



## **SECTION ONE**

### **THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES?**

#### **ACTIVITIES**

##### **ACTIVITY:**

As a class, explore further the variety of daily, universal pressures that can lead to "the blues" and depression. Create different categories on a blackboard or easel pads, e.g. "Girls", "Boys", "Friends", "Family", "School and Teachers", "Self-Image", etc. Give each student the chance to add items to each category, then discuss as a group.

##### **ACTIVITY:**

Girls and boys can have different sources of stress. As a class, create a list of these. Set up columns for each gender on a blackboard or easel pads, and give each student the opportunity to add items to the appropriate category.

##### **ACTIVITY:**

Ask students to research how a nutritional or chemical imbalance can lead to depression by investigating the effects of various elements of their diet and lifestyle (e.g. too much red meat, sugar, salt, caffeine, excessive dieting, use of alcohol and marijuana, etc.). Then have students research the benefits of exercise and correct diet on improving overall emotional and mental health.

## **SECTION TWO**

### **WHEN IT GETS SERIOUS**

#### **ACTIVITIES**

##### **ACTIVITY:**

Ask a local psychiatrist or psychologist to visit and speak to the class about depression, and about their job. Have them discuss their job in terms of confidentiality, ethics, their relationship with patients, etc. They should also explain what type of therapy and medication treatment are now used for teens with clinical depression. The idea is to show students that people who provide professional help are not threatening or weird, but trustworthy and capable of being a confidant.

#### ACTIVITY:

Ask students to take this self-test, which will help them to examine and recognize potential feelings of depression. Have them write down "yes" or "no" in response to each of the following questions: For the last two weeks or longer, (1) I have been feeling extremely sad all or most of the time. (2) I seem to have no energy. (3) I've lost interest in most of the activities I used to enjoy. (4) I've been sleeping much more (or much less) than usual. (5) I've been eating much more (or much less) than usual. (6) I've been having trouble concentrating, remembering, and making decisions. (7) I've been feeling hopeless about the future. (8) I've been feeling worthless. (9) I've been feeling anxious. (10) I've been thinking about easy death and suicide would be. Suggest that if a student has answered "yes" to two or more questions, they should consider seeking help.

#### ACTIVITY:

Ask students to research where to get help in your local community; for example, hotlines, youth services, churches, mental health clinics, a local chapter of a mental health association, etc. Have them consult both the blue and yellow pages in the phone book, and eventually create a "help sheet" for distribution in the school.

### **SECTION THREE**

#### **SUICIDE: THE ONLY IRREVERSIBLE CHOICE**

##### **ACTIVITIES**

#### ACTIVITY:

Pass out index cards to the class and ask each student to write down who they would feel comfortable talking to if they felt seriously depressed and needed help (i.e. friend, parent, teacher, minister, neighbor, etc.). Collect the cards, read the answers anonymously, and discuss the options.

#### ACTIVITY:

Put some of the lyrics to "Jumper" on a blackboard or easel so the whole class can see:

"I wish you would step back from that ledge my friend,  
You could cut ties with all the lies that you've been living in..."

The angry boy, a bit too insane  
Icing over a secret pain,  
You know you don't belong,  
You're the first to fight, You're way too loud,  
You're the flash of light on a burial shroud,  
I know something's wrong,  
Well everyone has got a reason to say  
Put the past away...

Well he's on the table, and he's gone to code,  
And I do not think anyone knows,  
What they are doing here,  
And your friends have left, You've been dismissed,  
I never thought it would come to this, And I want you to know,  
Everyone has got to face down the demons"

Review the lyrics line by line and ask students to interpret them in terms of everyday teen problems, depression, and how it is a strongly anti-suicide message.

#### ACTIVITY:

Organize a "Depression Awareness Day" at your school.\* Ask your students to create and display banners with positive messages about depression, e.g. "You Are Not Alone". Have them write and perform sketches, or do improvisational scenes with suggestions from audience, depicting common anxieties and pressures. Arrange for local members of the hospital, suicide hotline, etc., to speak to the school.

### **SECTION THREE**

#### **SUICIDE: THE ONLY IRREVERSIBLE CHOICE**

#### **ACTIVITIES (CONT'D)**

#### ACTIVITY:

Start a Yellow Ribbon Campaign in your school. Contact the Light for Life Foundation of America (see Resources) to receive ribbons, information, and copies of the Yellow Ribbon Card, which is used in Pierre. Or, ask your students to design and produce their own card and develop a program for depression awareness. Distribute cards to schools in your community, displaying the cards in

easy access locations so students can get them anytime without embarrassment (e.g. main office, counseling center, commons area).

\*During the first week of October, Thursday is set aside as National Depression Screening Day. It is part of Mental Illness Awareness Week activities nationwide. This is an opportunity to volunteer with a mental health association or NAMI affiliate to fight depression and promote screening for depression in your community.