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**Metropolitan Life
Foundation**

"What Is Depression?"

Estimated Time of Completion: One or two 50-minute periods

[I. Summary](#)

[II. Objectives](#)

[III. Materials Needed](#)

[IV. Procedure](#)

[V. Classroom Assessment](#)

[VI. Extensions and Adaptations](#)

[VII. Online Resources](#)

[VIII. Relevant National Standards](#)

I. Summary:

For grades 9-12. In this lesson, students will examine teenage depression: what it's all about, how it feels, and ways to deal with it. This will be accomplished by small group discussions, recalling life events that trigger depressive episodes, self-reflection and topic research. Upon completion, students will have a better understanding of depression and how it relates to their own lives.

II. Objectives:

- To reflect on times in one's own life where one felt sad or down
- To analyze the changes in feelings, thoughts, and actions that are experienced in times of sadness
- To learn the difference between "feeling depressed" and clinical depression
- To learn the importance of getting help when needed

III. Materials Needed:

- PBS **In the Mix** video: ["Depression: On the Edge"](#) (Optional)
- TV/VCR (Optional)
- [Worksheet](#)
- Poster boards, markers

IV. Procedure:

1. Begin with a brief discussion about depression. State that depression has been called the "common cold" of mental illness. There are varying degrees of depression, ranging from times when students feel "down" or "sad," all the way to clinical depression. Draw a straight line (continuum) on the board. Put "feeling down or sad" at the left end and "clinical depression" on the right end. Tell students that all of us will experience some degree of depression, i.e., when someone dies, significant losses/changes occur, relationship breakups, etc. Give an example you might have in your lifetime when you felt depressed. Put an "X" on the continuum where you felt it would be. The more symptoms of depression and the length of time you experience it will all help determine where it would be on the continuum. The closer you get to the right end, the more important it is to get help. Clinical depression needs professional help.
2. If the video "Depression: On The Edge" is available, show it at this time.
3. Put students in small groups of 3-5 and have one person be the recorder. Brainstorm events or periods of time when the students have felt depressed. It can be their own experiences or those of others. List them on the board when completed. Limit this to 5-8 minutes.
4. Back in a large group, give each student the [Worksheet](#) and have them quietly think back to an event or time period in their life, when they felt really sad or down, then fill in the sheet.
5. When completed, assure students that you don't want them to reveal anything too personal and they do not need to detail the event, rather just follow the discussion to find out more about depression.
6. Ask for responses from question **#4**: "List how you felt when you were sad." Teacher might start it out by listing words he/she felt when an event happened, like lonely, unhappy, angry, etc. On board or overhead, list the feeling words. Affirm all answers.
7. Go on to question **#5**: "How did you act differently when you were sad?" You

might start with, "wanted to be alone", etc. List student responses.

8. Go on to question **#6**: "What thoughts went through your mind when you were sad?" You could start with: "Why does this happen?" List responses.
9. Discuss with students the reason we did this activity. Look at our answers to **#3**. Regardless of the event, our answers were very similar. We all feel very much the same when we go through these events. Unless this event was quite recent, most of us don't feel that way anymore. Ask students individually if they still feel the way they listed. Most will not. Repeat with **#4** and **#5**. We all experience times when we're depressed. When we are depressed, we don't feel the way we normally do, we don't act the way we normally do, and we don't think the way we normally do. However, we all feel differently NOW than we did when we experienced the sad life events. You might have students voluntarily put an "X" on the continuum on the board to illustrate depressed they felt they were. If they were clinically depressed, ask if they got help.
10. Have students mentally recall their event again. Ask if they remember anyone saying something to them when they were sad that made them feel better. List responses. Conclude with the most important things we can do when students are depressed: TALK, LISTEN, and get help.
11. When students are clinically depressed, however, they can't pull themselves out of it. This can be a serious health problem that can affect the ability to carry on daily life. In the video "Depression: On The Edge," some students mentioned that they couldn't concentrate, they were lethargic, had poor self esteem, and resorted to alcohol and other drugs. As it was described in the video, "When you're having bad days everyday, you need to get help." When the feelings of sadness, hopelessness or despair last longer than a few weeks and interfere with interests and activities, professional help is needed. Professionals can give counseling and medication to help them get back to feeling normally again.
12. Have small groups or individual students, select one of the following topics and develop a poster for display in school. This could be researched and completed by using Web sites and other resources.
 1. Solutions for relieving stress in healthy ways.
 2. How we can help a friend who is depressed.
 3. Signs of depression in teens.
 4. Ways to can help our school and community understand teenage depression.

V. Classroom Assessment:

Score student work to the following scale:

- **4:** Completed worksheet, contributed to class discussion, and created an accurate, neatly written poster.
- **3:** Completed worksheet, contributed to class discussion, and created a fairly accurate and neatly written poster.
- **2:** Completed worksheet, contributed to class discussion, poster not well done.
- **1:** Worksheet or poster was incomplete.

VI. Extensions and Adaptations:

- Ask students to research the prescriptions available for clinically depressed teenagers: how they work, side effects, and programs used in conjunction with medications.
- Have a teenager who has been diagnosed with clinical depression talk to the class about her/his story. Ask that they include in their talk how they deal with it on a daily basis, their problems, and how others can help a friend in a similar situation.
- Ask students to list ways to be kind to fellow students. List phrases/manners that can be used to be nice to others. Practice the skills with a friend in class.
- Lead a discussion on ways to stay healthy, both physically and mentally.

VII. Online Resources:

- **PBS In the Mix** - "Depression: On The Edge"
www.pbs.org/mix/depression_index.html
- National Mental Health Association
<http://www.nmha.org>
- National Institute of Mental Health
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>
- National Foundation for Depressive Illness
<http://www.depression.org>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
<http://www.afsp.org>
- The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
<http://www.nami.org>

- Knowledge Exchange Network
<http://www.mentalhealth.org>
- Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network (SPAN)
<http://www.spanusa.org>

VIII. Relevant National Standards:

These are established by the National Health Education Foundation and can be viewed at <http://www.cancer.org/cshe/cshestud.html>:

- Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid health information and health promoting products and services.
- Students will demonstrate and ability to practice valid health enhancing behaviors and reduce health risks.

About the Author:

Kathleen Gasparini has her Master's in Curriculum and has taught secondary health education for over 20 years. She was the "Health Teacher of the Year" for state of North Dakota, and presently is on the National Health Standards Committee for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. She is a state HIV trainer. She teaches grade 10 health classes in Grand Forks, as well as School Health at the University of North Dakota.

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