

Program Overview

Why screening? We now know that mental health is central to the overall health and well-being of today's teenagers. If youth living with an emotional or mental disorder can be identified early and their families linked with effective services and support, they can avoid losing critical years of healthy development and growth.

How are parents involved? Parents play a crucial role in the identification of emotional and mental disorders in their children. They must drive every decision related to this process in order to achieve the best outcomes for their children and families. That is why the TeenScreen Program requires that parents have a chance to choose whether their teen will participate in TeenScreen's voluntary screening program.

Where does screening take place? The TeenScreen Program works by creating partnerships with communities across the nation to implement local screening programs for youth. Because schools are in a unique position to offer the venue necessary to ensure appropriate and confidential screening and to openly communicate concerns with parents, the majority of local TeenScreen programs are located in middle and high schools. Other communities have chosen to implement the program in doctors' offices, clinics and juvenile justice facilities - in short, anywhere that teens gather.

How does the TeenScreen Program work? After a parent has decided they would like their teen to participate and the youth has agreed to participate in the screening, TeenScreen asks teens to answer a short set of questions regarding different symptoms that occur in depressed or suicidal youth. This questionnaire is just the first stage of the screening process and is designed to find any youth that might have a problem. Teens that answer yes to more than a certain number of these questions advance to a short one-on-one interview with a mental health professional to follow-up on the symptoms the teen endorsed and determine if they are experiencing any impairment as a result of the symptoms. This second step of the program is most helpful to parents, because that is where they can find out if their teen might benefit from a more in-depth assessment.

Only teens that indicate they might have a problem on the screening questionnaire and are deemed to be at risk by a mental health professional are considered to have "screened positive." The parents of these teens are informed of the results and are offered a referral for a complete mental health evaluation.

Is screening safe? Research on screening as a method of suicide prevention has shown that asking about suicide does not encourage teens to attempt suicide. The Journal of the American Medical Association¹ reports that neither screening nor asking youth directly about attempting or thinking about suicide causes them to become suicidal, depressed or even at all distressed.

1 Gould, M. S., Marrocco, F. A., Kleinman, M., Thomas, J. G., Mostkoff, K., Cote, J., et al. (2005). Evaluating iatrogenic risk of youth suicide screening programs: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 293(13), 1635-1643.