



Grade 8 Sample Lesson Plan: Unit 2 – Stepping Up to Depression and Suicide

SOLs

- 8.1T Describe the signs and symptoms of depression and suicide
- 8.2Q Describe signs of self-harm behaviors
- 8.3N Identify resources for helping someone who is exhibiting self-harming behaviors.

Objectives/Goals

- Students will be able to describe the symptoms and red flags around depression and suicidal ideation.
- Students will be able to understand how to help people who may be struggling with these issues.
- Students will practice bystander intervention skills in groups with three scenarios using interpersonal communication.

Materials

- [Step Up Slideshow](#)
- [Depression & Suicide Assessment](#)

Procedure

- This is likely a two- or three-day lesson depending on your class period length.
- Hook idea (optional) - For this you want to know your students and community but it is likely your students will be familiar with this Grammy nominated song about depression and suicide. Play the song or show the video to the song by Logic - 1-800-273-8255 ft.
 - Alessia Cara & Khalid. This song will be memorable and touch human emotion. Here is a clean version to the song on YouTube - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FljGDa_YFYA
- There is a lot you could do after the song. Start by asking students the following question(s). *In one word, what do you think of this song? What does the song mean to you, or what stands out to you about this song? How many of you know someone who has dealt*

with depression or suicide?

- In order to make the topic of depression and suicide meaningful and relevant for students in Virginia, it would be a good idea to talk about the latest Youth Risk Behavior Survey from the CDC.
<https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx> You can search by state, grade level (9-12), ethnic group, sexual orientation and more. Here are a few examples of the latest data available from 2015 regarding depression and suicide
- YRBS Data potential questions you could ask: *What strikes you at first when you look at some of this data? Did anything surprise you? Why do you think the numbers are higher for females than it is for males? Do you think we have similar numbers at our school?*
- Next begin the slide show on depression and suicide.
- Tell students the overall goals for the day. There are three parts to today's presentation. First, we're going to talk about the symptoms and red flags around depression and suicidal ideation. Next, we'll talk about how to Step Up to help people who may be struggling with these issues. Finally, we'll practice our bystander intervention skills in groups with three scenarios.
- Next, ask students what they know about depression. You could have them do a think, pair, share in their seats or brainstorm ideas on the board. Once they have shared some ideas, go over the functional knowledge slide "Causes of Depression"
- Next ask students to think about or brainstorm symptoms of depression. Have them think about what it looks like as a bystander...*think about what you might observe in a person or what might their friend/roommate/etc. report to you?*
- Now go over the slide with the functional knowledge on "Symptoms of Depression"
- Continue with the slide "Key Points About Suicide" and "Red Flags"
- Next, ask students what they "should" and "should not" do when in terms of their behavior/interaction with a person struggling with depression and/or suicidal thoughts. You could have them do a think, pair, share in their seats or brainstorm ideas on the board.
- Now go over the slides "What to do" and "What not to do"
- Explain to students that it becomes very important to know how and where to "refer" someone for help. Have students research or identify places in your school or community that would be good places for help. Here you can also talk about the slides about what to do if they get a negative response, what if a depressed (non-suicidal) person refuses help, and what if a suicidal person refuses help. (see slides)
- Now it's time for students to role play and practice some scenarios. (see

slides). For the role play, spread out, if possible. Three rounds with approximately 5 minutes of role-play for each scenario. One person is the depressed person, one person is stepping up out of concern, and one person is the observer. Rotate roles after each scenario.

- It would be a good idea to go over these points before the role play so that students know more for their conversation:
 - Talk to the person alone in a private setting.
 - Allow the person to talk freely.
 - Give yourself plenty of time for the conversation.

 - I CARE (some general statement of caring about the other person)
 - I SEE (specific behaviors you've noticed that concern you)
 - I FEEL (concerned, etc.)
 - I WANT (to see you get help)
 - I WILL (help you look for resources, go with you to your first counseling appt, etc.)
- It will be important for students to process information after each scenario so here are some guidelines on how to do that: Between scenarios, you will debrief the role play in the following way:
 - For the intervener: How did it feel to step up? What did you say/do that you thought was effective? Was there anything that you would have done a bit differently if you were to do this role play again?
 - For the depressed student: How did it feel to be helped? What was particularly helpful? What might have helped to make this exchange even more helpful?
 - For the observer: What did you see/hear that you thought was helpful? Is there anything else that might have made this exchange even more helpful?
- Scenario 1 - Your friend's parents are getting divorced, and their mom recently told them
 - that they're selling the house they grew up in. You've heard them crying a number of times, and they have been drinking a lot more than usual. They seem irritable a lot of the time and wrestles with insomnia. They have made comments that they are to blame for their parents' struggles and said that it would be better if they weren't around. What do you do?
 - Scenario 2 - Your teammate has been reacting slowly on the court for the past month. Their concentration seems 'off,' and you're beginning to worry that these changes could cause an injury. In addition, you notice that they have been wearing the same t-shirt and jeans nearly every day for the past two weeks and has been on the phone with their parents every time you've seen them. All of this is highly unusual, as they are usually on point, social, and well-groomed. What do you do?

- Scenario 3 - A friend of yours recently broke up with their romantic partner. They have seemed down lately and told you that going to practice and being with the team just isn't as fun as it used to be. They nap a lot and misses class sometimes. You notice that they picks at their food during lunch and often says they are not hungry. When you have invited them to do things with you lately, they have declined. What do you do?
- After a short 5-minute debriefing on each scenario, have a large group discussion about what it was like to step up- and what it was like to be helped. What themes emerged? What were the major take-aways from this role-play series?

References

- [Depression & Suicide Assessment](#)
- [CDC, YRBS Data 2015, Depression & Suicide, State of Virginia](#)
- [StepUp Program for Depression and Suicide](#)
- **Andy Horne, 2018**

Handout

The next page includes a handout for the lesson. The handout is designed for print use only.

Name: _____

Depression/Suicide Assessment

___/1

Sarah was a 15-year-old girl who lived in the Midwest. Her parents had recently divorced, which forced her to move to a new community of 3,000 people. She hated the small-town atmosphere and didn't make any new friends. Her sister Tiffany, her 'only' friend, was going away to college in the fall, which made her feel even worse.

Sarah was having trouble sleeping, her grades were falling, and she was crying almost every day. She tried to tell her dad and new stepmom that she was feeling terrible, but they said that things would get better if she would just give it some time.

She gave her sister her birthstone ring and said she wouldn't need it anymore.

What is/are the signs from the scenario that have to be present to diagnose her with depression? (remember you have to have at least 1 of 2 present – be specific to the scenario)

What warning signs from the scenario are evident of depression or suicide?

How long would she have to experience these symptoms to be diagnosed with depression?

Name: _____

Depression/Suicide Assessment

___/2

Haley was sixteen and had been dealing with depression since she was 12 years old. She never felt 'quite right' in middle school, feeling like she didn't fit in and sad all the time. She started using alcohol on a regular basis, and then marijuana to try to cope.

Most of her old friends didn't do this, so she started hanging around with a different group of teenagers. She put herself at risk by having unprotected sex with friends in the group. Since school didn't seem important anymore, she started skipping classes.

She was sinking lower and lower, and thinking that it was not going to get any better. She told her mom that she accidentally threw away her prescription anti-depressant drugs and needed a new bottle. Her mom got the bottle refilled.

She told her friends that "life wasn't worth living," and said she was going to run away the next weekend.

What might be the cause of her depression?

What is/are the signs from the scenario that have to be present to diagnose her with depression? (remember you have to have at least 1 of 2 present – be specific to the scenario)

What warning signs from the scenario are evident of depression or suicide?

How long would she have to experience these symptoms to be diagnosed with depression?

Name: _____

Depression/Suicide Assessment

____/4

Ryan was a 17-year-old who seemed to "have it all." He was popular at school, had lots of friends, and his grades were always straight "A". He was a member of the soccer and golf team, and president of a school club. He strived to be the very best that he could, since his father had died and he wanted to be a good example for his younger siblings.

He filled out many college applications, but because of a poor SAT score, just couldn't seem to get admitted to the top colleges. His family thought that he should study harder and retake the test. Ryan started to feel very anxious, sad, and desperate. He told his brother and sisters that "it just wasn't worth it anymore". He's not interested in eating anymore and would rather spend his time napping instead of playing golf or soccer.

What might be the cause of his depression?

What is/are the signs from the scenario that have to be present to diagnose him with depression? (remember you have to have at least 1 of 2 present – be specific to the scenario)

What warning signs from the scenario are evident of depression or suicide?

How long would he have to experience these symptoms to be diagnosed with depression?

You decide to engage in a conversation with Ryan. What do you say? (there should be at least 3 parts)

Connecting this scenario to what you know about the teenage brain. Explain why Ryan might be contemplating suicide

Name: _____

Depression/Suicide Assessment

___/3

Peter, 16 years old, never did very well at school. In fact, he was barely passing. But he was a very talented musician and wrote many songs about death and the life hereafter. He changed his appearance, colored his hair, and experimented a little with drugs.

During his 9th grade year, he realized that his feelings about his friends were different. He felt an attraction to his male friends, but never addressed the feelings. He knew that they wouldn't understand, and the worst thing in the world would be to be excluded and be bullied. He started to be irritable and take his feelings out on his friends, but then when he was by himself and alone he felt sad.

He started to use heavier drugs to help him handle the feelings. He bought a gun from one of his new friends. He wrote a song, "I Found The Way," after a long night of drinking.

What might be the cause of his depression?

What is/are the signs from the scenario that have to be present to diagnose him with depression? (remember you have to have at least 1 of 2 present – be specific to the scenario)

What warning signs from the scenario are evident of depression or suicide?

How long would he have to experience these symptoms to be diagnosed with depression?

You decide to engage in a conversation with Peter. What do you say? (there should be at least 3 parts)

Name: _____

Writing Condolences

Expressing sadness for someone else's loss can be an integral part of their healing and grieving. It may be a loss that was expected or unexpected. No matter how it happens, it's not easy to deal with.

For this activity, pretend you are a friend or even an acquaintance of the person who committed suicide. Write a letter of condolence to their family. Writing these letters can be extremely difficult as it is important to be tactful so as to respect the feelings of everyone involved. Here are some guidelines for you to follow.

Guidelines for letters expressing condolences:

- Send out the letter within two weeks of the loss
- Handwrite the letter rather than typing it
- If using a store-bought card, write the letter on stationary and include it inside the card
- Write the letter the way you would speak to the person who is receiving it

What to include in the letter:

- Acknowledge the loss and refer to the deceased by name
- Express your sympathy
- Note special qualities of the deceased that you might know
- Note favorite memories of the deceased that you have
- Remind the family of their personal strengths or special qualities
- Offer help, but specific help...not merely, "let me know if there's anything I can do"
- End the letter with a thoughtful word, hope, wish, or expression of sympathy

If you do not know the deceased or the family well, you may include a shorter version of the letter including an acknowledgement, your sympathy, special qualities or memories, and a thoughtful ending. For the purposes of this assignment, we will write the full letter.

See attached rubric for grading of the letter.

Name: _____

	Put It In The Mail (5)	Needs Some Improvements Before You Send It (3)	Rewrite It (1)
Letter format	Written in a standard format; includes date, greeting, body, and closing	Has all the parts of a letter, but they are not in the right spot	Missing some pieces of the format
Followed guidelines	Handwritten and neat on paper or stationary; Written to the recipient from your point of view	Letter may be handwritten but is difficult to read or has many spelling or grammar errors	Typed letter; Did not represent yourself in the letter; used others words
Letter had all appropriate requirements	Included all 7 requirements and used appropriate examples for each	Has all requirements but poor choice of words OR missing some of the requirements but word choice is appropriate	Letter is missing some of the requirements; Some of the words used do not respect the recipient
Total and Comments			