

# The Art of Screening: Tips for Screening with Clients

## Screening as engagement

The art of screening is to gather the needed information while building rapport and engagement. Screening is often done on “first contact” with clients. This first contact is crucial in determining whether a client will continue with treatment. Over half of people who present with an addiction or mental health issue do not continue with treatment after their first experience with the system.

Remember that screening is a process that leads to something else. The something else can include:

- Assessment and treatment planning
- A brief intervention
- A supportive referral to an appropriate service

Whether clients will continue on to the something else is influenced by the quality of their early experiences with the treatment system.

## What is engagement?

Engagement is the degree to which clients are involved and participating in treatment. This is directly related to the quality of the relationships clients have with the staff they encounter. Whether it is a brief intake encounter or a long-term counselling relationship, the quality of the relationship has a huge impact on outcomes. Research has found that the client-clinician relationship (also called the alliance) accounts for 46% to 69% of treatment outcome.

## Elements of a good relationship

The key to building engagement during screening is to incorporate as many of these elements as possible:

- The quality of the alliance
- Empathy
- The collection of client feedback
- Goal consensus
- Collaboration
- Positive regard

## Tips for introducing the screen

When clients are asked what they think of screening, most are fine with the questions themselves. However, the experience can be very different depending on the approach of the clinician:

- Ask the client for permission to ask the screening questions.
- Explain We ask these questions of everyone.
- Remind the client about confidentiality.
- Explain the reasons for asking the questions: to gain complete information about their situation and to better match them with the most helpful services.
- Explain how much time it will take.
- Explain the outcomes of the screen, including scoring, further assessment, referral, etc.
- Develop a visual guide to treatment to show clients how screening fits into the entire treatment process.

## Tips for engaging while screening

- Accept clients where they are. Ask for permission to ask questions. This is a nice way to communicate acceptance that they might not be ready.
- Find a point of quick connection. Even in brief encounters, finding something you can connect about with each client can help build engagement. This could include thanking the person for coming to see you, affirming that it takes courage and determination, having a brief chat about the person’s interests, or placing photos/posters in your office to generate interest and comments.
- Show clients the screen. If possible, sit beside them and let them see it while you fill it out. Or let them write the answers. This communicates partnership, involves clients in a more active role, and reduces their fear of What are you writing about me?
- Discuss and explain the results of the screen. This can build engagement as clients discuss what the screening means for them, and encourages participation in deciding the next steps in the treatment process.
- Encourage discussion by asking open-ended questions. Be open to answering questions.

## Suggested activity

Listed below are challenges related to screening individuals as part of your intake process. Brainstorm with coworkers ways to address each challenge in your setting.

Challenge	Possible solutions
Lack of time	
People vs. paper	
I'm not going to be their counsellor	
Too many screens	
Literacy issues if the screen is self-administered	