

# Assessment

## The importance of complete psychosocial assessment

Adolescents undergo a period of biological, social and psychosocial development, and each of these domains impacts each other. Psychosocial areas of concern often emerge over the adolescent period (such as mental health conditions, drug use and risky sexual behaviour).

A comprehensive psychosocial assessment allows for the clinician to amass information that will provide a better understanding of the young person's situation and what their specific needs might be. By exploring each domain a clinician develops an impression of a young person's life and any risky behaviour or concerns.

A common screening tool or psychosocial framework that is commonly used is called the HEEADSSS. The HEEADSSS categories reflect the major domains of a young person's life and the risks to their health and psychosocial status.

**H.....Home**

**E .....Education and Employment**

**E .....Eating & Exercise**

**A.....Activities and peer relationships**

**D .....Drug use**

**S .....Sexuality**

**S .....Suicide, Self Harm, Depression (Mood/General Mental Health/Psychiatric symptoms)**

**S .....Safety /Spirituality**

<b>HOME</b>	Explore home situation, family life OOHC, relationships & stability. Homelessness
<b>EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT</b>	Problems at work/school. Level of connection & belonging. Unemployment
<b>EATING &amp; EXERCISE</b>	How do they look after themselves? Eating & sleeping patterns. Disordered eating.
<b>ACTIVITIES &amp; PEER R/S's</b>	Risk taking behaviours, attitudes about themselves, interpersonal relationships
<b>DRUG USE*</b>	Explore context of substance use, safety issues, dependence, family history
<b>SEXUALITY</b>	Explore knowledge, experience, orientation, sexual practices, risk taking, abuse
<b>SUICIDE</b>	Explore risk of mental health problems, coping strategies, supports
<b>SAFETY/SPIRITUALITY</b>	General health, abuse, traumatic experiences, DV , beliefs, relaxation, meaning

\* As we are a specific Drug and Alcohol Service we look at the following in detail for substance use:

- perceived reasons for use – initial and ongoing
- how and when initiated
- substances used
- mode of administration & any changes
- frequency of use
- quantity used
- periods of non-use
- physical effects requiring attention (e.g. complicated withdrawal, fitting, etc)

Within a psychosocial assessment it is also important to develop a picture of a young person's protective factors and strengths. Asking about the following enables clinicians to plan appropriate interventions aimed at reducing risk behaviours, modifying risk factors and strengthening protective factors;

- Family History
- Cultural background
- Recent life events (e.g. separation of parents, death of a relative/friend, suspension/expulsion from school, criminal charges)
- Coping skills
- Medical & psychiatric history
- Available support systems
- Personality factors

### **PRACTICE POINTS FOR CONDUCTING PSYCHOSOCIAL ASSESSMENTS**

- a) Help the young person to identify risks associated with their behaviour & to develop strategies for reducing those risks
- b) Use the findings of the assessment to identify areas for intervention and follow up
- c) Give the young person feedback about the assessment & actively involve them in developing a management plan
- d) Remember to identify what is going well for the young person & congratulate them on what they are doing well
- e) Work collaboratively with the young person to set realistic goals that fit with the young person's health concerns, developmental stage and lifestyle
- f) Where appropriate, let the young person decide the level of involvement they wish their parents/carers to have
- g) Give guidance to parents and carers on how they can support the management plan & on effective responses to their adolescents risk taking behaviour.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

- Health NSW.go.au Youth Health Resource Kit
- Klein D, Goldenring, J & Adelman WP . (2014) . HEEADSSSS 3 .0: The psychosocial interview for adolescents updated for a new century fuelled by media .
- Ted Noffs Foundation – Pre-treatment assessment tool