

Mental Health Screening in Schools: Resources for Louisiana Schools and School Boards

Mental health screening tools are used to identify individual students who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing social, emotional, and/or behavioral difficulties. A screening is not a diagnosis, but a way of catching mental health conditions early before issues escalate. General broad-spectrum screening tools look for a range of potential concerns; whereas, specific or narrowband screening tools will focus on particular behaviors or challenges. It is important to adhere to the guidance provided for each screening tool to ensure fidelity to the tool. Most screening tools may be completed by non-licensed individuals; however, some screening tools may recommend completion by a licensed mental health professional.

Below, LDH provides information on how to access: comprehensive guidance to schools to design and implement a mental health screening process; screening tool libraries, including a wide range of free broad-spectrum as well as narrow-band screening tools; and recommended free broad-spectrum screening tools for general use.

Comprehensive Guidance to Design and Implement a School-Based Mental Health Screening Process

LDH recommends that school boards consult comprehensive guidance on how to design and implement a mental health screening process in schools. While the sources below include recommended tools, they also go beyond the selection of specific tools to offer broad guidance on best practices to implement an effective mental health screening process.

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:** Ready, Set, Go, Review: Screening for Behavioral Health Risk in Schools. Rockville, MD: Office of the Chief Medical Officer, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019. [View resource.](#)
- **National Center for School Mental Health, School Mental Health Quality Guide: Screening.** NCSMH, University of Maryland School of Medicine, 2023. [View resource.](#)
- **Mental Health America: Mental Health Screening in Schools.** [View resource.](#)

Screening Tool Libraries

The following sources offer online libraries or compendia of screening and assessment tools relevant to mental health screening in schools.

- **The School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE) System** is a public-access, web-based platform that offers schools, districts, and states/territories a workspace and targeted resources to support school mental health quality improvement. SHAPE was developed by the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH), in partnership with the field, to increase the quality and sustainability of comprehensive school mental health systems. The SHAPE system's Screening and Assessment Library is a searchable library of free or low-cost screening and assessment measures related to school mental health. The library is accessible following the creation of a free SHAPE system account. [View resource.](#)
- **Mental Health, Social-Emotional, and Behavioral Screening and Evaluation Compendium (2nd Edition).** The Ohio Department of Education, Miami University, and the Ohio Mental Health Network for School Success compiled this review and comparison of no-cost screening and evaluation tools for use in school settings. [View resource.](#)
- **Mental Health America Screening** is a collection of online, free, confidential, and anonymous screening tools. After taking a mental health screen, students are given their results, are able to print or email their results, and are provided with tailored resources based on their results. [View resource.](#)

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Broad-Spectrum Screening Tools

The above-referenced guidance documents and screening tool libraries offer a wide range of different screening tools to meet a school's goals for mental health screening. LDH recommends that schools consult the above resources to make decisions on mental health screening tools in alignment with the school's specific student population, needs, and goals for mental health screening. LDH notes that comprehensive guidance, as well as screening tool libraries, typically suggest the following as options for "general," broad-spectrum mental health screening tools:

- **The Pediatric Symptoms Checklist** is a freely available 35-question screen for cognitive, emotional, and behavioral problems. Rather than being specific for a particular diagnosis or disorder, the PSC is a broad screen meant to indicate the need for additional evaluation, either by the primary care provider or by a mental health provider, and flag potential areas of concern. There is a version to be completed by the caregiver as well as a youth self-report version (Y-PSC) for youth ages 11 and older. In addition to the original 35-item parent-reported questionnaire, there are translations into more than two dozen other languages, a youth self-report, a pictorial version, and a shorter 17-item version for both parents and youth. All versions of the Pediatric Symptoms Checklist are available for download from the questionnaire's developers at Massachusetts General Hospital, Child Psychiatry Service. [View resource](#). Online versions of the Pediatric Symptoms Checklist are available from the Mental Health America Screening's library of online tools (please see above, under "Screening Tools Libraries"), and are labeled as "Parent Test: Your Child's Mental Health" (parent-report version) and "Youth Mental Health Test" (youth-report version).
- **The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)** assesses positive and negative psychological attributes across emotional, behavioral, and social dimensions. Educator/teacher and caregiver/parent versions (2-17 year olds), as well as student/self-report (11 years old and up) and informant versions (18+ years old) are available. All versions are offered with an optional impact supplement to assess functional impairment, and a follow-up version to assess change over time. The SDQ provides the most utility when information is combined from multiple informants and with the use of the impact score. [View resource](#).

Information compiled as a response to [Act 469](#) of the 2025 legislative session, which authorizes public schools to offer annual mental health screenings to students with notification and consent of the parent.