Screening and Assessment Tools & Best Practices for RHY Programs
Screening, Prioritization, Eligibility, & Assessment Tools

Introduction

Screening and assessment tools play a critical role in helping organizations support youth and young adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness. These tools allow service providers to identify the unique needs, strengths, and vulnerabilities of individuals in their care, ensuring that interventions and services are tailored to promote positive outcomes for youth. By utilizing reliable screening and assessment instruments, organizations can better understand the diverse challenges faced by runaway and homeless youth (RHY), including mental health, substance use, family dynamics, and housing instability. This approach empowers providers to create more effective, person-centered support systems that foster resilience and long-term stability.

Understanding Screening & Assessment Tools

Understanding organizational needs related to screening and assessment involves answering questions throughout four phases in youth and young adult (YYA) engagement. Implementing screening and assessment tools and practices ensure the complex needs of each young person are identified, and referrals are made in a timely manner.

When do we consider assessment and screening?	Why is it important now?	What are we trying to understand?
Initial Engagement *When program staff first interact with YYA*	To assess youth's eligibility for the program. May also involve screening YYA who may be at risk of homelessness.	1. Are YYA facing adversity? 2. Are YYA eligible for certain services? 3. Which YYA should be prioritized?
	To assess eligibility for services, programs must answer three questions: 1. **Who is the population of interest (e.g. pregnant and parenting youth, minors)?** Program staff should have a sense of who their population is, which may be determined by local laws, community needs, and organizational focus. Understanding the population of interest may inform the selection of specific assessments or screening protocols. 2. **What are their immediate needs?** Staff should use the initial engagement phase or the intake phase to have YYA complete assessments that would reveal their needs. Staff should then prioritize which needs their program(s) is likely to address and provide referrals within the community for needs their program is unable to address.	

		3. **How can those needs be addressed?** Staff need to be able to delineate links between stated needs and available services and determine if the program could help YYA address their needs. For YYA who are not eligible or well-suited to a program, program staff should refer them to other programs.
Intake *Once a YYA has agreed to enroll in a program*	To develop a baseline of information on which a program can track YYA's progress.	1. What are YYA's needs? 2. What are YYA's strengths? 3. What needs should the program prioritize?
Program Engagement *Throughout YYA's program enrollment*	To monitor growth and progress as they engage in the program.	1. How are YYA doing over time? 2. What areas remain of greatest need for this YYA? 3. What supports, assets, or resources have emerged?
Exit & Aftercare *Once a YYA has completed a program*	To assess key metrics that were monitored during engagement to understand progress and set aftercare goals.	1. What progress did YYA make on achieving their goals? 2. What additional needs do YYA have after the program end? 3. What aftercare goals should be set?

Screening and assessment tools should focus on **key predictors of youth homelessness**, which may illuminate challenges YYA experience before or during an experience of homelessness:

- Family conflict
- Family instability
- Child welfare &/or juvenile justice systems involvement
- Behavioral health needs
- Educational disconnection
- Human trafficking

Programs should rely on evidence-based measurement tools, those that research has shown to meet certain scientific standards. The Screening Tool database found on RHYTTAC's website offers an inventory of screening and assessment tools relevant to serving YYA, providing information and links for each tool in the database. As a reminder, when selecting tools to use, programs should select measures that are:

Tools should capture an outcome that is related to ending YYA homelessness — **Relevant**

Appropriate — Tools should be relevant and developmentally appropriate for YYA

Effective Measurement Tools

Tools should measure what they claim to measure and produce consistent results over time — **Valid & reliable**

Feasible — Tools should be brief and easy for programs to use, including no or low cost

While it is important for selected measurement tools to be relevant, valid, appropriate and feasible, programs are often challenged to find the right tool(s) to meet these conditions. Further, there are many available assessment and screening tools that measure distinct and specific outcomes, and programs may struggle to select the few that will help them best support youth and young adults in their program. Below, we discuss the importance of selecting tools that are a right fit for your program, and we offer examples of tools across several outcome areas.

Considerations for Practice

The most important considerations for practice when selecting a screening or assessment tool for each program are **fidelity** and **program/community fit**.

- **Fidelity**: Programs must first outline an assessment process before selecting an assessment tool for any of the phases of YYA engagement. Staff must establish when assessments will be completed, how they will be completed (on electronic devices or on paper), and how data from the assessments will be used for monitoring, improvement, and evaluation. Programs should identify specific roles and responsibilities of staff related to assessment and build these processes into the workstreams, ensuring they follow measurement guidance and maintain fidelity to the program's stated protocol.

- **Program/community fit**: Programs must select the tools that are the right fit for the aims of the program. Assessment tools should capture outcomes that are on the program's logic model, meaning outcomes that could realistically change because of YYA's engagement in the program (e.g., economic and educational outcomes for Transitional Living Program).

  - When determining the fit between the assessment tool and the program's intended aims, it is best practice to engage YYA in this process. They should participate in activities with staff to identify the best tools and should be invited to give feedback on both the selection of the assessment tool as well as on the process by which the assessment will be completed.

Evidence-Based Assessment Tools

Accessible online at https://resources.rhyttac.org/resources/screening-tool

Family Conflict
- Adverse Child Experiences Questionnaire
- Child and Adolescent Trauma Screen
- Family Environment Scale
- Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale
- Child and Adolescent Trauma Screen
- Childhood Trauma Questionnaire – Short Form

Substance Use
- Adolescent Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI-A2)
- Adult Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI-4)
- Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)
- Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST or NIDA-ASSIST)
- CRAFFT Screening Tool for Adolescent Substance Abuse
- Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-10)
- Fast Alcohol Screening Test (FAST)
- Global Appraisal of Individual Needs Short Screener (GAIN-SS)
- NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse) Quick Screen

Commercial Sexual Exploitation & Human Trafficking

- Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT)
- Comprehensive Human Trafficking Assessment Tool (NHTRC)
- Human Trafficking Screening Tool (HTST)
- Human Trafficking Screening Tool - Short Form (HTST-SF)
- Human Trafficking Screening Tool (HTST)
- Trafficking Victim Identification Tool (TVIT)

Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice System Involvement

There are no specific measures for capturing previous system involvement.

- Areas of inquiry:
  - Any previous involvement
  - Length of involvement
  - Type of involvement (e.g., kinship care vs. foster care; delinquency vs. dependency)

Family Instability

- Residential Timeline Follow-Back Inventory
- HMIS current housing
- Adverse Child Experiences Questionnaire
- Child and Adolescent Trauma Screen

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health

- Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II)
- Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale, Second Edition (BERS-2)
- Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)
- Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS)
- Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)
- Child and Adolescent Service Intensity Instrument (CASII)
- Children's Depression Inventory-Second Edition (CDI 2)
- Children's Functional Assessment Rating Scale (CFARS)& Functional Assessment Rating Scale (FARS)
- Crisis Assessment Tool (CAT) [Formerly Childhood Severity of Psychiatric Illness (CSPI)]
- Functional Analysis Screening Tool
- Individual Protective Factor Index
- Individual Protective Factor Index
- Kessler-6
- Mental Health Continuum - Short Form
- Mental Health Inventory (MHI)
- Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (MFQ)
- Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC)
- Outcome Rating Scale (ORS)
- Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ)
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
- Suicide Probability Scale (SPS)
- The Conner-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)
- The Treatment Outcome Package (TOP)
- Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI)

Surveys to Look to for Demographic & Other Items

- Youth Risk Behavior Survey
- Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health)
- National Survey of Children's Health
- Future of Families & Child Well-Being Study