



Start the year with Erika's Lighthouse

The 2019-2020 school year proved to be a unique one. Some major curveballs were thrown and the limits of educators and students alike were tested. Students will be **returning to school** buildings and will need support. It is imperative, perhaps more than ever, for students to know about the importance of depression education and good mental health.

How to incorporate depression awareness/suicide prevention education in your school going forward

It is important to understand that everyone has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been a collective adverse childhood experience (ACE) that has impacted every student in some way.

This matters because adverse childhood experiences can have lasting, negative effects on health, well-being, and even opportunity later in life. This means that we can not afford to passively sit back and ignore the social emotional (SEL) needs of our students. We must have a sense of urgency now, to adequately respond AND be proactive, in addressing the needs of our students, their families, as well as our teachers, administrators, and other school-based staff.

From [Why Every School Must Have a Social Emotional Learning Plan Prior to Reopening](https://www.lessonsforself.com/why-every-school-must-have-a-social-emotional-learning-plan-prior-to-reopening), lessonsforself.com

Prepare

- Focus on the importance of good mental health and know it is OK for students to say that they aren't feeling well.
- Log in to the [Erika's Lighthouse Resource Portal](#) to view all documents and lessons mentioned in this guide.
- Check out our many resources that are offered in both English and Spanish.
- Explore the Middle School and High School Programs, now available in both our original version and also a skills-based version, which meets some of the National Health Education Standards (NHES).
- Start with Lesson 3 of the original Middle School Program, for any grade.
- Communicate with school mental health staff to ensure supports are in place for students.
- Consider utilizing the [Beacon of Hope signs](#) around school to build a supportive and inclusive network of Trusted Adults as everyone returns to the building.
- Read the [Best Practices for Implementation](#) document and review classroom lessons.
- Notify parents/guardians/family members that this topic will be taught.

Teach

- We recommend starting with Lesson 3 of the original middle school program (which would also be suitable for high school students) to focus on good mental health, then utilize as many lessons as possible to allow for a full program experience.
- If/when you show the video from Lesson 1, allow students to process what they see in the video and be sure to allow time for class discussions and activities.
- For middle schoolers, it will be important to allow them to reconnect with their peers; the lessons in which they pair up with classmates and role play will allow them to interact with each other.
- For high school students, they might want to be able to show what they have learned about themselves during the pandemic, and lessons 2 and 3 (and also lesson 4 in the NHES version) will allow them to creatively explore and express.
- Use the [Mindfulness Activity](#) with students and other worksheets available on the Resource Portal.
- Utilize the self-referral cards to allow students to use their voices to ask for help.

Note: Do not hand them out on a Friday or at the end of the school day in case a student needs immediate help.

Incorporate the Whole School and Community

This reentry into the school year will be like none other. Be sure there is regular communication among staff members and administrators to help make sure the school will be particularly supportive and ready to help students and families. Consider outlining a plan for direct communication with students and parents outside of regular class time; check-ins might be greatly appreciated.

Engage Students

Positive Coping Mechanisms worksheet
Managing Stress worksheet
Jeopardy Game
Performance Assessment for high school students

Engage Parents

Letter to Parents (English and Spanish)
Depression Discussion Guide
Common Vocabulary
[Parent Handbook on Childhood & Teen Depression](#)

Ongoing Support

- Continue to collaborate with the school mental health team to ensure they are involved with the implementation of any depression education lessons and are prepared to support the ongoing needs of students.
- Brainstorm with Erika's Lighthouse staff on how to best utilize resources throughout the school year.
- It is OK to ask students how they are feeling. Especially now, young people will want to know they have people to talk to.
- Keep emphasizing Trusted Adults in the building so students continue to know that the school is a supportive and inclusive environment that they can feel safe in.
- Support yourself! Self-care for educators is of the utmost importance. Take time to make sure you are getting the support you need during these times.

Contact Us

We recognize that these are trying times, and we want to ensure that this very important topic is discussed with empathy and understanding. Please don't hesitate to contact us.

Peggy Kubert, LCSW, Senior Director of Education | peggy@erikaslighthouse.org
Ilana Sherman, MPH, Director of Education | ilana@erikaslighthouse.org
847-386-6481



Erika's Lighthouse®