

# Comprehensive Youth Risk Screening: What Fears are Holding You Back?

If the idea of asking about mental health, substance use, or sex seems overwhelming or makes you feel uneasy, you are not alone! Many youth-centric organizations struggle to provide comprehensive risk screening. We've gathered some of the most common concerns and have provided our thought-provoking responses:

## If we know about a risk, we'll be responsible to take action.

This concern isn't just about liability, it's about the fear of not having the resources to address risks that may be identified. RAAPS identifies key risks and provides education and national resources, opening the door for youth to connect with you as a trusted adult without you having to be an expert on every risk behavior or situation. Making this connection provides an opportunity for you to discuss resources and, when necessary, provide referrals to other professionals.

- Nearly half of all youth who commit suicide visited a healthcare provider within the last month.
- Mental health risks (depression, anger management, being bullied, having thoughts of suicide or self-harm) now rank higher than drug, alcohol and tobacco use among youth.

According to the CDC: **risk behaviors are responsible for 3 out of 4 (75%) preventable deaths and illness in youth.**

## We don't have the time to ask about risk and address the behaviors identified.

It's true, you always need more time. Finding practical solutions that minimize impact on time and workflow is at the heart of the development of RAAPS. In less than 5 minutes RAAPS identifies the risks that contribute most to preventable illness and premature death in young people aged 9 to 24. In the tightest of workflows, in organizations that run like clockwork, finding a 5-minute window of time for risk screening could save a life!

## We don't want to upset parents.

We get it, parents may be uncomfortable with the idea of their son or daughter being asked about risk factors and behaviors. You can help them understand the importance by explaining that standardized risk screening is an opportunity to stop an uptick in bullying, prevent a potential suicide, or identify incidences of sexual abuse. Possibilities for Change can also help with time-tested, proven strategies and resources for you to use when talking with parents.



## We don't know what to say.

Conversations about risk can be uncomfortable. But did you know that having a trusted adult to confide in is one of the single most important mitigating factors in reducing youth risk? Just by being present and starting the conversation you are helping. For additional support, RAAPS provides built in health education to help you navigate conversations around risk topics that may be uncomfortable. And, Possibilities for Change offers Adolescent-Focused Motivational Interviewing workshops to help you better connect with the youth you serve.

## Asking the Tough Questions

Professionals often think simply asking "tough" questions can re-traumatize or cause additional harm. In reality, asking these questions provides the opportunity for youth to share their experiences, which has shown to be the start of getting help. Here's some research to support this:

- ✓ In a study examining whether asking about suicidal thoughts or behavior during a screening program creates distress or increases suicidal thoughts among high school students—generally or among high-risk students—there was no evidence of negative effects.<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ On the topic of trauma and sex, another study showed the majority of participants—including women with a history of sexual victimization—reported not being distressed while being screened. In fact, participants with a history of sexual victimization rated the study as resulting in higher positive affect, having greater benefits, and being less mentally exhausting.<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ When undergraduates were asked: "Please consider both your experience answering the questions about child abuse and other trauma, and your feelings about how important it is that we ask the questions, and then rate how good of an idea it is to include such a measure in psychology research." 85% answered "somewhat good" or "very good."<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ Youth must have an opportunity to talk about what they have witnessed and how they feel in an emotionally safe space, with caring parents or adults who can listen and understand. Staff willingness to listen to a child's story can provide the foundation on which to increase resilience and personal strength.<sup>4</sup>

**Remember, not asking is not preventing.**

**RAAPS is recognized by leading national agencies**



<sup>1</sup>Gould MS, Marrocco FA, Kleinman M, et al. Evaluating Iatrogenic Risk of Youth Suicide Screening Programs: A Randomized Controlled Trial. JAMA. 2005. <sup>2</sup>Yeater EA, Miller GF. 'Sensitive'-Topics Research: Is It Really Harmful to Participants? APS Observer. 2014. <sup>3</sup>Becker-Blease KA & Freyd JJ. Research participants telling the truth about their lives: The ethics of asking and not asking about abuse. American Psychologist. 2006. <sup>4</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health.