

Schools & Communities FAQs for Parents

What is TeenScreen Schools and Communities?

TeenScreen Schools and Communities is a national mental health and suicide risk screening program for youth. The goal of TeenScreen is to make voluntary mental health checkups available for all teens in America. TeenScreen works by assisting schools and communities throughout the nation with developing locally operated and sustained screening programs for youth. Screening can take place in schools, clinics, youth groups, shelters, and other youth-serving organizations and settings.

TeenScreen screens for the risk factors that are associated with depression and other mental illnesses but does not make a diagnosis. Parents of youth found to be at possible risk are notified and helped with identifying and connecting to local mental health services where they can obtain a complete evaluation by a qualified healthcare professional. TeenScreen Schools and Communities does not involve treatment and does not recommend or endorse any kind of treatment for the youth who are identified by the screening. The results of the screen are confidential and not shared with teachers or school administrators.

What are the benefits of screening adolescents?

The main benefit of screening is finding teens who are suffering silently. TeenScreen's strength is in identifying these youth, alerting their parents to their struggles, and giving them a chance to get help before the problems become severe and, for some, life-threatening.

Do kids really have serious mental problems in middle and high school? Aren't they too young for that?

10% of American youth suffer from a mental illness, but two-thirds of them do not receive help. The number of teen suicides annually is just about equal to the number of deaths from all natural causes combined, and 90% of teens who die by suicide have a treatable mental illness at the time of their death, most often depression.

Why offer screening in schools? What does mental health have to do with learning?

Mental illness is a major barrier to learning and academic success. Research has shown that fewer than half of students with serious mental disorders graduate from high school. Schools have an important role to play in helping teens achieve their full potential.

Won't teens just grow out of emotional problems as they get older?

All children feel sad or worried at times. Usually these feelings are temporary, but not for all. Half of all mental illnesses begin by age 14 and should be addressed before they negatively affect a teen's future. Screening is a way of identifying serious problems early on and providing parents the opportunity to get help for their teens.

I believe this is a private issue, which belongs in the family, and I don't feel comfortable with my child talking about his or her problems, especially in school.

TeenScreen is completely voluntary and you and your teen have the right to refuse to participate in the screening program. Many teens appear to be normal, happy, and healthy on the outside, but are in great pain on the inside. They don't realize that they need help, or they don't know how to ask for it. Youth are more likely to acknowledge emotional symptoms on questionnaires than they are to report these symptoms to their parents or other trusted adults. Screening results are confidential and are not shared with teachers or included in academic school records.

My child is doing well in school, so I know there is nothing wrong. Why should my family participate?

While a decline or change in school performance is often an external sign of emotional or substance abuse problems, mental health problems don't always show up in these ways. Often the warning signs are not visible.

What happens if the screening identifies emotional problems or suicide risk in my child?

If a potential problem is noted in your teen's screening questionnaire, he or she will have a follow-up interview with a trained mental health professional, to determine if they would benefit from a complete evaluation. If this is the case, you will be contacted by the screening staff to discuss your teen's results and the clinician's recommendations. And if you would like, screening staff can assist you in contacting a local healthcare professional, to obtain a complete evaluation for your child.

Are the screening results kept confidential? Will they affect my child's academic record and chances for college admission?

We work closely with school and organization administrators to develop procedures to ensure your child's confidentiality. Neither the teaching staff nor fellow students are involved in these procedures or are aware of individual screening results. The only people who will see the screening results will be the screening staff. ID numbers, rather than names, identify each questionnaire and all screening files are kept separately from academic files and are stored in locked file cabinets.

Who funds TeenScreen?

The TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups is funded by private foundations, individuals, and organizations committed to the early identification of mental illness in youth and the prevention of teen suicide. This funding also allows for ongoing outreach to help develop and expand local TeenScreen programs. Neither the National Center or any of TeenScreen's programs or initiatives have ever received support or funding from pharmaceutical companies for screening.

My child is already receiving mental health services. Should he/she be screened anyway?

It is a good idea to routinely check in with teens around issues of mental health. Our experience shows that teens will sometimes provide more information on the screening questionnaire than they do to their treatment provider or other adults in their lives. This information can then be shared with you and your child's therapist or doctor to ensure that all of your child's needs are being met.

Does TeenScreen recommend anti-depressants for teens found to be suffering from depression?

TeenScreen makes no diagnoses or treatment recommendations. Our goal is to provide parents with information about a possible problem and to link youth in need to professionals who can perform a complete diagnostic assessment.

How will we, the parents, be involved in the screening process?

Parent consent is required for teens to participate in the screening. Parents are notified if the screening staff recommends a complete evaluation and will assist families in connecting with a local healthcare professional, if requested.