



## Wellness Screen: FAQs for Parents

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### **What is the Connected Community Wellness Screen(Wellness Screen) program?**

Wellness Screen is an emotional wellness and suicide risk screening program for youth. The goal of Wellness Screen is to make voluntary emotional wellness screening available to all adolescents who wish to participate. Wellness Screen works by assisting schools and communities with the opportunity to have screening available in schools or the local office.

Wellness Screen identifies risk factors that are associated with depression and other mental illnesses but does not make a diagnosis. Parents of youth that are found through the screening to have potential emotional wellness risks 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. Connected Community Wellness Screen does not involve treatment and does not recommend or endorse specific treatment for the youth who are identified by the screening process. The results of the screen are confidential and not shared with school staff.

### **What are the benefits of screening adolescents?**

The main benefit of screening is finding teens that are struggling and unsure what to do next. Wellness Screen's strength is in identifying these youth, alerting their parents to their struggles, and giving them a chance to get help before 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?**

Just like vision and hearing, emotional wellness is a major factor in your teen's academic success. 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.

**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 the screening staff can assist parents in how 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.**

Wellness Screen 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. The screening offers another opportunity for youth 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 your student's 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 staff 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 Connected Community Wellness Screen?**

The program is supported by foundations and local communities. It is operated as a nonprofit public service and accepts individual donations to help provide free screening services to local communities. The program receives no funding from pharmaceutical companies.

### **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 or different 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 Wellness Screen recommend anti-depressants for teens found to be suffering from depression?**

Wellness Screen makes no diagnoses or treatment recommendations; it is beyond the program's scope. 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 evaluation.

### **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. However, parents can always contact screening staff with any questions they may have.