

An Internet-Based Screening Program for Mental Health Problems and the Risk of Violent, Suicidal and Self-Injuring Behavior

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StepOne for Parents (StepOne) is the name of a computer-assisted mental health screening system that is available on the world wide web (Web). The system consists of the adolescent clinical screening questionnaire (ACSQ) and a computer generated clinical screening report. The ACSQ was developed to involve, educate and empower parents first and foremost. StepOne is a significant departure from mainstream mental health where instruments are designed primarily to support professionals who provide services.

StepOne is designed for parents who,

- want to screen their child privately and quickly
- need to understand clinical and behavioral problems
- are looking for intervention and treatment options
- are concerned about self-injuring, suicidal and violent behavior
- are not sure where to get help or what to say
- want to document their child's behavior and problems
- do not have quick access to qualified mental health care
- live in remote or isolated areas
- want to monitor their child's behavior and the benefit of treatment

The clinical screening report is generated by the StepOne computer program based on responses provided by parents. The parents are first qualified as reliable informants by the program's enrollment process. The clinical screening report provides information in an organized format that can help parents communicate with school and health care professionals and advocate for the services they believe are appropriate and necessary. StepOne can also provide location specific community information and referral support.

StepOne users must pass a test of knowledge of the "terms of use" to access the system. This approach provides a means to measure informed consent. StepOne also qualifies the user by asking

questions about their education, knowledge of their child, reading ability and primary language. StepOne is designed to protect family privacy and to involve, educate and empower parents with information and interim referral guidance. StepOne does not replace the role of parents or the role of health care professionals. StepOne is designed to respect parental rights and responsibilities.

StepOne is designed specifically to be administered on the Web. StepOne can be completed anywhere that a parent has access to the Internet. Parents can start their questionnaire, save their responses and return later to finish. The computer system and software provide the highest level of encryption and data security available to the public. The services offered have been reviewed by a multidisciplinary team of health and education professionals. The system substantially meets or exceeds ethical and professional standards for development and operation of an Internet mental health screening system.

StepOne is designed to be simple and easy to use. No appointment, oversight, third-party approval or government involvement is necessary. Parents set up a secure account and complete a series of questionnaires regarding their child's current and past behavior.

StepOne asks parents a large number of questions. Parents who use StepOne may learn how well or poorly they know their child's situation as they encounter questions they may never have considered. Parents who answer many questions "Don't Know" are advised to talk with their child or have a mental health professional talk to their child about these issues.

When two parents complete the questionnaire independently they may discover how much they agree or disagree about their child's behavior and history. This is also an indicator that parents may need to spend more time with or talk more with their child.

Using StepOne, parents are exposed to a broad range of questions both to identify potential problems and to raise parents' awareness of issues they should

monitor or inquire further about. The basic process of parents coming to know their child better can be a positive first step in problem resolution. Discussion between parents regarding their child's mental and emotional well-being is an important part of parenting and, of itself, can help children. By exposing parents to a large number of questions, the ACSQ can sensitize parents to recognize problem behavior in the future. Parents become more aware and involved in identifying potential concerns.

The ACSQ can be used to help identify symptoms and signs of behavioral problems, syndromes and mental health disorders. The questionnaire can also be used to obtain historical and behavioral observations and ratings over time and from multiple sources. This can provide information about a child's response to interventions, treatment, and medications.

The ACSQ utilizes a multi-informant history, behavior rating and symptom checklist procedure. The use of multiple informants (i.e., two parents) in provides an estimate of the consistency and, therefore, the reliability and validity of results. It is a basic psychometric principle that the upper limit of validity is determined by the reliability and thoroughness of the information gathered and analyzed. Using multiple informants can be an effective way to gather information as well as determine and increase the validity of results.

StepOne supports the process of clinical interviews, diagnosis and professional treatment plan development.

InCrisis reports are based on sound research principles and demonstrate how reliable and accurate data with content and concurrent validity can produce useful information for health care professionals seeking information for diagnostic purposes.

Generalizability

The StepOne for Parents Program was developed in primary medical care and private practice mental health care settings. The program is designed for use in private practice mental health, primary medical care, school and foster care.

Implementation Essentials

Implementation essentials include the following:

1. Parents and informants must have access to the web using a personal computer equipped with Microsoft Web Browser (6.0 or greater) and Adobe Acrobat Reader (5.0 or greater).

2. Parents must be able to read at a 7th grade reading level.
3. Parents must read an online informed consent and correctly answer questions that measure of their understanding.

Program Costs

The screening and assessment instrument is being piloted at no charge in Oregon. Mentor Research Institute is seeking opportunities to collaborate and provide community services and research that empowers families and community services.

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