

Introducing Depression Screening for Young Teens with a Chronic Condition

Components of the Conversation

- Recognize that managing [*condition*] can be challenging, particularly during adolescence
- Emphasize that providing the best care for a youth with a chronic condition involves not just the physical aspects of health, but the mental and emotional health needs as well – “We provide better care when we care for the whole person”
- Inform that the both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the US Preventive Services Task Force recommend that all adolescents should be screened every year for depression.
- Share that research has shown that some youth with [*condition*] are at increased risk for symptoms of depression
- Explain how depression screening results will be used

Example Conversation

{For Parent/Caregiver}

We are working to find better ways to support your teen's overall health. We know [*condition*] can be stressful and affect many aspects of your child's life, not only physical (body) symptoms. Research has shown that some patients with [*condition*] may be at higher risk for symptoms of depression – some examples are things like becoming really irritable, losing interest in activities, or having difficulty concentrating.

We now make it routine practice to check in on the emotional health of our patients with [*condition*] at clinic visits. We ask all youth ages 12-17 to complete a brief depression screening survey every year.

It may be helpful to know that the American Academy of Pediatrics and the US Preventive Services Task Force recommend that all adolescents should be screened every year for depression. These are national organizations made up of doctors, mental health professionals and parents that are dedicated to the health of children and teens. We are asking your child to complete this survey because we know that even when teens have many positive coping skills, they may sometimes feel stressed or down, and not know what to do about it. When they feel stressed or down, taking care of [*condition*] can be harder.

The survey is a screening tool that helps us to understand and discuss concerns that teens may be having.

[*Teen*] will fill out this survey privately. Then we will review [*Teen's*] score during the visit to determine whether they are experiencing symptoms associated with depression. Survey answers will be kept confidential from parents, with the exception of an item that suggests harm to self or others. Depending on the score, we may also offer additional resources, such as meeting with a social worker or psychologist.

What questions do you have for me about the screening process?

{For Teen}

We are working to find better ways to take care of you. We know [*condition*] can be stressful and affect many parts of your life, not only physical symptoms.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the US Preventive Services Task Force recommend that all adolescents be screened every year for depression. These are national organizations made up of doctors, mental health professionals and parents that are dedicated to the health of children and teens. We think it is especially important for you to complete this survey because we know that even when teens have many good coping skills and strong support, they may feel stressed or down and not know what to do about it. When that happens, taking care of [*condition*] can be harder.

We have a new routine for all of our patients with [*condition*] that involves checking on their emotional health during office visits. We ask everyone between 12 and 17 years of age to complete a brief depression symptom screening survey every year when they come to see us. . The survey asks questions about feelings, including stress, and helps us understand and discuss concerns that you may be having.

You will fill out this survey privately and we will keep your answers private from your parents, except anything that suggests you might be thinking about hurting yourself or someone else. We will talk about your survey with you during the visit and might talk about additional resources if they could be helpful.

What questions do you have for me about the survey?

Considerations and Reminders

- Depression screening should be carried out in the *context of an ongoing conversation with families* – a conversation that explains the rationale for screening and lays the foundation for eliciting concerns going forward.
- Appropriate screening should be conducted for all teens and families, regardless of how they look or what their perceived needs might be. This universality is particularly important as it helps to alleviate stigma and detect symptoms that may not be “obvious”.
- Become familiar with relevant resources in response to a positive screen – eg, social services, therapist/psychiatrist, support groups, local/regional lay or professional support organizations.
- If a teen is not experiencing symptoms at the time of screening, the affirmation of caring for the whole teen the whole teen and supporting the teen’s family creates an environment for sharing concerns that may emerge later.
- Consider letting patient/family know ahead of the appointment that the next visit will include depression screening.
- In addition to depression symptoms, be alert to symptoms of anxiety or use of substances to cope.

Funded by the American Board of Pediatrics Foundation, the Roadmap Project aims to increase the resilience, and emotional and mental health of pediatric patients with chronic conditions and their families. This resource is one in a series offered to help pediatric clinicians conduct conversations with families. It has been reviewed by parents, patients, clinicians and pediatric psychologists, but will be refined with use and feedback over time. Direct questions or improvements to the [Roadmap Project Team](#).

