

## Universal Screening Consent and Assent Processes

### Determine Consent and Assent Processes

Schools and districts must address legal and ethical considerations such as parent/guardian consent, student assent, student privacy, and a plan to screen students in a timely manner in accordance with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) privacy rules for accessing student health data. Schools and districts have found success using passive consent and opt-out procedures to garner parent consent and student assent for universal screening procedures. To successfully implement passive consent, consider the following strategies:

- Deliver a consistent message:
  - Deliver a consistent message about the purpose and importance of mental health screening in advance of all screenings. Schools are routinely involved in universal physical health screenings like eye exams to ensure students are ready to learn. It can help to explain the importance of universal mental health screening as a similar process, tied to learning readiness.
- Share information in multiple formats:
  - Ensure all parents/guardians are aware of screening procedures by sharing the passive consent message in multiple formats, such as:
    1. automated telephone calls to all students' families
    2. information on the school website
    3. written notification sent in the mail
    4. signs posted in the school building
    5. information at parent meetings
- Provide an opt-out form for parents, guardians, and adult students to return to the school that includes the following information:
  - A statement indicating that the parent, guardian, or adult student does not wish for their child or himself/herself to participate in the universal screening;
  - Parent, guardian, and student's printed name;
  - Parent, guardian, or adult student's signature and date;
  - Instructions about where to return the form (such as school office, school counselor, or administrator's mailbox) and when the form is due by;
  - Time period the opt-out form is good for (such as 2018-2019 school year, fall or spring semester); and
  - Information about who to contact if the person completing the form has any questions about the universal screening procedure.
- Provide information about student assent that includes:
  - The purpose of completing the universal screening;
  - The right for the student to choose to participate in the screener;
  - The right to decide at any time not to finish the screener;
  - The right to ask questions about the screener at any time;
  - Allowing the student to complete an alternative activity in lieu of completing the screener;
  - Refusing to participate in the screener will not result in any negative impact on the student's grades; and
  - Contact information for a student to reach a school mental health professional if needed.



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## Citations:

Center for School Mental Health (2018). School mental health screening playbook: Best practices and tips from the field.

Available at: <https://noys.org/sites/default/files/School-Mental-Health-Screening-Playbook.pdf>.

Cornell University Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (2007). Sample child assent form. Available at:

<https://researchservices.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/2019-06/Sample%20Child%20Assent%20Form.docx>.

# Universal Screening Data Collection, Administration, and Followup Processes

## Data Collection

Develop screening data collection and progress monitoring systems.

- Determine how you want to collect the data, such as by paper or electronically. An electronic format for data collection, such as Google Forms, allows students to complete screening data online and facilitates prompt analysis of results and follow-up.
- Determine how often you want to collect the data (for example, complete the screening once per semester).
- Implement the screening procedures, share data as appropriate, and utilize data to plan school mental health and behavioral health services and supports at the individual, family, group, classroom, grade levels, and/or school-wide level.

## Administration

Determine what students will be screened and the process for screening.

- Who to screen: Universal screening indicates that all students will have the opportunity to be screened. The school and district will need to determine which universal screeners are used based upon the age of the students and population being screened.
- Pilot the screener: Start small by conducting pilot-screening procedures with small groups of students (e.g., 5 students in 1 grade at 1 school) to test procedures before administering to an entire grade or school. Collect feedback from students, student' families, and staff administering the pilot screening about the screening tool and process to inform screening procedure modifications.
- When to screen: Consider using advisory or homeroom time to administer screenings.
- Staff to support screening: Determine who will help to support the screening process. Provide screening instruction scripts for staff to read to students immediately prior to the screening administration and include procedures for any questions that arise during screening administration.

## Follow-up

Determine systematic process and data rules to follow up with students identified with different levels of risk for a mental health concern.

- Determine what indicators will identify students who need immediate follow-up (high risk—same-day), prompt follow-up (moderate risk—within the week), or nonurgent follow-up (low risk—follow up to communicate negative findings).
- Determine what interventions will be implemented for students at different levels of risk (e.g., immediate crisis referral, referral to a school-based or community mental health provider, referral to early intervention/prevention group).
- Determine a plan to ensure mental health staff receive and analyze data the same day as the completed screening to ensure prompt follow-up.
- Ensure any students endorsing risk of harm to self or others, or exposure to abuse, neglect, or exploitation, will receive immediate follow-up (same-day).

- Determine a plan for following up with the parent/guardian of students with at-risk indicators. This includes completing a parent consent form for mental health and behavioral health services and interventions (see “Mental Health/ Behavioral Health Services and Intervention Sample Parent Consent Form”).
- Determine a plan for following up with school staff about screening and progress monitoring results.
- Alert crisis teams and local community mental health providers to be on call in advance of screenings. Determine if a referral form needs to be completed in order to access additional mental health/ behavioral health services at outside community agencies. See the “Sample Referral Form for Outside Mental Health Services.”
- Appropriate school and community partners will join together to form a student intervention team to meet regularly to discuss the intervention plan for a student. The student intervention team will:
  - Review the needs of the student referred for mental health services;
  - Determine appropriate services and supports for the student; and
  - Evaluate data, monitor progress, and adjust the intervention plan as needed.

### Citations:

Center for School Mental Health (2018). School mental health screening playbook: Best practices and tips from the field. Available at: <https://noys.org/sites/default/files/School-Mental-Health-Screening-Playbook.pdf>.

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. Providing school-based mental health services. Available at: [https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/05%20P2\\_Providing%20Sci-Based%20MH%20Svs%20FINAL.pdf](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/05%20P2_Providing%20Sci-Based%20MH%20Svs%20FINAL.pdf).