

EPIC Cycle 6: Student Leadership Guide

Dealing with Anxiety and Depression

Student Leaders:

The answers are provided after each question. These are provided so you can help spur conversation in your weekly meetings.

Week 1: Equip

This week we will talk about anxiety, which is the mind and body's reaction to stressful, dangerous, or unfamiliar situations. It often manifests as worry and/or fear and is experienced by everyone at some point. There are also anxiety disorders, which are characterized by chronic feelings and behaviors. If you are experiencing chronic anxiety symptoms, please speak with your parent, guardian, pastor, or teacher. Today's discussion is not designed to diagnose or treat anxiety- it is simply an opportunity to read scripture and discuss how it applies to us.

1. In Genesis, we read about Hagar who was the slave of Abraham and the mother of first son, Ishmael [in ancient times, it was common for men to have children with their female slaves]. There was jealousy and strife between Hagar and Abraham's wife, Sarah, so Hagar and Ishmael were sent away to live in Egypt. The following verses from **Genesis 21:14-20** tell us about when Hagar and Ishmael were sent away: "Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob.¹⁷ God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink."

Questions:

- A. Why is Hagar crying in verse 16-17 (describe her circumstances and what she must be feeling)? She was feeling abandoned, lonely, scared, hopeless, etc.
- B. Who responds to her while she is crying and what is she told? Why is this significant? An angel of God tells her that God has heard her cries and is taking care of her. When she feels like everyone has turned their back on her, God shows up for her and meets her needs.
- C. What, if anything, do these verses have to do with us? When you feel defeated or alone, know that God is with you, sees your pain and has a plan for your life. And, always remember that God is goodness and love.

2. In **Luke 23:26-27**, we read about how Simeon tells Mary that she will eventually suffer greatly, referring to Jesus' crucifixion: "Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ²⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus was condemned to die on a cross, his followers (including his mother) were confused and afraid because they thought he was the savior and were not expecting him to die like a common criminal.

Questions:

- A. How do you think his mother, Mary, was feeling when she was at the foot of the cross while her son was dying (besides feeling confused and afraid)? Heart-broken, betrayed, depressed, anxious, angry, shocked
- B. Why is fear the main emotion of anxiety and how can it be debilitating (overwhelming)? Fear is an emotion while anxiety is a reaction to that emotion. Fear can leave you in flight, fight or freeze mode. Anxiety causes you to freeze and become overwhelmed with the situation at hand. It can make you feeling isolated.
- C. Are you able to provide an example of a time in your life when you have felt completely overwhelmed? How did you respond?

3. In **Matthew 14:28-31**, we read about Peter walking on the water with Jesus: "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁸"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Questions:

- A. What is significant about Peter being the only disciple to get out of the boat and walk to Jesus (on the water)? Even though he had doubts, he believed that Jesus was the Messiah (Savior) and was able to make Peter walk on the water.
- B. Why did Peter become afraid and begin to sink? When Peter looked around and saw his circumstances (it was storming and he was walking on water) he began to doubt and this caused him to fall. This wouldn't have happened if he'd kept his eyes on Jesus and continued to trust him.
- C. Why does doubt cause us fear/anxiety and what should we do when we doubt God's ability to take care of us? In our human frailness and sin, it is expected that we will doubt God. We may doubt God's goodness, love, and willingness to help us. But, it's important to take these doubts in prayer to God, to read the Bible so we can know Him better, and keep our thoughts focused on his promises.

Challenge: Pray for a friend who needs to know Jesus

Week 2: Prepare

This week we will talk about depression, which is the mind and body's reaction to loss or life's challenges, and it often manifests as sadness. If you are experiencing chronic feelings of sadness and hopelessness, please speak with your parent, guardian, pastor, or teacher. Today's discussion is not designed to diagnose or treat depression- it is simply an opportunity to read scripture and discuss how it applies to us.

1.**Ruth 1:8-14a** reads: "Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. ⁹May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband. "Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."¹¹But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹²Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— ¹³would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has turned against me!" ¹⁴At this they wept aloud again..."

Questions:

- A. Why is Naomi telling her daughters-in-law to go back to their mothers' homes? She believes they are better off without her; Naomi feels as if the Lord has turned His back on her but not them.
- B. How would you describe Naomi's state of mind and how do you think this is affecting her relationship with God? Sad, depressed, and bitter. She is only focusing on her terrible circumstances, which has caused her to doubt God and to be angry with him. She doesn't see the ways that the Lord is loving her during the midst of this difficult time.
- C. How do we often feel when bad things happen to us?

2. In the Old Testament, we read about the prophet, Jeremiah, who was sent by God to warn the people in Judah to stop sinning and turn back to God. He knew what would happen if they did not turn back, but no matter how hard he tried, they would not listen to him. In fact, the people hated him for it, even though he was trying to help them. In **Jeremiah 15:10**, we read about his sadness over these circumstances: "Woe to me, my mother, that you have given birth to me to be a man of strife and a man of contention to all the earth! I have not loaned, nor have men lent money to me, yet everyone curses me.

But even in these terrible circumstances, Jeremiah says the following in **Lamentations 3:24** “The LORD is my God, and I trust him.”

Questions:

- A. How do we know that Jeremiah is feeling depressed and hopeless in these circumstances? He’s so depressed that he wishes he had never been born.
- B. What does **Lamentations 3:24** tell us about how Jeremiah eventually responds to his circumstances and how does this **prepare** you for trials and tribulations in your own life? Even though he is depressed and overwhelmed, he still chooses to trust that God’s plan is good and that He is ultimately in control.

3. Please take a few minutes to PREPARE for next week’s INVITE meeting by asking students to volunteer for the following:

- to share his/her faith story next week (they should write it out first)
- to read the gospel an invitation next week (see under INVITE Week)
- to welcome students and explain FP
- to open and close next week’s meeting

4. If you have time remaining, here’s an additional question: **In Esther 3: 8-11,4:1** reads: “Then Haman said to King Xerxes, “There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate [the Jewish people]. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. 9If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king’s administrators for the royal treasury.”10So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11“Keep the money,” the king said to Haman, “and do with the people as you please.” When Mordecai [a Jew] learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. (Side note: Because of Queen Esther, the Jewish people are spared from this terrible decree)

Questions:

- A. Why does Mordecai tear his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes upon hearing the news of the decree? This was a Jewish custom for grieving and deep sadness. It symbolized how deeply he was hurting.
- B. Apart from God intervening, what was the likely outcome of this situation? The Jews would be destroyed.
- C. Has there ever been a time in your life where your circumstances seemed overwhelming or insurmountable? How did God help?

Challenge: Invite at least 2 friends to next week’s INVITE meeting.

WEEK 3: INVITE

This is the week to invite your friends to hear the good news about Jesus. Please ask a student to share a faith story, and the gospel message and invitation (SEE BELOW). Please remember to use the Response Cards, and to report attendance and decisions for Christ.

Gospel Message (To be read a out loud to the group):

- Admit that you are a sinner. To "sin" means to make a bad choice, and sin separates us from God.
- Believe in Jesus and put your trust in Him. Christ's death on a cross two thousand years ago was an act of selfless love. He took on the whole sins of humanity, making it possible for all people to encounter God.
- Confess Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior. This means acknowledging that you want Him in your life.

Invitation/Prayer (ask students to bow their heads):

If this message is speaking to you today, and you want to trust in Jesus as your Savior then pray this simple prayer to yourself: Dear Lord, I have sinned and this has separated me from you because you are a Holy God. But, I your word in Ephesians says that Jesus died for me, and his grace is extended to me so that I can be forgiven. Today, I pray that you will come into my life and be my LORD and help me to trust in you and live in a way that is pleasing to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Follow UP Plan:

Once you've shared the gospel and invitation, collect the Student Response Cards (can be downloaded from the First Priority website) and then follow these steps:

1. Student leaders commit to praying for and contacting any student who has made a decision for Christ and/or has questions.
2. When contacting these students, student leaders will want to:
 - Answer any questions they may have
 - Offer to pray for them
 - Invite them to the next week's HELP Week meeting
 - Invite them to your church, if they don't have one
3. Return all Student Response cards to the student leader or teacher (Response cards or information on the cards must never be given to an outside adult or organization/ church)

Week 4: Connect

This is Connect Week and after we talk about dealing low self-image, we will talk about why it's important to be connected to a local church. Low self-image or self-worth often manifests as sadness, jealousy, insecurity, or resentment. If you are experiencing chronic self-esteem issues, please speak with your parent, guardian, pastor, or teacher.

1. In the Old Testament, when the Israelites escaped from slavery in Egypt and were living in the desert, several of the Levites (priests) turned against Moses and Aaron, God's chosen prophet and High Priest. The leader of the rebellion, Korah, was resentful of his lower position to Moses and Aaron, and aspired to more power. In **Numbers 16:8-11** we read about Moses confronting these rebellious priests: "Moses also said to Korah, "You Levites, listen to me. ⁹You should be happy that the God of Israel chose you to be different from the rest of the Israelites. He lets you come near to him to do the special work in the LORD's Holy Tent to help the Israelites worship him. Isn't that enough? ¹⁰He brought you Levites near to him to help the priests, but now you are trying to become priests also. ¹¹You and your followers have joined together and turned against the LORD! Did Aaron do anything wrong? No, so why are you complaining against Aaron?"

Often, low self-image or self-esteem is due to comparing ourselves to others' social standing, influence, popularity, gifts or beauty, which often leaves us empty, jealous, frustrated, and depressed.

Questions:

- A. What clues are given about the rebellious priests and the condition of their hearts? They were "resentful of their lower positions" and "aspired to more power."
- B. Why do we often feel jealousy and depression when we compare ourselves to others? We often think we deserve what others have or feel "less than" when we look at others. When we compare ourselves to others, it is a trap and it will leave us empty and jealous.
- C. Why are we often unsatisfied with what God has given us and why is this dangerous? This stems from pride because it essentially means that we are owed or deserve more than we have.

2. When we are struggling with self-image and finding ourselves in the comparison trap, we should go to God's Word for our identity. In **Genesis 1:27** we read that "God created human beings [⁷man; ⁸the Hebrew *Adam* can mean human beings, humankind, person, man, or the proper name Adam] in his image [⁹reflecting God's nature/character and representing him in the world]. In the image of God he created them. He created them male and female. In **Genesis 1:31a** it reads: "God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good *and* He validated it completely". In **Psalms 139:13-14** we read: "For [God] formed my innermost parts; You knit me [together] in my mother's womb. I will give thanks *and* praise to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well".

God does not make mistakes. You are not a mistake and you are not forgotten by God. He knows your flaws, failures, selfish desires and sinful nature, and he also knows your gifts, talents, purposes, and potential.

Questions:

- A. Why does it matter if we are created in God's image? This shows us that God was purposeful in His creation and he loves us.
- B. How do we find our identity in God's Word and what happens if we don't? The Bible teaches us who God is, why he created us, and how he plans to bring creation back to him.
- C. C. Why is it important for us to remember that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made"? God doesn't make mistakes. He created you to be uniquely yourself. There is no one that has been put on this Earth to serve the same purpose as you. He intimately knows you and loves you exactly how he created you.

Challenge: Invite two friends to your youth group or church this week.