



SCHOOL NURSE DISCUSSION GUIDE

Understanding and Responding to Depression

This discussion guide supports school nurses in reflecting on and discussing how to respond effectively and compassionately to students showing signs of depression—either in a group setting or for individual reflection. Facilitators may choose the questions most relevant to their group.

Icebreaker Questions

- Many of us have close encounters with depression in our own families and have seen it firsthand in our work. How do these experiences influence how you support students who may be struggling with depression?

Recognition of & Response to Depression

- How do younger students express depression differently than older students?
- What are some physical complaints or nonverbal cues during clinic visits you've seen that later turned out to be linked to depression?
- What phrases or approaches have helped you successfully start a conversation with a withdrawn or sad student?
- How do cultural beliefs, stigma, or mistrust affect how students and families respond to depression or mental health support?
- What additional supports are needed for students who may be at greater risk for depression due to social, cultural, or personal challenges?

Systems and Supports

- Does your school have a crisis team for student emotional concerns? If not, would forming one be helpful, and who might be part of it?
- How does your school approach follow-up after a mental health referral? What role can nurses play?
- What are the barriers to communicating mental health concerns with families, and how have you overcome them?
- What small, practical tools have you shared with students to manage sadness?
- What's something (insight, strategy, connection) that you've offered a student that seemed to make a difference?
- What kind of strategies can you use to help students re-engage with school and social life after they've been withdrawn?
- Are there school-wide approaches that could better support students showing signs of depression?

Personal Reflection and Wellness

- Supporting students can be draining: what helps you recover after tough conversations?
- What professional development or training would help you feel more confident supporting students with depression?

Conclusion

- What is one thing you might try differently after viewing the module and participating in today's discussion?