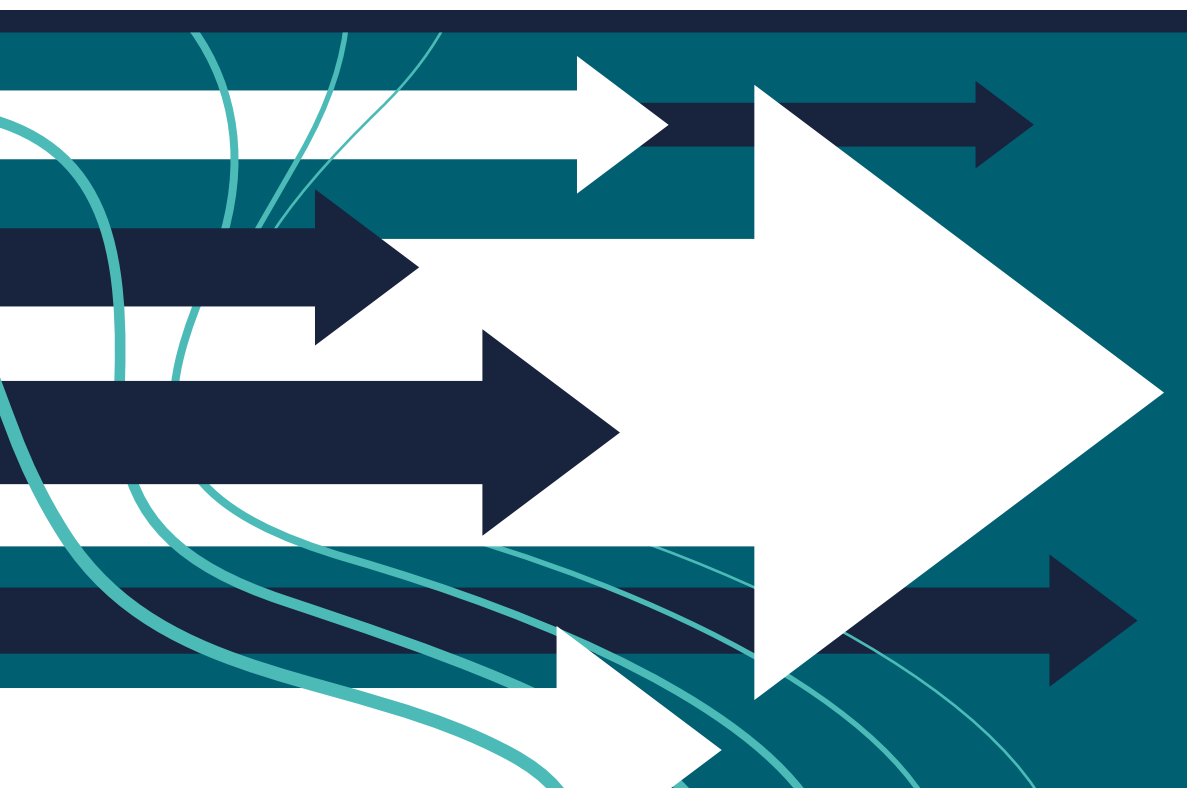


Drug and Alcohol Screening Tool for young people





**Somerset aims to deliver
services to all young people
who are at risk of or
experiencing problems with
drugs and alcohol.**

What is screening?

Screening is a common process used in health and social care. Screening is a relatively short and simple process that can be done by staff who are not drug and alcohol specialists.

Why do we want workers who don't specialise in drugs and alcohol to screen young people?

Everyone's involvement in responding to drug and alcohol use is vital:

- To be able to identify the early signs of drug and alcohol use in young people
- To be able to discuss drug and alcohol use with the young people you work with
- To be proactive and not wait for problems to become too big
- To know how to respond if a young person you work with needs specialist help

Myth - I am not an expert on drugs/alcohol so I can't talk about them with young people.

Reality - You probably know the basics already. Not being an expert yourself can be a good place to start.

Why are some young people more at risk?

National research indicates that the risk of problematic drug and alcohol misuse is particularly high for vulnerable young people. It is useful to know if the young person you are seeing is in a more vulnerable group, for example:

- Young people who are, or have been, looked after by local authorities
- Young people who have family members who use drugs and alcohol
- Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Young people from some ethnic minority groups
- Young people with behavioural and/or mental health problems
- Young people excluded from school or truanting
- Young people involved with the criminal justice system

Not all young people from vulnerable groups will develop drug and alcohol use problems at all. This is due to a number of protective factors, for example:

- The young person has a positive temperament
- They have a supportive family environment
- They are linked into a good social support system
- They experience a caring relationship with at least one adult
- They are in education, training or employment
- They are able to learn from difficult experiences and are able to resist pressure

As part of the screening tool there is a prompt sheet with a list of questions to go through highlighting risk/vulnerability and protective/resilience factors. **This does not need to be completed with the young person.**

Use of language:

Language is so important to make sure people feel empowered and not judged. Some words and phrases around drugs and alcohol can feel really outdated and have an impact on how you feel about yourself – even if no malice is intended.

Drug and alcohol misuse and abuse – Misuse and abuse are loaded with judgement and have negative connotations. We should promote a nonjudgemental approach towards people and our language should reflect that.

Preferred language: Substance use / Person who uses drugs and/or alcohol.

When should you use the screening tool?

Here are some examples of when you should definitely screen a young person for drug and alcohol use:

- If a young person asks you for some advice or information about drugs, alcohol, glues, gases or aerosols.
- If a young person tells you they are using drugs and alcohol, or talks a lot about the subject.
- After a drug and alcohol use related incident occurs, like finding drugs on someone, or someone being intoxicated. Make sure you don't confuse the screening process with the disciplinary action you take in response to any incidents though.
- When you work with any child or young person who fits into any of the above mentioned vulnerable groups, whether or not there are any immediate concerns about drug and alcohol use. This screening might be done as part of an initial assessment, or it might be better to wait until you have developed more of a trusting relationship with the young person.
- When drug and alcohol use in the child/young person's household has been identified.
- Where your professional judgement leads you to have any other concerns that the young person might be involved in drug and alcohol use. For example, a parent or a friend might express concerns, or the young person might have friends that you know use drugs or drink a lot.
- As part of your organisations policy on safeguarding young people.

You should definitely use the drug and alcohol screening tool if a young person:

- Asks for advice or information
- Tells you they are using drugs or alcohol
- Is involved in a drug or alcohol related incident
- Fits into one of the vulnerable groups described on page 2
- Or if there are safeguarding concerns

Who should carry out the screen?

The screening tool is suitable to be used by all young people's workers. You do not have to be a drug and alcohol specialist to use it. However, before you start it might be useful to check:

- Am I the right person to do the screening?
- How well do I know the young person?
- Are there other professionals the young person is in contact with who are in a better position to carry out the screen?
- How confident do I feel?
- How can I help to educate the young person about drugs and alcohol?

The next section will help you to prepare and feel confident about using the screening tool.

Myth - You cannot do anything until a young person discloses they have a drug and alcohol misuse problem.

Reality - Most young people will not acknowledge, or even know they have problems with using alcohol or drugs. You can take action to reduce or prevent harm and find solutions to problems of housing, physical health, mental health, education and employment etc. Along the way you might be able to point out how the drug and alcohol use is contributing to some of the young person's problems.

Screening - how do I start?

You do not need in depth, specialised knowledge about drug and alcohol use, you just need to be able to ask a few simple questions and be able to listen.

Preparation

- Pick a time that is appropriate.
- Make sure you have enough time to complete the screen. It could take anything from 5 minutes upwards depending on the needs of the young person.
- Use a private location wherever possible.
- Get hold of some leaflets or information beforehand to get the conversation started, or to give out as part of the session.

www.talktofrank.com

The national drug and alcohol website where anyone can access confidential information and advice on drugs and alcohol. You can introduce the site to young people for them to find out more information themselves and you can use it as a resource for yourself.

Remember:

Screening is not a substitute for your professional judgement.

Consideration

- Ask their permission, get their consent – this will make them much more receptive to answering the questions. You shouldn't try to force a young person to engage with the process (see p16 - consent).
- Young people may need some reassurance “You're not in trouble”...”I want to make sure you're ok”...”I want to make sure you have all the information you need”.
- Explain about confidentiality right from the start and make sure you are clear about your own agency policy (see p14 - confidentiality).
- Be sensitive to the young person's culture, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and age.
- The drug and alcohol use should always be looked at in the context of other things known about the child or young person. If you don't know whether the young person has risk factors in their life; you can use the risk factor prompt sheet to explore these.
- Consider the risk factors. You may know that the young person has several risk factors already so you do not need to go through the questions. Do they also have protective factors?
- You can go through the risk and protective factors beforehand if you know the young person well to check if any apply to them. You do not need to go through each question with them. If you do go through the risk and protective factors with the young person, this will need to be done sensitively.

Introducing the tool

- Make sure you let the young person know the purpose of the screening:
 - To help find out if there is any information we can give you that would be useful. To help you look at what is going on for yourself or those close to you.
 - To help you find the right person to talk to about anything you might be worried or unhappy about around drugs and alcohol.
- Explain that the reason for screening is to find out whether the young person might need any help, not to discipline the young person.
- You will need to explain about your agency's confidentiality policy.
- The first few questions of the Pre-Screen section of the Screening tool, are lead in ones for a gentle introduction to the subject. For example: Has anyone ever talked to you about alcohol or drugs before? or What do you think about alcohol or drugs?
- The next three lead in questions have yes/no answers. If the young person answers 'No' to all of them, there is no need to continue with the screening tool.

Going through the screening tool

- Complete the screening tool collaboratively with the young person. Be prepared to prompt or explain anything.
- The screening tool is designed to be effective even if just completed in a 'tick box' way. However, you will get a better result if you are able to talk around the questions.
- Total the score on the screening tool.
- Explain the risk levels to the young person and follow the guidance in 'Next steps after using the screening tool'.
- If you are unclear about the results of the screen and how to respond, speak to a worker. This could be someone in your own organisation or someone providing targeted services for young people in Somerset. Some young people may want you as the worker they know and trust to give them information, so getting advice from a worker who has experience in working with young people around substance misuse will support you to help the young person. You could arrange to meet the worker with the young person.

- If the young person scores as high risk – supporting the young person to see a worker providing targeted services for young people, or a specialist substance misuse worker could be an essential part of your role. It could still be very important for you to continue working with that young person while they are receiving a substance misuse intervention. It is important to keep the young person engaged and encourage easy access to services. You could go with the young person to a more specialist service; or it may be possible for a more specialist worker to come to the young person.
- A form is provided for referral, with this screening tool.

Myth - You can't help a person with a drug or alcohol problem until they have hit 'rock bottom' and want to change.

Reality - Simply not true: most people with drug or alcohol problems sort them out long before they become really serious, often after encouragement and support from friends, family or professional help.

Somerset Drug & Alcohol Service's (SDAS) Young People's team

Somerset Drug & Alcohol Service's Young People's team provide advice and information on drugs and alcohol brief interventions to support and help young people identify and make changes in their use of drugs/alcohol and find alternatives.

The service provide a dedicated specialist service for young people up to the age of 18 or 25 for care leavers.

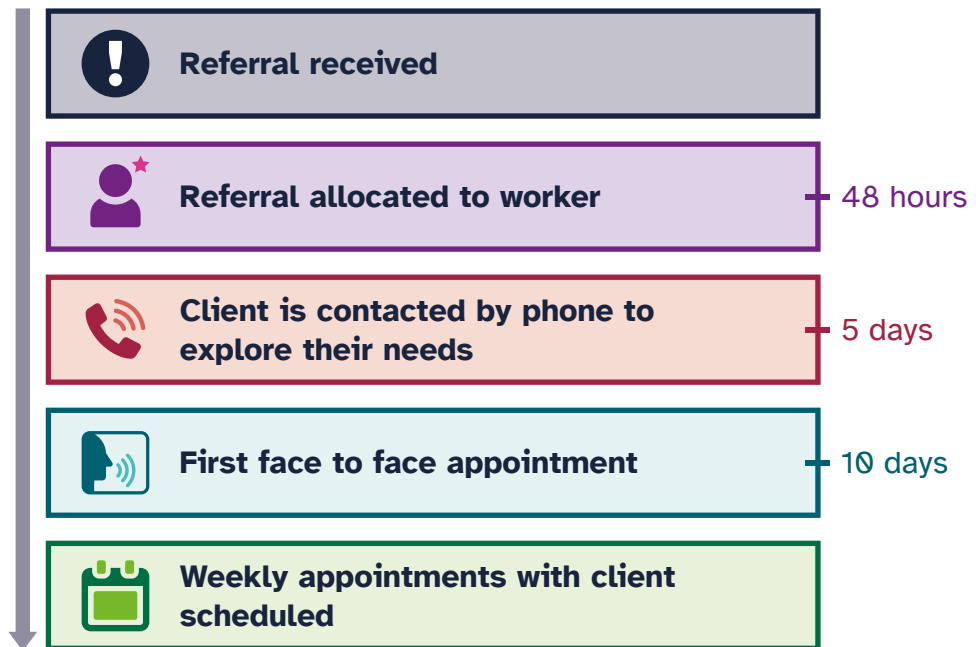
Support is available, tailored and age-appropriate; based on young people's needs and delivered through face-to-face/remote/blended methods, recognising young people's choice and preference. SDAS also provides support to those affected by others substance use.

Offer:

- A non-judgmental service
- 1:1 sessions
- Outreach service - meet where it suits the individual
- Space to talk things through
- Up to date and factual information and advice
- Support to look at drug or alcohol use, how much and how often
- Help with deciding what changes to make
- Access and support to other services
- A support plan that looks at all of needs
- Support for those living with or affected by a family members drug or alcohol use

What Happens when you make a Referral to Somerset Drug & Alcohol Service (SDAS) for a Young Person?

Referral timeline



A minimum of 3 attempts will be made to contact the YP – If multiple attempts fail, the service will explore other contact options.

During the first contact by telephone, the YP worker will:

- Explain the service
- Check the young person is happy with the referral
- Discuss confidentiality
- Discuss where the young person would like to meet

Confidentiality

All services should have clear policies on confidentiality, consent and information sharing which are agreed with the local safeguarding children board and partner agencies.

All workers need to be able to explain these to a young person in an understandable, relevant, honest and engaging way.

Make sure you know what your agency's confidentiality policy is and make sure the young person is aware of it.

The boundaries of confidentiality should be explained, in terms of the limits with regard to balancing confidentiality and the agencies' duty to safeguard the well being of the young person and others.

Involving parents and carers:

- All children and young people should be encouraged, wherever possible, to discuss their drug and alcohol use with their parents and carers. Evidence suggests that being able to discuss issues of drug and alcohol use openly with their parents is a protective factor for later drug and alcohol misuse.
- Where there is serious drug and alcohol use and particularly if the young person lives with parents, outcomes are considerably improved where the parents can be constructively involved in any support and treatment plan.
- Drug and alcohol using young people can create many tensions and difficulties for their families. Parents, carers and siblings may need support in their own right. Find out what's available for carers and families at:
www.turning-point.co.uk/services/somerset
and see the Online support for family and friends section.

Consent

You will need to have the agreement of the young person to go through the screening questions with them. You need their cooperation and engagement for the process to work. You should have their agreement before you refer them for any specialist help.

You should also, as good practice, make sure that when you give any advice or information to young people, that you check the young person's understanding of this and make sure the information you give is appropriate to their age and level of maturity.

NHS guidelines (December 2022) clearly define consent to treatment for children and young people.

“Like adults, young people (aged 16 or 17) are presumed to have sufficient capacity to decide on their own medical treatment, unless there's significant evidence to suggest otherwise.”

“Children under the age of 16 can consent to their own treatment if they're believed to have enough intelligence, competence and understanding to fully appreciate what's involved in their treatment. This is known as being Gillick competent.”

Therefore, advice, information, screening and referral to an appropriate agency does not require a formal consideration of consent to treatment.

Carrying out this screening tool and delivering information, advice, education or support work does not need informed consent beforehand. Before any treatment intervention can be delivered, informed consent to that intervention must be gained.

Examples of interventions that do not need informed consent:

- Advice and information such as that contained within widely available leaflets and other public information sources on substance use
- Encouragement to attend appointments and progress with the assessment and treatment plan
- Advice on risks and harms of substance misuse that allow young people to reflect on their substance use.

Examples of interventions that do need informed consent:

- Advice and information about safe injecting techniques and access to injecting equipment
- The use of counselling, regardless of the technique, conducted over a series of planned sessions
- Any invasive procedure that could be, without informed consent, described as actual bodily harm. Examples include prescribing of medicines, massage methods, acupuncture and removal of clothes to inspect injecting sites.

Young people's drug and alcohol treatment



Somerset Drug & Alcohol Service

For details of the drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services for young people see:

www.turning-point.co.uk/services/somerset

If you make a referral to a drug and alcohol treatment service, you need the young person to consent to this.

If the young person does not consent to the referral and you are concerned for their safety, continue to use your skills to encourage the young person to agree to a referral. Discuss with your manager as you may need to consider this as a safeguarding issue.

Ensure you offer them a number of access options and re-emphasise the importance of their safety and wellbeing. If the young person continues to refuse a referral and you and your manager assess them at considerable risk, the wishes of the young person may have to be overridden and it is important you contact a member of staff in a targeted service working with young people and / or staff in the Somerset drug and alcohol service.

With the agreement from the young person, it is good practice to inform the person with parental responsibility of the referral as long as this would not cause any harm to the young person (see involving parents and carers page 15). If they are under 16 you almost certainly need to inform the person with parental responsibility unless you can prove, with guidance from your manager and the drug and alcohol service, that the young person is competent enough to attend without parental involvement and if the young person states clearly why it would not be beneficial for their parent or carer to know.

The drug and alcohol service will carry out a comprehensive assessment with the young person and the involvement of the young person's parent or carer will be explored further as part of this.

SDAS Young People and Family Team:

 **0300 303 8788** (24 hour help and referral line)

 **www.turning-point.co.uk/support-we-offer/young-people**



To download and print additional forms, scan the QR code or visit:

www.cypsomersethealth.org/children_and_young_people__substance_use_screening_tool