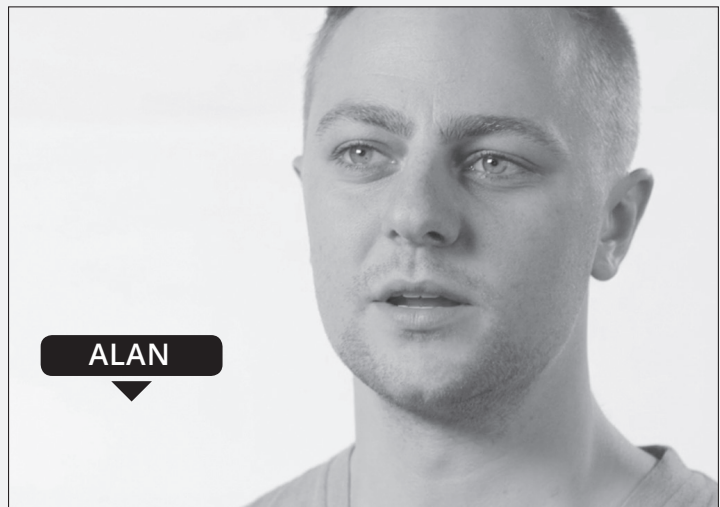
In your small group, take turns reading aloud each part of your student's story. When you're finished reading, discuss the reflection questions and jot down your group's answers in your packet.



Finally, your group will create a mini-poster to share with the full class highlighting something you learned about your student.

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Alan's story involves his parents' divorce and the impact it had on him. His experience helps us understand what it might feel like when someone is struggling with depression. He learned a lot about the power within himself and relies on practicing mindfulness to help cope with his depression and suicidal thoughts.



ALAN 1

ALAN

RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION When I was really young (between kindergarten and 5th grade), I had probably the ideal life as a young child. There were some dysfunctionalities, like there are with every family, but I wasn't really aware of them.

Once I got into 6th grade, everything started to really fall apart. My parents began to fight, and my brother and I were often brought in as ammunition for our parents to use against each other in arguments. With all of this, my mom primarily raised me. **My dad was around a little but he was around less and less as my parents' relationship worsened. I was also worrying about not having a family anymore, that's what it felt like.**

IMPACTING DAILY LIFE In 7th grade, when I didn't do well in my classes, my dad would get really hard on me. My parents, they were experiencing their own battle. They weren't really attentive to what I was going through and I don't blame them for that in any way. But because of that, if I didn't do well in school, my dad thought his role was to crack down really hard.

There's not a single good thing I can say about myself when I'm experiencing depression in its heaviest wave. Like *"I'm a failure."*

I did have moments of thinking about suicide and self-harm. You have to understand, that's a really distorted place to be. There's nothing logical about that.

SEEKING HELP AND FINDING SUPPORT [Therapy for me] looked like a psychologist, a therapist, who helped me notice how I was feeling and what was going on—becoming aware of myself and what was going on. **I like to look at psychologists or therapists as teachers, someone who is there to coach you.**

In getting better, it's not everybody's responsibility to get you better. In the end, it's in your head, it's in your experience, your own reflection of yourself, your self-talk, and for a long time, I think I just wanted other things or other people, like the medication or the therapist or people around me [to fix everything for me], and that was a barrier for a long time.

COPING SKILLS The things that I do personally to help manage my depression, the first one is mindfulness. I do a lot of deep breathing, centering into the moment. A lot of fear in general, depression comes a lot from thinking about the past, the future, interchangeably, and mindfulness is a great way to bring you right back into this moment. I couple mindfulness and gratitude together, if I'm sitting there, breathing, centering myself in the moment.



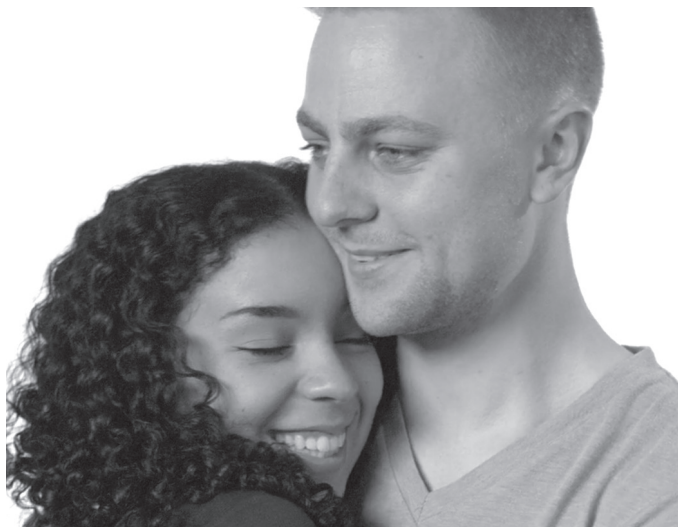
ALAN 2

ALAN

I love [my girlfriend] Amanda—someone who is really close to me and understands me on a level a lot of people don't. I [also] found a lot of indirect support from my best friend and his family. I spent a lot of time over at his house and it served as a safe haven for me when I was in really bad binds. I also found help from other friends, and my brother and I became close.

The most difficult thing about being a male with depression is that you're not allowed to have it [as a male]. In our society, it's very important to "be a man," to not have feelings. There's a lot of pressure on men to be that way.

Some people would argue that emotions can get in the way of productivity or get in the way of whatever, but I think that regardless of whether they get in the way of anything, it's still real, and it's still there. Instead of saying *"You should just shove it under the rug and stop thinking about it and block it out,"* I think we should at the very least say, **"Tell me everything about how you're feeling. Great, now how do we want to deal with it?"** Instead of just saying, *"Let's kick it under the rug."*



The biggest way that depression has changed the way that I look at the world is that people are often going through a lot more than you think they are.

I want to help people who may be experiencing what I have experienced in the past or what I'm experiencing on a daily basis, help them to see the light at the end of the tunnel and not feel trapped and lost—to feel encouraged. To give them hope that it isn't all bad, it doesn't last forever.

I would tell someone who is having suicidal thoughts or impulses that they are worth keeping around. I would tell them that everything is going to be okay, that there are people who love you and care about you, that want you here. Even if you don't want you here right now, you will find later in life that it was a lot better to stick around.

LOOKING FORWARD The biggest thing I learned about myself through depression was that I'm awesome. But in that everybody's awesome. That we have so much more power than we give ourselves credit for. One of the things that depression really attacks is our vision of ourselves and our vision of what we can and cannot do. And what I have learned is that we can do anything, anything! We, I, all of us are really awesome.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Talk about the following questions in your small group and jot down some answers.

1. What was going on in Alan's life when he was experiencing depression? Why was it so hard for him to talk about those feelings?
2. What did depression feel like for Alan or what areas of his life did it affect? How do you think these feelings would have affected his behavior day-to-day?
3. What difficulties did Alan have when asking for help or trying to get help? What were the barriers to getting help?
4. What people, resources or activities did Alan find helpful when he was experiencing depression? What other resources could have been available to him?
5. What about Alan's story most stood out to you? What would you have done as his classmate to help?

STUDENT STORY PRESENTATION

Create a Mini-Poster

Each small group will now create a mini-poster on a sheet of paper to present to the class. **Your mini-poster should highlight one part, theme or message from Alan's story** that your group thinks is important for the class to know.



The mini-poster can have words, drawings, sentences, quotes or anything important your group wants to share with the class about Alan.



If you're not sure what to talk about, go back to the reflection questions for ideas.



Each group will present their mini-poster to the class. When your small group presents, tell the class:

1. What did you decide to put on your mini-poster?
2. Why did you feel this was an important part of Alan's story to share?
3. Overall, what's a positive take away or message you learned from reading about Alan today?