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## ***Depressive Symptoms among Cuyahoga County Adolescents: Recommendations from the Cuyahoga County YRBS Advisory Committee (2018)***

*The following recommendations are presented for consideration by the Youth Risk Behavior Survey Advisory Committee in light of the most recent YRBS data released concerning the emotional health of Cuyahoga County adolescents. We urge adolescent behavioral health providers, teachers, school administrators, families, policymakers and other concerned community stakeholders and advocates to join together to address the critical emotional health needs of our young people.*

*As a starting point, we recommend:*

- 1) Develop a protocol for schools and mental health agencies that include a comprehensive referral pathways plan for screening, early intervention and linkage and/or referral to appropriate mental health services.
- 2) Increase identification of depression, trauma exposure and other mental health issues among Cuyahoga County adolescents by promoting universal depression screening\* through the school system and school-based clinics, pediatric/family medicine offices, and community clinics, among others.
- 3) Implement an easy to administer pre-screening question as a "first-step" approach for use in school-based and after school environments to identify whether further screening should be conducted to evaluate for depression.

The Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2) suggests a 2-item question with Likert scale response options (0=Not at all, 1=several days, 2=more than half the days, 3=nearly every day): "Over the past 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems? (1) Little interest or pleasure in doing things (2) Feeling down, depressed or hopeless".

Another approach could be to incorporate several screening elements into a single yes or no question, such as: "In the past 2 weeks have you felt down, depressed, hopeless or had little interest/pleasure in doing things for so long that it made it difficult for you to do basic tasks, like pay attention in school, eating or sleeping well, etc.?"

- 4) Provide training to school and community stakeholders for depression screening, identification and referral of children and adolescents.

- 5) Develop a universal child and adolescent mental health referral form and protocol for referring providers.
- 6) Enhance access to culturally appropriate mental health services by developing a network of culturally sensitive child and adolescent mental health providers with a capacity for rapid response to referrals (within 72 hours) and ability to offer an appointment within 1-2 weeks.
- 7) Develop and disseminate, with input from community stakeholders, culturally sensitive educational materials on mental health for adolescents, providers, first responders, and the community.
- 8) Promote evidence-based behavioral (mental health and substance abuse) prevention and trauma-informed care curricula for community and school-based implementation.
- 9) School districts should continue to develop and implement 'Response to Intervention' (RTI, a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs) and 'School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports' (SWPBIS, that integrate mental health services through the application of a behaviorally based systems approach on a tiered continuum from universal to more focused and targeted interventions) to ensure positive school environments and appropriate individual supports and services.
- 10) School-based mental health programs and social-emotional development strategies, as well as proactive coordination between child and adolescent community-based mental health providers and schools, should be strengthened.

\* A comprehensive resource of freely accessible no-cost mental health, social-emotional, and behavioral screening tools for children and adolescents prepared by the Center for School-Based Mental Health Programs at Miami University can be found at:

[http://sst3pbisleadershipnetwork.weebly.com/uploads/2/7/3/2/27328863/mental\\_health\\_screening\\_and\\_evaluation\\_compendium.pdf](http://sst3pbisleadershipnetwork.weebly.com/uploads/2/7/3/2/27328863/mental_health_screening_and_evaluation_compendium.pdf)

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