

Research on Mental Health Screening

Research Shows that Mental Health Screening for Youth Is Effective

Screening accurately identifies youth with serious mental health problems and the known risk factors for suicide.

- In a TeenScreen follow-up study, high school screening correctly identified two-thirds of the screening participants who made a later suicide attempt or went on to experience a major depression in young adulthood.¹
- When clinicians in school-based health centers (SBHC) use screening tools to assess students who present for services, they correctly identify three times the number of depressed youth, five times the number of anxious youth, and four times the number of youth with multiple disorders than SBHCs that do not use screening tools.²
- Rates of self-reported suicide attempts decrease when mental health screening is combined with education about suicide and its prevention.³
- The scientific evidence supporting mental health screening led the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health to place a high priority on the implementation of voluntary school-based screening programs.⁴
- The U.S. Surgeon General has also highlighted mental health screening as an effective method of youth suicide prevention.^{5,6}

Research Shows that Mental Health Screening Is Safe

The results of a study of 2,342 high school students, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (April 2005), revealed that mental health screening and directly asking youth if they are thinking about suicide or have made a prior suicide attempt does not cause them to start thinking about suicide, increase suicidal ideation, or create distress.⁷

- Teens who participated in mental health screening did not have higher distress levels than teens who did not participate. This was true immediately after being screened and two days later
- Screening participants did not have higher rates of depressive feelings than non-participants
- Screening participants were not more likely to report suicidal ideation after completing the screening than non-participants
- Depressed teens and previous suicide attempters who were screened were less distressed and suicidal than depressed teens and previous suicide attempters who were not screened

References

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6 U.S. Public Health Service. (2001). *Report of the Surgeon General's Conference on Children's Mental Health: A National Action Agenda*. Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services.

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