

Towards Flourishing Enhanced Mental Health Screen

What is the Enhanced Mental Health Screen?

Within public health practice, simple 1- or 2-item measures are often used to screen for the presence of mental distress. An important part of the Towards Flourishing Strategy is the Enhanced Mental Health Screen. It provides more detailed information on levels of distress, and on levels of positive mental health. After a review of the scientific literature on screening for mental distress in the post-partum period, and in consultation with public health teams and key stakeholders (e.g. clinical nurse specialists, psychologists, etc.), four measures were selected for the Towards Flourishing Enhanced Mental Health Screen.

These measures are self-administered, so parents can fill them out privately and return them in a sealed envelope. However, in the case of the Towards Flourishing Strategy, when parents ask for assistance in completing them, home visitors can offer assistance in completing the forms, or in assisting with literacy issues to the degree that is deemed acceptable to the parent, and does not compromise the integrity of the tools. The screen includes the following tools:

Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC – SF; Keyes, 2002).

This 14-item questionnaire asks about emotional, psychological and social well-being. It measures positive mental health and produces a score that indicates that a person is flourishing, moderately mentally healthy, or languishing. The Towards Flourishing Strategy represents the first use of this scale for clinical purposes – to determine areas of strength as well as areas of positive mental health that could be strengthened, and to use that information for service planning purposes.

Kessler 10 Item Psychological Distress Scale (K10; Kessler et al., 2002).

This is a brief 10-item questionnaire that measures the level of distress a person is experiencing, and assesses the severity of the symptoms reported.

Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS; Cox et al., 1987).

This screening questionnaire assesses for the presence of depressive symptoms during the post-partum period. It has been used primarily with mothers, but has also been validated for use with fathers.

Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT; Saunders et al., 1993).

This questionnaire is used to detect drinking behaviour that is considered to be above the low-risk guidelines, risky, or hazardous.

How is the Screen is Used?

Within the Towards Flourishing Strategy, the Enhanced Mental Health Screen is:

- 1) Collected by home visitors – home visitors take the screening package to parents on a regular home visit. They leave the package for parents to complete and pick it up on their next visit. In some cases the home visitor assists the parent in completing the package.
- 2) Scored and interpreted by the Mental Health Promotion Facilitator (MHPF) – The MHPF is a mental health professional who, as part of the Toward Flourishing Strategy, supports the public health teams in numerous ways. One of these supports is to score the screening measures, complete a Summary Feedback Form with the screening results, and provide an interpretation of the scores, along with some recommendations according to the needs demonstrated by the parent's

screening scores.

- 3) Used by the public health team for service planning – The MHPF provides the screening summary form with interpretation and recommendations to the public health team (the public health nurse and home visitor). When a parent's scores suggest that there is unmet need around mental health issues, the MHPF and the public health staff schedule a consultation meeting to create a plan for tailoring the appropriate services and referrals for the parent. This includes considering specific sections of the Towards Flourishing curriculum that might be most useful, identifying community supports or educational information that might benefit the parent, and facilitating connections to mental health supports and referral to appropriate professionals or agencies where needed.

At the outset, there was some concern among home visitors and public health nurses that asking parents to respond to questions about their mental health would "open a can of worms". Some thought that the screens would bring up issues that home visitors were not prepared to deal with, or that parents would not want to respond to these kinds of questions because they would find them too personal or invasive. In interviews with mothers and staff, we asked about the screening process and found that overall, it was a positive experience.

Women appreciated the opportunity to focus on, and talk about mental health. While the screens did sometimes reveal struggles that the home visitors were not aware of, this was helpful in planning services and, because of the MHPF support, was not overwhelming to the home visitor. In other instances, the screens affirmed what the

home visitor and the public health nurse had already observed about a parent's struggles and provided them with some specific feedback to discuss with the parent, or to use for planning purposes.

Some parents did have concerns about answering questions about their mental health, fearing that their ability to parent their children would be questioned if they acknowledged certain struggles. All parents have the option of not answering questions that they are uncomfortable with, and parents are reminded that the information was only being used to assist in planning supports and services for them, and for research purposes. It is important though, to reflect on the judgment and stigma that some parents anticipated in discussing their mental health, and to consider the work that remains to be done in reducing these fears and normalizing the experience of symptoms of mental illness, as well as the process of asking for, and receiving help and support for those struggles.

References:

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