

# Student Mental Health Screening: A Toolkit for Schools During COVID-19

## Universal Screening Recommendations

Prior to student screening, schools should develop comprehensive protocols that:

- Indicate all items that will be included in student screening tools
- Describe when and how surveys will be administered to students
- Identify the staff responsible for reviewing student responses
- Establish when and how student responses will be reviewed and interpreted
- Clarify the supports that will be activated in response to screening results, particularly for high-risk students
- Define how quickly staff must respond to varying degrees of student risk identified through screening

## Selecting Screening Items

Staff responsible for development of school screening protocols should review the item bank in this toolkit and determine which items will be used for universal student screening in their building or district. Schools may also add items not included in the item bank. All screening items should then be added to student measures, which can be distributed on paper or via survey software such as Google or Microsoft Forms, or Qualtrics.

## Free Google Forms Template / Survey Administration Tool

TRAILS offers a free Google Forms template containing all screening items, which may be customized to your local setting (including deleting items and / or adding additional items). To request a link to this template, please email [inquiries@trailstowellness.org](mailto:inquiries@trailstowellness.org) and the link will be sent along with complete instructions for use.

## Parent/Guardian Consent for School Mental Health Screening

Community support for school-based student mental health screening is often mixed. Some families may not understand the need for mental health screening or may feel it is not an appropriate role for schools to play. Copies of all screening items should be made available to parents/guardians, with adequate time for families to voice questions and concerns, or to opt their children out of screening activities.

## Possible language to include in a communication with all families

This year is unlike any before, and the health and safety of our students is our top priority. To help identify students in need of additional support services, teachers may administer brief wellness surveys to students throughout the year, in coordination with our school mental health team. Survey responses will be used to connect students with appropriate resources, including school mental health professionals (such as a school social worker or counselor). During these unprecedented times when the safety of our students is critically important, we are not requesting written parent/guardian permission for school-wide student mental health screening. Instead, we are providing you with all survey items (see attached) and allowing families to request that their child(ren) do not participate. If you do not want your child to participate in school wellness screenings, you may opt your child out by contacting the main office.

## Suggested Teacher Script for Introducing Universal Screeners

This year is very different from what we are used to and many of our friends and classmates may be having a hard time. Our school can offer different kinds of help, but we can't know how best to help, unless we know how our students are doing. This survey will ask about your health and safety. I will review your completed survey and may share your responses with our school counselor, social worker, or other staff member to help make sure all students get the support they need. You are not required to complete this survey; if there are questions you do not want to answer, you may skip them. There are no right or wrong answers and your responses will not affect your grades in any way.

## This document is for use by school staff and should not be shared with students

The Michigan Blueprint for Comprehensive Student Recovery provides guidance to schools to promote student safety and equity during COVID-19. Guidance includes a recommendation that schools “Conduct universal mental health screenings to identify students in need of supports”. This guidance is considered a High Leverage Action, but is not required. To support schools that choose to implement student mental health screening, TRAILS compiled this toolkit, covering both universal and follow-up screening options.

### FAQs and Common Concerns

Q: Should schools be using clinical assessments to diagnose mental illnesses among students without written parent/guardian consent?

A: No. This toolkit is not intended to identify the presence of any mental illness or to diagnose any health condition. The sole purpose of this screening toolkit is to provide schools with tools that may help identify students in need of additional assessment, support services, or intervention. Language that schools may use to explain screening and give families an opportunity to opt their student out, is included in the toolkit.

Q: Teachers are not mental health professionals. Should they be administering screeners to students?

A: Typically, mental health screeners should be administered by trained professionals such as social workers, counselors, or psychologists. However, in this unprecedented public health crisis, it may not be feasible for mental health professionals to conduct universal screening or review student responses efficiently. In circumstances when schools lack sufficient staff to oversee student screening, teachers may be asked to support this activity. Administrators and staff should create a protocol for any screening, review of student responses, and referral to appropriate building staff or services as needed.

Q: What if a school does not have the capacity to respond adequately to all the students who report mental health concerns, exposure to traumatic events (e.g., abuse, neglect), or risk of suicide?

A: Prior to COVID-19, most schools already struggled to manage student mental health concerns adequately, simply due to the high number of students in need and the relatively low number of mental health professionals on staff. COVID-19 has amplified this problem and also made it harder to reach students needing support. Some schools may decide this is sufficient justification not to administer universal mental health screeners to all students; other schools may elect to triage students based on severity of need identified through screening efforts. In many schools, there may be no perfect option.

Q: Is the TRAILS toolkit a validated instrument?

A: No. Some items are taken from validated instruments (see screening pages) but in cases where no adequate, published measure was identified, original items were developed by TRAILS clinical staff.

Q: Do schools need to ask all questions in the toolkit?

A: No. The toolkit provides items for schools to use at their discretion and wording is offered as a recommendation only. It is suggested that wording of validated items (e.g., PHQ2, GAD2) not be altered.

Q: What about students who don't feel safe answering these questions from home?

A: Under ideal circumstances, mental health screening should take place in a safe, comfortable, and private space. If circumstances make this impossible, schools will need to determine how to proceed. Language is included in the toolkit that staff may use to help students feel more comfortable and to clarify that it is okay to skip items. All students should understand that completion of screeners is not required.

## Universal Student Wellness Screening: Item Bank

### MIDDLE / HIGH SCHOOL

	ITEM	SCORING
Anxiety	Over the <u>last 2 weeks</u> , how often have you been bothered by feeling nervous, anxious or on edge? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not at all</li> <li>• Several days</li> <li>• More than half the days</li> <li>• Nearly every day</li> </ul>	0 1 2 3
	Over the <u>last 2 weeks</u> , how often have you been bothered by not being able to stop or control worrying? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not at all</li> <li>• Several days</li> <li>• More than half the days</li> <li>• Nearly every day</li> </ul>	0 1 2 3
		Flag if TOTAL > 2
Depression	Over the <u>last 2 weeks</u> , how often have you been bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not at all</li> <li>• Several days</li> <li>• More than half the days</li> <li>• Nearly every day</li> </ul>	0 1 2 3
	Over the <u>last 2 weeks</u> , how often have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not at all</li> <li>• Several days</li> <li>• More than half the days</li> <li>• Nearly every day</li> </ul>	0 1 2 3
		Flag if TOTAL > 2
Post-Traumatic Stress	Sometimes things happen to people that are unusually or especially frightening, horrible, or traumatic. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An earthquake or flood</li> <li>• The death of a loved one</li> <li>• A physical or sexual assault or abuse</li> <li>• A war; or seeing someone be killed or seriously injured</li> </ul> <p>Have you ever had an experience of this kind? [Y / N]            →If Y, please complete the item below            →If N, skip to the next section</p>	
	In the past month, have you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had nightmares about the event(s) or thought about the event(s) when you did not want to?</li> <li>• Tried hard not to think about the event(s) or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of the event(s)?</li> <li>• Been constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?</li> <li>• Felt numb or detached from people, activities, or your surroundings?</li> <li>• Felt guilty or unable to stop blaming yourself or others for the events(s) or any problems the event(s) may have caused?</li> <li>• None of the above</li> </ul>	Each item = 1pt. Flag if TOTAL > 2

# Universal Student Wellness Screening: Item Bank

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

### Additional instructions for elementary school teachers

Survey items should be read out loud to students while they complete the items either with pencil/paper or using an online platform. Some students may need help from an adult but should have an opportunity to respond to all survey items.

You may adapt the privacy statement from this packet's cover sheet to help students understand. The primary points to clarify are:

1. Our school cares about how students are doing physically and mentally
2. If a student is having a hard time, our school can help
3. We have to ask everyone how they're doing, in order to find out who might need help
4. You do not have to complete the survey, but if you choose to participate, try to answer honestly
5. I will be considerate of your privacy but may share your responses with school staff who are here to help
6. I can help you understand the survey questions, but your answers should be your own: if you aren't sure how to answer a question, just do your best – there are no right or wrong answers
7. If there are questions you do not want to answer, you can skip them.

	ITEM	SCORING
Anxiety	<p>Using the chart below, choose which face shows how scared or worried you have been feeling most of the time during the <u>past 2 weeks</u> (0=not at all, 10 = the most scared or worried you've ever felt)</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> </div>	Flag if > 3
Depression	<p>Using the chart below, choose which face shows how sad or mad you have been feeling most of the time during the <u>past 2 weeks</u> (0=not at all, 10 = the most mad or sad you've ever felt)</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> </div>	Flag if > 3

## Universal Student Wellness Screening: Item Bank

### HIGH SENSITIVITY ITEMS – ALL GRADE LEVELS

The following items are not part of standardized or validated measures but provide language that schools may want to use or modify to screen students for exposure to potentially traumatic events or safety risks. Prior to including these items in universal student screeners, careful consideration should be taken regarding the purpose of student screening and the capacity of school staff to respond in a timely manner to any indication of risk to a student's wellbeing. Screening items should be included only if they will either inform further mental health assessment or influence delivery of services. Many schools may not be adequately resourced to review student surveys immediately after they are completed or to connect all students to needed support services, and therefore may elect not to administer these items to all students.

Illness	Have you or a very close family member been hospitalized for severe illness in the past year?	Y / N
Loss	Has someone you care about a lot (family member, close friend) died in the past year?	Y / N
Safety	Sometimes kids and teens don't feel safe at home. This could be for many different reasons. Sometimes it is because an adult is hurting them or hurting someone else at home, or because they are being left home alone for a very long time or overnight. <u>Do you feel safe at home?</u>	Y / N
Suicide	In the past two weeks, have you had thoughts of killing yourself?  Note: You may clarify for young children if needed: In the past two weeks, have you wished you were not alive anymore? In the past two weeks, have you wished you could go to sleep and never wake up again?	Y / N
Flag if any bold responses are endorsed		

## Follow Up Student Mental Health Screening: Item Bank

The following resources are recommended to support additional, follow-up mental health assessment conducted by a trained professional for students identified through universal screening or other referral mechanisms as possibly at risk for a mental health concern. Student mental health assessment should adhere to best practices, including provision of a clear confidentiality disclaimer, support to ensure that students understand each item (especially younger students), and a comprehensive clinical interview if there is indication of safety risk (e.g., suicide, self-harm, abuse/neglect). Indication of safety risks must be addressed immediately through safety planning, referrals to crisis teams or urgent care, and/or reporting to CPS.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RESOURCES		
General Wellbeing	Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (self-report & caregiver report; grades 3-12)	<a href="https://bit.ly/2YIMI61">https://bit.ly/2YIMI61</a>
Depression	Moods and Feelings Questionnaire	<a href="https://bit.ly/3I4HSnt">https://bit.ly/3I4HSnt</a>
Anxiety	SCARED Student Self-Report	<a href="https://bit.ly/326DEmo">https://bit.ly/326DEmo</a>
PTSD	Option 1: Page 2 of Child and Adolescent Trauma Screen	<a href="https://bit.ly/3j3uY7q">https://bit.ly/3j3uY7q</a>
	Option 2: Progress monitoring Child and Adolescent Trauma Screen	<a href="https://bit.ly/2EtblGD">https://bit.ly/2EtblGD</a>
Suicide	NASP checklist for conducting virtual suicide risk assessment	<a href="https://bit.ly/3aJ1Zmt">https://bit.ly/3aJ1Zmt</a>
Safety	Follow school protocol for in-person/virtual evaluation	

HIGH SCHOOL RESOURCES		
Anxiety, Depression, or Attention Difficulties	Option 1: Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (self-report & caregiver report; grades 3-12):	<a href="https://bit.ly/2YIMI61">https://bit.ly/2YIMI61</a>
	Option 2: Pediatric Symptom Checklist-17 Suite (self-report & caregiver report):	<a href="https://bit.ly/32gbkOv">https://bit.ly/32gbkOv</a>
PTSD	Part 1: UCLA COVID-19 experiences items [first 6 items only]	<a href="https://bit.ly/3iZOxNR">https://bit.ly/3iZOxNR</a>
	Part 2: Page 2 of CATS [20 items]	<a href="https://bit.ly/3j3uY7q">https://bit.ly/3j3uY7q</a>
Suicide	Checklist for conducting virtual suicide risk assessment	<a href="https://bit.ly/3aJ1Zmt">https://bit.ly/3aJ1Zmt</a>
	Consider using a standardized screening tool:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (SSRS)</li> <li>• Ask Suicide-screening Questions (ASQ)</li> </ul>	<a href="https://bit.ly/3I92P0k">https://bit.ly/3I92P0k</a> <a href="https://bit.ly/2YQIjIE">https://bit.ly/2YQIjIE</a>
Safety	Follow school protocol for in-person/virtual evaluation	

## Assessment, Triage, and Referral Navigator

### Step 1:

Classroom teachers or school mental health professionals conduct universal student screening and review student responses

### Step 2:

Names of students needing follow-up are provided to building support teams (e.g., counseling, social work, school psychologist, etc)

### Step 3:

Building support teams meet regularly to review student lists and assign students to individual staff for follow up

### Step 4:

Support staff meet individually with students to administer additional screening measures and assess need and/or make referrals

## Student support teams make referrals as needed

### Low Risk

- Provide self-care resources
- Refer to classroom-based SEL
- Send informational materials for parent/guardian

### Moderate Risk

- Provide self-care resources
- Send informational materials for parent/guardian
- Refer to outpatient care (via student or guardian, per school protocol and parent consent status) and assist with appointment scheduling when possible
- Refer to a stress management group either within school or via a community-based or online resource

### High Risk

- Follow school risk management protocol including referral to urgent care, emergency services, crisis support, and/or CPS
- Communicate with parent/guardian unless contraindicated for safety
- Refer to outpatient care (via student or guardian, per school protocol and parent consent status) and assist with appointment scheduling when possible

### For low and moderate risk referrals

Start with local providers / county CMH first. Refer to state, national, or online resources as a backup option if local care is not accessible.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
988

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)