

## **Addressing Adolescent Substance Use** Opportunities for Providers in Clinical Practice

As the human and financial costs related to substance use disorder continue to soar, providers need comprehensive models of care to adequately confront substance use in their practice. [Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment](#) (SBIRT) is an evidence-based method for approaching substance use across a variety of community-based settings. This early intervention approach targets patients with nondependent use disorder to prevent the development of more severe use down the road. SBIRT has been shown to [decrease severity](#) of substance use, [reduce trauma risk](#), and [lower costs](#) related to substance use disorder. SBIRT reimbursement is crucial to its widespread use, and currently reimbursement is available through Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial insurance.

### **Asking the Right Questions: Evidence-Based Screening Tools and Resources**

#### *What is screening?*

A typical screening consists of 1-3 questions for initial assessment. In cases of a positive initial screen, an additional set of questions can evaluate alcohol and drug use more thoroughly. A number of screening tools and risk assessment instruments can be easily administered in any clinical setting by a wide range of health care providers. Not only are these tools easy to administer, but they also fit in well with—and do not disrupt—existing workflow.

Adolescents report that providers do not ask about substance use, yet they also report a willingness to discuss this with their providers if asked in a nonjudgmental way. The screening tools can be used to begin the discussion with the adolescent, but would caution that this be done in private.

#### *Evidence-Based Screening Tools and Resource Materials*

- [National Institute on Drug Abuse: Drug and Alcohol Use](#)
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse: Adolescent Substance Use](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Mental Health and Substance Use](#)
- [Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine: Adolescent Drug and Alcohol Use](#)

### **A Targeted Approach: Strategies for Early Intervention**

#### *What is a brief intervention?*

The complexity of substance use disorder requires a multi-faceted treatment approach that no one provider can handle alone. A brief intervention is a

time-limited, initial discussion about substance use. This introductory conversation offers a patient-centered approach to behavior change that relies on increased patient insight and awareness. Even a 5-10 minute discussion provides the opportunity for personalized feedback to educate and inform the patient on his or her substance use.

*What should I discuss during the brief intervention?*

Because the brief intervention is designed to be a personalized conversation, topics discussed will depend on severity of use and risk for adverse effects. Providers can utilize [motivational interviewing](#) to approach these conversations in a way that relies heavily on individual patient motivations to promote behavior change. Potential topics could include interactions with medications or other health problems, interference of personal life because of substance use, or goal setting to reduce use. In all cases, providers should share risk assessment scores and offer respectful resources and support to promote decreased substance use.

### **Bridging the Gap to Care: Referral to Treatment**

*What comes next?*

When necessary, advancing the course of care by referral to a higher level of treatment is often the next and final step for the majority of providers. In this role, providers can help patients navigate specialized treatment in selecting specialty care facilities for substance use treatment and recovery. While this hand-off is the final step in this initial intervention to address substance use disorder, continuing to coordinate necessary care and follow-up support will be critical throughout the treatment and recovery process.