



The **Erika's Lighthouse** Program:

**Depression and
Suicide Awareness
for High School Students**



Erika's Lighthouse®

Erika's Lighthouse is a not-for-profit depression and mental health education organization that educates 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.

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

Depression and suicide are important—and often required—topics for schools to address with their students. At Erika's Lighthouse, we have a strong track record of creating depression and suicide awareness programs that are teen-centered, effective, impactful and hopeful.

The Erika's Lighthouse Program was designed to be taught in a high school classroom setting, led either by a teacher or a school mental health professional. The lessons provide opportunities for students and staff to engage in open and safe conversations about depression and good mental health.

THE ERIKA'S LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAM AIMS TO:

- Increase students' knowledge of key concepts related to depression and suicide
 - Increase students' empathy and understanding toward young people with depression
 - Increase self-advocacy and peer-to-peer intervention
 - Increase students' awareness of how they can support their own mental health and well-being and contribute to a positive mental health culture in their school and community
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The *Erika's Lighthouse Program* is a flexible and easy to implement program,

allowing you to determine how many lessons to teach based on what you need and how much time you have to spend on depression and suicide awareness. Therefore, schools can choose to teach either 1, 2, or all 3 of the lessons.

Each lesson is 45 minutes long and includes facilitator's instructions and student packets.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ERIKA'S LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAM

**At the core of this program
is a 20-minute depression
and suicide awareness video
featuring 7 young people sharing
their diverse stories and experiences.**

We believe that it is important that high school students have the opportunity to hear about depression directly from young people of similar age and to hear from students from a variety of backgrounds.

After watching the video, students are provided with opportunities to discuss and think critically about the information and perspectives shared in the video. The instructor is also asked to educate students about school and community resources should they need to get help for themselves or help for a friend.

This program can serve as your school's primary depression and suicide awareness teaching tool or can be used to supplement the education you're already providing your students through your own lesson plans, textbooks, other curricula and/or guest speakers.

We are committed to partnering with you as you teach this program. Please let us know how we can best support you. We also welcome any feedback, suggestions and ideas you have about how we can improve the resources we offer to schools.

PLEASE CONTACT US AT ANY TIME AT
info@erikaslighthouse.org.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ERIKA'S LIGHTHOUSE PROGRAM
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We would like to thank the following people
for their contribution to this program:

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Lesson Overview and Objective

Lesson 1 is the core lesson of *The Erika's Lighthouse Program* and is designed to raise students' awareness and knowledge of key concepts related to depression, suicide and help-seeking.

Students watch *The Erika's Lighthouse Program* 20-minute video, which teaches key concepts about depression and suicide through student stories, narration and graphics.

The lesson concludes by educating students on where and how to access help should they need it for themselves or a friend.

TOTAL INSTRUCTION TIME

45 minutes

FORMAT

Video and Full Class Discussion

PARTICIPANTS

Lead Instructor/Co-Instructors
(Classroom Teacher and/or Mental Health Staff Person)

Representatives from your school's mental health
or counseling staff (*preferable*)

Representatives from your school's Erika's Lighthouse Teen Club
(*if applicable*)

EQUIPMENT and MATERIALS

- Check audio/visual equipment prior to class
 - *The Erika's Lighthouse Program* Video
 - Lesson 1 Student Packet, one for each student
 - Self-referral cards, copied and cut (*optional*)
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LESSON 1 FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

LESSON ONE OUTLINE

- | | |
|---|---|
| 2 minutes | Pass out packets and read lesson introduction aloud. |
| 18 minutes | Play <i>The Erika's Lighthouse Program</i> video. |
| 10–20 minutes | Lead class through the packets and discussion questions in the Lesson 1 Student Packet.

Adjust the length of this discussion depending on whether or not you are having students fill out self-referral cards or if you have Teen Club members stopping by your classroom. |
| 5 minutes
<i>(required)</i> | Instructor or mental health staff person educates students on how to get help at your school or in the community should they need help for themselves or a friend. |
| 5 minutes
<i>(highly recommended)</i> | If your school can support the self-referral card process, pass out self-referral cards, provide instructions for filling it out and confidentially collect a card from every student. Make sure cards are delivered to the appropriate mental health staff members in your school in a timely fashion. |
| 5 minutes
<i>(if applicable)</i> | If you have an Erika's Lighthouse Teen Club at your school, students and/or adult sponsors can tell the class about their activities and how students can get involved with the club. |

1

PREPARATION REQUIREMENTS

1. Gather information to share with students about how to access help at your school or ask a mental health staff person at your school to stop by for the last 10 minutes of the lesson to provide this information.

Either you or a fellow staff person at your school should be able to inform students of the following at the end of Lesson 1:

- Who provides mental health support to students at your school?
 - Where are their offices located?
 - How should students go about getting connected with help if they need it or are worried about a friend?
 - What should students know about confidentiality and limits to confidentiality?
 - Is there any other information that is important for your students to know about seeking help?
2. Determine if your school can support the self-referral card process. At the end of Lesson 1, we highly recommend that you provide students with an opportunity to immediately and confidentially reach out for help and connect with a mental health staff person in your school.

However, self-referral cards should only be handed out if you have confirmed with the mental health staff in your building that they are able to support the process and will have time to manage student self-referrals at the time you plan to teach Lesson 1.

If your school cannot support the self-referral card process, make sure you have all the relevant information to share with students who may need to access help after the program. Students may come to you for support in getting connected with help so be sure you know what to do if that happens.
 3. If you have an Erika's Lighthouse Teen Club at your school, talk to the club's sponsor and students and see if they would they would like to stop by at the end of the lesson to educate students about the club and recruit new students.

LESSON 1 FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

SELF-REFERRAL CARD TEMPLATE

It is important to make help available to students who may need it.

Before using the Self-Referral Cards, please ensure the following:

- There is mental health support in the school.
- Your school mental health staff supports the self-referral card process.
- School mental health staff has set time aside to manage student self-referrals.

DIRECTIONS

READ THE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE CARD OUT LOUD and reinforce to students that if they check one of the boxes requesting a follow up with a school mental health professional, that action will be taken to connect them with a school mental health professional.

Instruct the students to **FILL OUT THE ENTIRE CARD AND FOLD IT IN HALF**. Everyone should fill out a card to ensure student confidentiality. Have each student hand in his/her card individually. Once the cards are collected, pass the cards on to the school mental health staff immediately for follow-up.

1

SELF-REFERRAL CARD

Please fill out the ENTIRE card, fold it in half and turn it in to your teacher.

Name _____

Classroom _____

Teacher _____

Period _____

After hearing the presentation,

I **would like** to talk to a mental health worker in the **next 24 hours**.

I **would like** to talk to a mental health worker in the **next week**.

I **would not like** to talk to a mental health worker.

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Introduction

Welcome to Lesson 1 of *The Erika's Lighthouse Program: Depression and Suicide Awareness for High School Students*.

Today we'll start off by watching a video that features 7 students sharing their diverse perspectives and personal experiences with depression.

THE VIDEO WILL COVER THE FOLLOWING LEARNING GOALS:

- Depression is a common mood disorder with specific changes in moods, thoughts and behaviors.
- Depression can happen to anyone, anywhere. There's not one reason someone has depression.
- Depression can get better and you can find support.
- Good self-care is a key piece to managing depression.
- Self-harm and suicidal thoughts are symptoms of depression that we must take very seriously.
- There's a lot you can do to support a friend who has depression.



As you watch the video, please feel free to doodle or take notes next to the learning goals. Otherwise, feel free to just watch the video if that's how you learn best.



As you watch the video, pay attention to your thoughts and feelings. The video might remind you of things that have happened in your life or in the lives of people you know. You might find that there's a particular story you connect with or a story that really affects you.



If anything today prompts a feeling that you need to talk to someone, please let your teacher or another trusted adult at school know. At the end of today's lesson, you will also be informed of how to connect with help at school should you ever be concerned about yourself or a friend.

LESSON 1 STUDENT PACKET

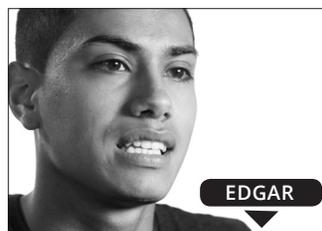
Take a moment to stand up and stretch after watching the video.

VIDEO REFLECTION

When you sit back down, take a minute or two to write down or draw anything you remember about what each student shared in the video.

Don't worry about remembering everything, just write down anything that comes to mind next to the student's photo.

- What did each student share about their lives and their experiences with depression and thoughts of suicide?
- How would you describe this person to a friend?
- Did this person remind you of yourself at all or anyone you know?



CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What were some of the signs and symptoms the students talked about in the video that clued you in that they were struggling with depression?
2. What stood out to you from each student's experience or story? Was there any particular story that stood out to you the most?
3. Which students reminded you the most of students at your school or in your community?
4. The video only provided a glimpse into the lives of these 7 students. What kinds of follow-up questions would you want to ask these students about their experiences if you happened to run into them on the street?
5. What would you do if a friend was feeling suicidal and turned to you for help? If you think a friend is showing signs of suicide or hinting at suicide, you should know that it is okay to ask them, "*Are you talking about suicide?*" or "*Are you hinting at suicide?*"

This will not put the idea in their head. It will actually help them feel cared for because you are showing them that you are paying attention and that you want them to feel better. Just know that you should always get additional help from an adult if a friend tells you they're feeling suicidal.

Optional Did any of the experiences the students talked about in the video remind you of things that have happened in your own life or in the lives of people you know?

**Now we're going to talk about how
you can get connected with help
if you are ever worried about
yourself or a friend.**

LESSON 2 FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

Lesson Overview and Objective

TOTAL INSTRUCTION TIME

45 minutes

FORMAT

Small Group Work and Small Group
Presentations to Full Class

PARTICIPANTS

Lead Instructor/Co-Instructors
(Classroom Teacher and/or Mental Health Staff Person)

Lesson 2 of *The Erika's Lighthouse Program* is designed to increase students' empathy and understanding of what it might be like to experience depression as a high school student.

The class will break into small groups. Each small group will read about the experiences of one of the primary students featured in the video.

They will learn more about risk factors that might contribute to depression, challenges a student with depression might encounter, people and activities that can be helpful when you have depression and what young people say they have learned from their experiences with depression.

Each group will create a mini-poster about their student to present to the class.

2

LESSON 2 FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS
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MATERIALS

- Lesson 2 Student Packets

There are 6 different packets for this lesson, one for each of the primary students featured in the video (Mac, Jasmine, Callie, Mason, Edgar and Alan).

For this lesson, you will break your class into 6 small groups, one for each student in the video. Each small group will focus on one of the students.

Print/copy packets for each group. Each group member will need their own copy of their assigned student's packet. For example, all of the students in Mason's group will need a copy of the Mason packet.

- Blank sheets of copy paper for the group mini-posters.
- Optional art supplies like markers and colored pencils for creating mini-posters (students can also just use pen and pencil).

2

LESSON 2 OUTLINE

- 5 minutes** Break class into 6 small groups and assign each group a different student from the video. Hand out packets to each member of the group. Read the packet introduction aloud. (The introduction is the same for all 6 packets.)
- 10-15 minutes** In their small group, students read their assigned story aloud and discuss the reflection questions.
- 5-10 minutes** The groups create their mini-poster.
- 15 minutes** Each group presents their mini-poster to the class.
- 5 minutes** Ask the class to reflect on what they learned from hearing more details about these students' stories and if they noticed any themes across the stories.

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.



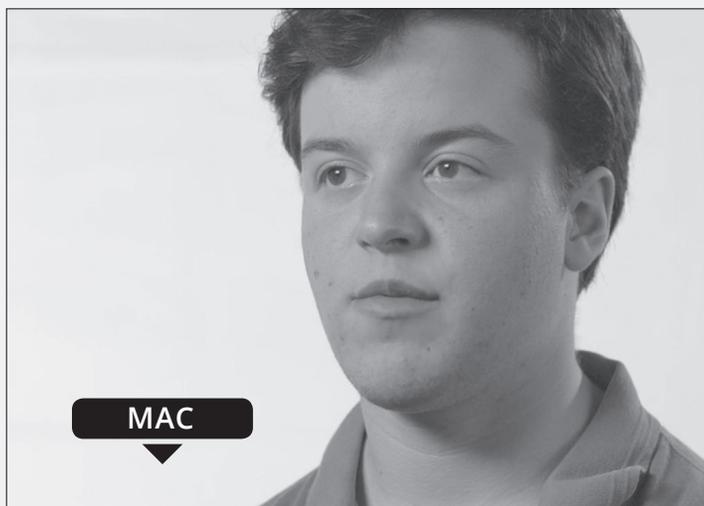
In your small group, take turns reading aloud each part of your student's story. When you're finished reading, discuss the reflection questions and jot down your group's answers in your packet.



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

2

Mac has experienced depression for much of his life which he says is connected to his struggles with his gender identity. He grew up in a high pressure community and had a hard time finding the right people to help him. Here he shares his story about how he found hope and help to get through his most difficult times.



MAC 1

RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION My depression comes from long-term stress. My depression comes from a family that doesn't talk about feelings. [My depression comes from living in a community with] little or no information/exposure to anything LGBT. My depression comes from my struggles with my gender identity.

[My] days were pulled down by the intensity of my gender dysphoria; people not seeming to get that I wasn't a girl.

Both my depression and my gender identity are things that show up in my first memories. With my gender identity, I've had, I have very severe gender dysphoria, which is a severe discomfort with your body, in the fact that your body is not lining up what the map in your mind has it to be. It's not exactly what you think it should be. And so my gender identity—the dysphoria that came with it got more intense with time, especially in middle school ... and my depression got intense at the same time.

IMPACTING DAILY LIFE My baseline stress level was at such a high point that anything would tip it. One of my close friends said, *"Everything is a catastrophe for you."* I'd reach a lot of little breaking points over time. If you're constantly tipping over, overflowing with stress, over time, you reach a point where you don't want to deal with it anymore, and you start considering things like suicide.

I felt really helpless. Especially in the face of my family not wanting to deal with the fact that I am transgender. It was too hard for them to wrap their minds around

SEEKING HELP Getting help was difficult. In high school, my family didn't want to recognize that I had depression. None of my family talked about their own. There was a stone wall—don't ask, don't tell policy—which made it hard for me to ask them for advice, help, connection, and resources.

I had a few teachers who reached out to me and really understood who I was—some just encouraged my talents and interests, some did tell me that life would get better and that it's not always as rough. It helped me to feel seen.

[Overall] in school it was really difficult because I met a social worker who believed that they were helping me, but they actually really alienated me, and they didn't listen to me at all. They didn't know what to do with me. So for a couple years I bounced around but a lot of people were trying to help me in ways that weren't helpful, a lot of different therapists, three I think.



FINDING SUPPORT [There were] two things that really helped me. **The first thing that really helped me was empowering myself. I got involved in an organization that talked about mental health and taught people what mental health was. It gave me a tangible way to fight back at something [depression] that was so intangible.** Getting involved in things that matter to you, where you can see yourself making a difference in some way, really helped me a lot.



The second thing was I took a lot of time to think about why people were reacting the way they were reacting to me. Especially with my family, it helped me to recognize that they were as helpless as I was in this situation. They had never faced this before. Most people I talked to didn't know what being transgender meant. I had to recognize that they were going to need a lot of time to wrap their minds around a concept they had never heard of, that was terrifying to them, and that there really was no research about.

It was terrifying to me too, it wasn't something I had wanted for myself. They were very clear that they loved me a lot, and although the way they were reacting and acting didn't feel like love at all, I had to remember that they were coming from a place that they thought they were doing the right thing for me.

COPING SKILLS What helped me is that people's reactions are their reactions. They're not connected to you. Their reactions aren't about you, it's about their history, their ideas, their preconceived notions. You have to take their reactions with a grain of salt. Reframing things helps a lot.

Reading a lot ... I used information and I think information became really powerful for me, helped me cope with feeling out of control, how to cope with feeling stressed. I actually learned a lot of [positive] coping methods that [from books]. **I found activities that really grounded me and helped me connect with my body—especially sports. I feel most happy and connected when I'm with people I really feel comfortable around.**

LOOKING FORWARD I've had a lot of luck finding a few close friends—we call it “no filter”—you don't have a filter, I don't have to filter myself when I'm around them or when we're talking. It makes me feel really good because I feel more connected to them and more connected to myself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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

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



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

LESSON 2 **STUDENT PACKET****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.

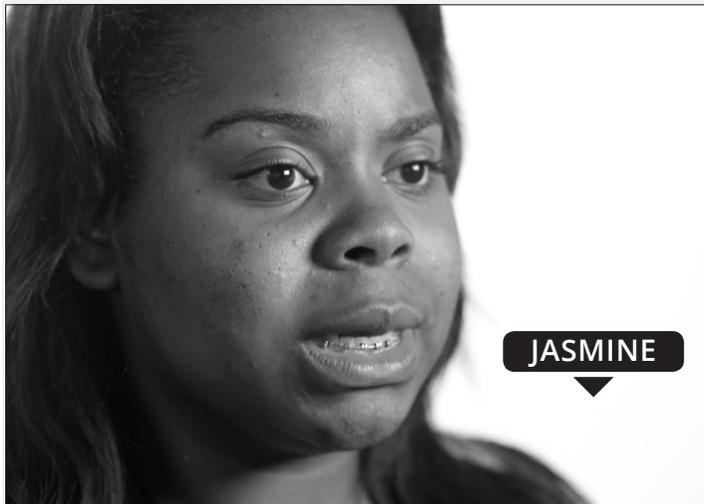


In your small group, take turns reading aloud each part of your student's story. When you're finished reading, discuss the reflection questions and jot down your group's answers in your packet.



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

2



Jasmine experienced depression after being affected by community violence. She also faced some challenges when trying to get help, but connecting with a therapist provided a safe space for her to talk about her feelings.

JASMINE 1

JASMINE

RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION I grew up with a parent who suffered from depression. As an only child in a single parent home, that can be very difficult because that's your only person, she was a single mother, so that's the only person that I really had communication with and to be cut off like that [because of her depression], I definitely picked up some of those traits. I go through bouts where I'm significantly sad.



[I also had an] experience with community violence [that] was definitely heartbreaking. That's what started me going down in a spiral because it was something I didn't understand, couldn't put an answer to. I feel like when we can't find answers, that's when we get the most confused. When you experience and witness these traumatic events, when you are constantly enduring these traumatic events, you can't help but to feel some type of way about it and to be hurt about it.

IMPACTING DAILY LIFE [When I'm depressed], I shut everyone out. I don't want people to necessarily know that I'm going through a hard time, sometimes especially if I can't identify why I'm going through this or why everything is very emotional for me and bothering me. I just shut down. **When you're feeling feelings of depression, it leaves you confused. It leaves you lonely. It leaves you upset. It leaves you broken feeling.**

I think in the black community we're told that we have to be strong, we have to be independent, and these things are drilled in our head constantly, so when there's something that's happened traumatically, we feel like we're not being strong ... we're not being independent ... we're letting down our families ... we're not being who we're supposed to be.

To think that you're anything less than another person because you're going through depression is really sad for me to hear, especially when so many people suffer from the same thing. With the stigma in my community about depression, we're all going through something, we're all hurting, but we don't want to say what we're going through, we want to act like we're not struggling with this. And it's just hard.

Stigma for me looked like, "*What goes on in this house, stays in this house,*" and it looked like that for a lot of my friends, too. So a lot of the hurt my friends went through I didn't find out about until years later, even though I was going through it with them, not knowing I was going through it with them.

JASMINE

SEEKING HELP I felt like I had a great connection with a lot of my teachers. They started to notice subtle changes in me and they reached out to me. I didn't want to share what I was going through, and I felt like I was embarrassed. I felt like I was being successful at hiding my depression, but apparently not.

FINDING SUPPORT Therapy for me was a lifesaver. It was a challenge with my family because they weren't supportive of my decision to continue therapy. However, after talking with my parents and grandparents about why this is important to me and how this is changing me, I was able to have some therapy sessions with them as well. So it definitely played a big role in me feeling better.

Something that surprised me about therapy was how much I loved it. I was just so addicted to being able to express myself, and just getting it off my chest, I didn't want to hold in those feelings anymore. It was definitely comforting to be able to talk to someone and not be afraid that other people were going to find out. It's non-judgmental.

COPING SKILLS Church and my spirituality definitely helped me overcome my hard times. I feel like church gave me hope, it was a place where I was amongst people who were going through something and I could see their pain and I could see them growing, and hope that knowing that, *"Yes, I'm going through something. I'm not alone. And God is going to look out for me, He's there for me."* I also started [living] a healthier life. I became invested in reading my Bible, I became invested in the things that I put into my body, I became invested in working out.



Something that I thought wouldn't help was sharing my story. [When I started to share my story] I was able to see how so many people have gone through something similar to what I went through and could use my life and the way I got through it as an example, and it really helped me.

LOOKING FORWARD If I had to say something to someone who was afraid to get help, I want to say that you're already on the right track. You're thinking about *"How can I change my life?"* or *"How can I overcome this?"* So congratulations. This is your life, and it's a precious gift.

I've learned that life throws everyone curveballs. No matter how rich, beautiful, popular, or another label that is desired, everyone goes through something or is born with something.

JASMINE

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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

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



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

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.

Callie experienced bullying and her parents' divorce also had an impact on her. She also lost a friend to suicide, which was something that contributed to her depression. Callie learned about the self-care strategies that work best for her when she is experiencing depression.



CALLIE 1

CALLIE

RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION My depression comes from a lot of different situations that piled up on top of each other. My parents' divorce was a main factor in my depression. I think a big part of that was I felt like an item, going back and forth between house to house.

I had some bad experiences with peers and people I thought were friends at the time. They were really mean to me and pushed me away and ostracized me. Something that's important to know is that bullying can look like a lot of different things, it's not necessarily what you imagine, like a kid getting picked on in the hallway or books being shoved down. Especially now with technology, a lot of it is behind screens and people just being mean and manipulative.



When I was a freshman in high school, I had a really good friend who was a senior. I really looked up to her. It was Thanksgiving and I was with my family, and I got a call from another friend telling me that my friend had taken her own life. The first thing I experienced with that was just shock.

For a while, I had depression but wasn't familiar with what it was, I didn't really have a name for it. I had some symptoms of depression, but I didn't know what it was or how to classify it.

IMPACTING DAILY LIFE I lost my passion for things I really cared about. [My depression] also definitely impacted school. I felt like I was sitting in class, trying to do a math problem, but I had so much more on my plate and so much more to deal with.

SEEKING HELP The first person I went to was my mom. I said, "Hey, this is what I'm feeling" and she kind of shut me down a little bit. She was a little defensive, she didn't want to believe that I was dealing with depression so she was kind of like "Nope!" I think inside she did really understand it, but she shut it down to me. I was a little discouraged, and was like "Is this not how I'm feeling or am I mislabeling how I'm feeling?"

I finally decided to go talk to someone else and I decided to talk to our school counselor, and she was awesome, so finally I was like, "Good. I can actually use this to get better." I talked to her about everything, and that was an amazing experience to be able to open up and have someone really say, "The way you feel is not your fault, and we're going to help you get better from here." So therapy was definitely really big for me.

CALLIE

FINDING SUPPORT School was [also] an incredibly supportive environment. I found love and peace and comfort in my teachers and coaches. I felt that I was in a safe haven within the walls of my high school, and I am incredibly grateful for that. I found support in my friends and I did find support in my family. My mom is definitely supermom. Sometimes this support was confusing and not exactly how it was needed, but I know that everyone around me meant well.

COPING SKILLS I love running. Running just kinds of brings me away from all the struggles that I'm dealing with and lets me get away from it. When I'm running, I'm not thinking about how hard of a day I had, I'm thinking about how great it feels to be out there running. It kind of just lets me connect with myself and turn inward and just exist

[My friend's suicide] kind of taught me that we don't know how much time we have left, so to make the best of the time that we do have. I decided to make sure I took advantage of all the time that I have because she doesn't have any time left, and I can't bring her back, but I can live the best life that I can, to try to take advantage of that time.

[Because of my depression] I definitely learned about myself that I'm a lot stronger than I thought I was. I'm learning that I'm capable of getting through a lot. I think the capability to deal with difficult situations has always been there, I just didn't know it. It's important for us all to know that we are capable of overcoming and that we will overcome.

It can be really scary to open up to someone. Telling someone that you have depression makes it more real, it makes it difficult to say to someone that you are depressed because that makes it a really real thing. **But if you're feeling scared or worried about it, I think it's really important to know that there are so many people around you that care about you, whether it's parents, teachers, a coach, a relative, there are a lot of adults who can help and want to help.** It's all about taking the first step and deciding you are going to get help.

LOOKING FORWARD My depression does not define me. No one's mental health struggles define them. We are all more than our struggles. We all have stories to tell.



CALLIE

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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

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



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

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.



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

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

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?

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.



When Edgar was a teenager, he moved from Mexico City to the United States. His experience moving and having to leave some of his family behind in Mexico contributed to his depression. His story shows how he came to understand his depression and how family and mentors can play an important role in getting help.

RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION I come from Mexico City [and] a really loving family, a lot of support.

The first interaction with depression I was about 14, 13. I was in Mexico. All of a sudden, I felt something was wrong. I thought it was mostly because of my relationship. I loved this girl with all my heart, but then for one reason or another, things didn't work out, especially with me moving to the United States, I knew that was going to be a tough transition.

Latinos, we know family, community. Leaving that behind, no matter where you go, even if you're leaving for the greatest thing, you're not going to have your family with you. That is the hardest part I think. That support. It's people who know when you're sad, when you're happy, they know everything about you. So not having that support [after you move], it's tough.

IMPACTING DAILY LIFE I knew that my grandma and my mom would have a hard time [with me leaving Mexico] because I'm their only son and their only grandson. So I knew that was going to be tough on them, so I was kind of sad for that reason too. I felt slow, my mind was clogged. My mood wasn't as happy, or as energetic. My thoughts were of guilt, thinking I could have done things different to sustain my relationship [with my girlfriend in Mexico]. I was clumsy in my movements, I did not want to do as many activities.

My mom was a little angry and surprised. She had never seen [me depressed] like that, and she told me about how I was not focused. Coaches told me the same thing, my level of play wasn't as it used to be and they wanted me to perform well. The desire to learn wasn't as strong.



SEEKING HELP AND FINDING SUPPORT The inner struggle was that I was someone who I didn't think would have depression. I am outgoing. But it was happening to me. [For me, getting help was] going to therapy, meeting with my therapist. I miss her, she was a big part of my recovery from that state of mind. I remember the first sessions were just like basic stuff, getting to know me. After a while, that's when I really started opening up about the core of my depression.

EDGAR

I did cry. It got me. It really did. Because we all feel, and my message is, allow yourself to feel. When that happens, when something isn't as good as you want it to, like depression, talk about it, let it go. It's like putting weight away.

COPING SKILLS My goals, my family, the desire to do well for me and those around me [give my life meaning].

What I do to keep balanced is, I like to learn things all the time. I'm a curious person. Learning new things, they keep your mind positively occupied.



Depression will not look to your skin color, to your background, that will not matter to depression. What people misunderstand about depression sometimes is that [they think] if you have depression, you're weak, or something along those lines. Something about being less than the person next to you. That is not true. The point is anyone can have depression, we're all different of course so there are different reasons for what triggers depression.

A lot of people need to hear [about what it's like to be depressed] from someone who looks like them, in my case, in my culture, Latinos. I know what it's like, I know the struggles. I'm trying to get this message to everyone, but especially to my people, the people I know.

LOOKING FORWARD I learned that I'm stronger than I thought I was. Once you overcome depression, you feel like you can do anything. You've been on the low, but now it's time to enjoy when you're on the rise.

Love yourself at all times because you don't want to do anything that harms yourself. Do not hold onto feelings of hate. Take care of your body because it's who you're going to be for the rest of your life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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

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



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

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.



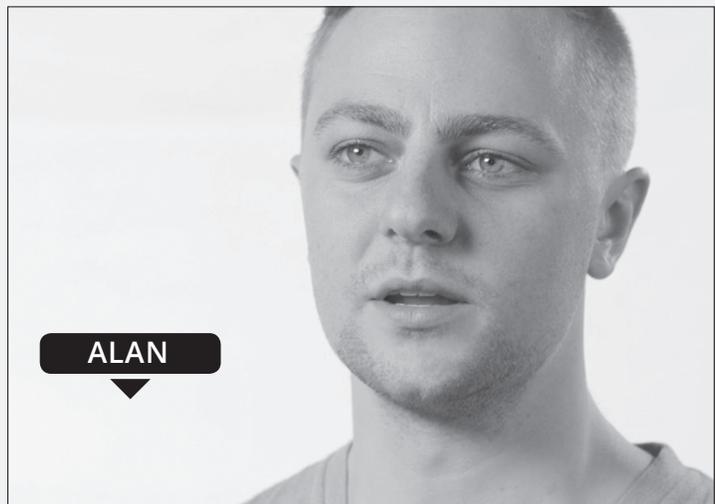
In your small group, take turns reading aloud each part of your student's story. When you're finished reading, discuss the reflection questions and jot down your group's answers in your packet.



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

2

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?

Lesson Overview and Objective

TOTAL INSTRUCTION TIME

45 minutes

FORMAT

Small Group Work and Full Class Discussion

PARTICIPANTS

Lead Instructor/Co-Instructors
(*Classroom Teacher and/or Mental Health Staff Person*)

MATERIALS

Lesson 3 Student Packet,
one copy for each student.

3

Lesson 3 of *The Erika's Lighthouse Program* is designed to raise students' awareness of what might help them when they're having a difficult time, including what kinds of people they find supportive during times of stress.

This lesson is also designed to raise students' awareness of how they can help create a positive mental health culture in their school.

LESSON 3 FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

LESSON 3 OUTLINE

- 2 minutes** Pass out packets and read lesson introduction aloud.
- 10 minutes** Prior to breaking students up into small groups, have students work through the packet individually and jot down some notes for each of the questions.
- We suggest that students are allowed to keep these packets for themselves, but if you plan to collect their packets, please let the students know at the start of the lesson.
- 25–30 minutes** Break class into groups of 4 students and have them go through question by question and share their answers with one another. You can either let students pick their own groups or mix it up so students get to know their classmates.
- 5–10 minutes** Wrap up with full class discussion questions found at the end of the student packet.

Introduction

Welcome to Lesson 3 of *The Erika's Lighthouse Program: Depression and Suicide Awareness for High School Students*.



Today we're going to work in small groups and imagine that the Erika's Lighthouse film crew has come to your school to interview you for a video about taking care of your mental health in high school.



While not everyone will experience depression, everyone goes through difficult times and it's good to know how to support yourself. In your group, you'll also think about how you can be sensitive to students at your school who may be experiencing depression.



First you'll have a chance to reflect quietly on these questions and write down some answers.



Then you'll share your answers with your group.

When other people are sharing, your job is just to listen attentively, there's no need to respond or comment on what your group members are saying.

PART 1
Interview Questions

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR GROUP MEMBERS

When Erika's Lighthouse film crew interviewed students for the video, they started with a few warm-up questions, just to get to know the students better. For these warm-up questions, jot down some answers.

I am...

I come from...

I love/I'm passionate about...

Unless you got to know me, you might not be able to see that...

The people and/or pets who have most shaped and affected my life are...

The 3 things in my life that I'm most grateful for today are...

People have said that my strengths are/that I'm really good at...

PART 2

Helpful Activities and People

FOR THESE QUESTIONS, JOT DOWN SOME ANSWERS

1. What are some stressful situations or events you've experienced in the past?
2. What does it feel like when you're going through a stressful situation? What do you notice about yourself or your behavior when you're stressed or feeling down?
3. When you're feeling stressed or down, what are some things that help you feel better?
4. Are there places you like to spend time when you are feeling stressed or down that help you feel better?
5. Are there people you like to spend time with or talk to when you're feeling stressed or down?
6. Remember a time when you told someone you were feeling stressed, and they responded in a way that helped you feel better. What did that person do or say that felt supportive?
7. Has anyone given you any good advice about how to handle stress that you'd like to share with your group?

