
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.

2



MASON

Mason experienced depression and struggled with anxiety while in high school. He also learned that depression runs in his family. He found comfort in knowing his friends stood by him and never judged him for his depression. Mason shares how finding the right fit in a therapist and having a plan after hospitalization is important.

MASON 1

MASON

RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION My depression comes from overwhelming amounts of anxiety and pressures put on me by myself and others. Pressure to achieve was a lot on myself as well as a lot on my family. I think I assumed it was a lot more [from] my family than they really expected me to do. I mean I always wanted to be the best in sports, school, everything, so I always felt the need to do better and be better, and be the best.

With school and sports, I would be overwhelmed and because of that I created anxiety for myself. And all that anxiety building up led to me being too overwhelmed and leading toward my depression, I would say.

Anxiety feels like your body is moving really fast, internally, like you have all these thoughts racing through. When I feel anxiety, I can almost visually see my head spinning at times. **[Depression feels like] being really down at times, not necessarily being down 24/7, but a sense of hopelessness and feeling like you're never going to be happy again at times.**

IMPACTING DAILY LIFE My depression definitely affected my school life the most, socially and academically. It became a lot harder to focus or do anything. A lot of people at school still don't really understand what depression is and that was definitely a challenge.

SEEKING HELP I've gone through a few therapists. When I had my first big depressive episode, I was on my second therapist and I quickly realized after being hospitalized that she was not necessarily [the best fit], so I found a new therapist.

The most important things I've learned in therapy are my coping mechanisms, and also figuring out where my anxiety was coming from. I had so much anxiety I wasn't able to tell what caused it. A big part of therapy was figuring out what this anxiety was building off of and why, and how to reduce it. **Sometimes it takes longer to find someone who will work out and be a good match with you.**

FINDING SUPPORT When I really became depressed around my freshman year of high school, my dad sat me down and really told me what his depression was like. **My dad is [very] supportive and he can sense when I'm feeling down, he reminds me to see my therapist.**



MASON 2

MASON

COPING SKILLS My friends were a big part in my return to being healthy, just helping me cope with everything. They weren't necessarily a support [that] I talked to about my depression, but the fact that they were always there and never looked at me differently or treated me differently.

I feel most happy when I'm doing something that I love, when I lose time doing something because I'm having so much fun. For example, **like playing sports or making music with my friends really puts me in a happy spot.** It almost puts you in a different mindset where you're not processing what's happening in the outside world, you're just focused on what's happening right there, and when you're in that state of mind, that's the happiest.



[When I was feeling suicidal] I thought about how [suicide] would affect everyone. And even though I was extremely down, I realized it would affect so many different people in so many different ways. I thought about my close family, my sister, and how it wouldn't just affect her for a couple years but for her entire life.

The purpose of being hospitalized is to find a plan for the future because usually when you're hospitalized you're at your lowest point. **When you're at your lowest point, you want a plan to get back to being healthy again.** It's mainly to get that process started and figure out a way to keep getting treatment after you get out of the hospital.

Going through depression you assume you're weak because you're going through that, but afterwards, you learn that, one, it's not your fault, and two, that you're pretty strong that you went through depression. You're pretty cool.

LOOKING FORWARD I'm ready for so many more things in the future, I know how to handle myself in situations. I learned that I'm capable of doing a lot more than [I think] I'm capable of. Now I know that life isn't smooth sailing, but that I know how to handle those situations when they arrive.

[When you're going through depression] make sure you keep up with friends and socialize and don't put so much pressure on your school life. School is important, but having friends and being social and being able to get out and talk to people is just as important as learning in the classroom.

What I would recommend if I had a friend going through what I had gone through, I would say treat them how you've always treated them because they don't want to feel like they're any different. Don't feel like you have to be a therapist to them, they just want you to be there as a friend, to have someone to hang out with and do fun things with.

MASON

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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

1. What was going on in Mason'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 Mason 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 Mason have when asking for help or trying to get help? What were the barriers to getting help?
4. What people, resources or activities did Mason find helpful when he was experiencing depression? What other resources could have been available to him?
5. What about Mason'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 Mason'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 Mason.



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 Mason's story to share?
3. Overall, what's a positive take away or message you learned from reading about Mason today?