

Preventing Depression: A Toolkit for Schools



Nadja N. Reilly, Ph.D.
Editor



Children's Hospital, Boston

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Children's Hospital Neighborhood Partnerships

Swensrud Depression Prevention Initiative

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Preface

The **Preventing Depression: A Toolkit for Schools** manual was created based on the work originated through an *Adolescent Mental Health and Wellness Curriculum: A Starter Kit for Schools*. The current manual focuses on the implementation of a program specifically designed to address depression prevention for students in grades 7-12. We define prevention as a process – a process of increasing awareness, resilience, and coping skills with the purpose of promoting early recognition and intervention in order to prevent serious crises from occurring. We understand that some factors associated with the development of depression are beyond the scope of what schools are able to target. However, there are many skills that adolescents can use to help bolster their emotional well-being, and these can be incorporated into every school day. It is our hope that we can prevent emotional disturbances from becoming more serious crises by teaching students to actively employ recognition and coping skills.

This curriculum is comprehensive in its approach – it includes information about preparing a school system for initiating a depression prevention program, provides staff development exercises, student and classroom activities, and resources to assist staff in working with students who need more individualized mental health services. Our goal is to provide a tool that describes how to create a program from onset to finish and includes information relevant to a wide spectrum of students ranging from those whose needs are only for prevention, to those who confront daily struggles to succeed in school while battling a mental illness.

The contents of this manual are divided into three sections: preparation, curriculum, and evaluation. The **preparation** section introduces the philosophy and purpose of the activities, and discusses how a school system prepares to implement a prevention program with its students. A “top-down” approach is recommended, where administrators and school leaders are equally as invested in the prevention of depression as the staff conducting the interventions. While we recognize that not all staff will be directly involved in implementation, the entire school system should feel comfortable with this information so everyone is prepared for the response from students and parents. A range of resources are also offered, including surveys for needs assessments, sample organizing guides, and exercises for guiding staff development workshops. Finally, suggestions for best practices are offered. These suggestions are based on the feedback provided by many students, teachers, and parents.

The second section, **curriculum**, focuses on the implementation of the activities. Clear, step-by-step instructions are provided for presenters, and interspersed throughout the activities are sample questions and responses that students have given while participating in the activities. Sample adaptations to meet the needs of specific classes/circumstances, as well as handouts to be used for individual use with students are offered. Also in this section, readers will find information regarding the correlation between aspects of the activities and Massachusetts Department of Education English Language Arts and Comprehensive Health Curriculum Frameworks.

We understand that initiating conversations about depression will likely generate some questions from students and might lead some to seek additional assistance. It is indeed our hope this will be the case, and that students will seek help early rather than wait until a crisis arises. To help students with these questions or self-referrals, we have created a “toolkit” for staff which includes sample interview questions, contracts for safety, case management sample forms, tips on how to work with students already diagnosed with depression, and post-hospitalization re-entry plans.

Finally, the third section, **evaluation**, discusses how to approach outcomes. It is critical to evaluate the effectiveness of any tool designed for prevention. Educators are encouraged to determine the initial one or two outcome measures most appropriate to their school systems for measuring the impact of interventions. Sample student, teacher, and parent evaluations for use after activities are also included in the manual.

We hope you will find this manual a useful tool. If there are any questions about its contents or regarding implementation, please find our contact information below.

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