



Screening in
High Schools to
Identify,
Evaluate and
Lower
Depression

SHIELD Study

**TO ACCESS RESOURCES
ON DEPRESSION FOR
A FRIEND, FAMILY
MEMBER OR YOURSELF,
[CLICK HERE.](#)**



Understanding Teen Depression Through Focus Groups

SHIELD
Study

Focus
Groups

Results

Impact

Depression among teens is becoming more common. Between 2008–2018 its incidence increased in the U.S. by over 70%. Many teens do not get help for depression. Understanding how to recognize the signs and overcome stigma can help. While people are more open to discussing mental health issues now than in the past, our willingness to discuss teen depression does not match its prevalence and seriousness.

The Penn State SHIELD study aimed to compare the effectiveness of screening all high school students for depressive symptoms versus the current school process of identifying at-risk students based on concerning behavior. The hope was that screening all students, regardless of obvious symptoms, would lead to better, earlier identification of students in need and greater success with treatment initiation for these students.

The SHIELD study was conducted as a randomized clinical trial (RCT), in which participants were randomly assigned to an “intervention group” or a “comparison group.” This design allows researchers to test the benefits (or harms) of the intervention, in this case, depression symptom screening. Although valuable information is gained from a well-designed RCT, it does not allow space for participants to share their beliefs, experiences or opinions on the study topic.

In order for the study team to gain a deeper understanding of how the participating school communities viewed and understood depression and mental health, the team used qualitative research techniques. Qualitative research involves the researcher and participants engaging in some type of discussion (i.e., interview or focus group). While questions are prepared in advance, there is greater flexibility to incorporate new perspectives and varying opinions.

Read the full published journal article: Stuckey H, Hivner EA, Kraschnewski JL, Molinari AM, Costigan HJ, Sekhar DL. “I wouldn’t even know what to do,” *Adolescent and Parent Perspectives on Identifying, Understanding, and Seeking Help for Adolescent Depression* [published online ahead of print, 2021 Apr 28]. *Psychiatr Q.* 2021;10.1007/s11126-021-09918-7. doi:10.1007/s11126-021-09918-7

Authors: Renee Urick, Francesca Pileggi and Marisa Vicere

Editors: Beth Sprentz, Dr. Mark Widome, My Mental Health Matters Club (State College Area School District), SHIELD research team members.

Research reported in this publication was funded through a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute® (PCORI®) Award (AD-2017C3-8752) totaling \$2.03M. The views presented in this publication are solely the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute® (PCORI®), its Board of Governors or Methodology Committee.

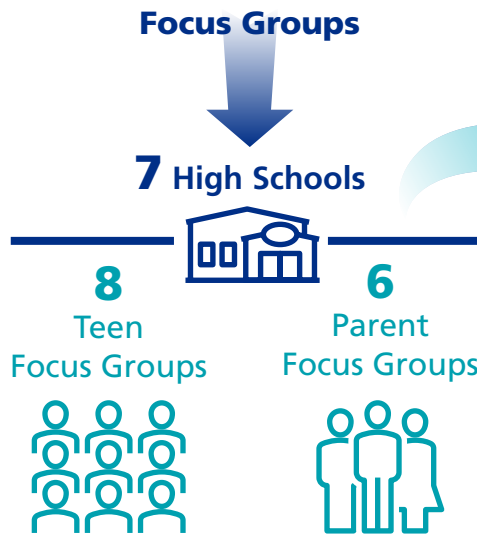
Focus Groups



Focus groups involve a group of individuals discussing a topic. Discussions are led by a facilitator to keep the conversation on track.



A total of 36 parents and 52 students participated in the focus groups and significantly guided the research team. (See Figure below.)



The research team:

1. Facilitated, recorded and transcribed the 60-minute discussions.
2. Analyzed the transcriptions.
3. Systematically categorized, interpreted and reported important words and phrases.
4. Identified major themes.

Figure: Focus Group and Analysis Process

Results



Two major themes emerged from the focus groups:

1. **Parents and teens believed the majority of teens would seek help for depression from friends first.**
2. **Parents and teens are unsure about where to seek help.**

"...some people... [are] scared of how their parents... [will] react if it's something bad, depending on the situation. They're scared to be judged. Maybe their parents might not understand. They just might not feel completely comfortable... talking to their parents about those types of things." – student focus group participant

When asked about schools resources for mental health: "Yeah. I'd say to be honest with you, I don't know." – parent focus group participant

"...so I've been here all my life. I went to school in this area... I don't know about the [mental health] programs that are offered in the high school." – parent focus group participant

"...it's easier to talk to your friends... because they can relate to it [stress] and they're able to help you through it... better than your parents might be able to." – student focus group participant

In regards to where to seek help, adolescents were clear that they would not seek help from their doctor. "Who wants to discuss stuff with their doctor? That's weird."...student focus group participant

Impact



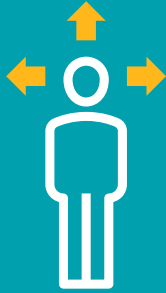
The study team used focus group feedback to:

- plan for logistical considerations during the screening,
- partner with schools to implement community events to promote mental health literacy and
- develop stronger school and community relationships.



Mental Health Resources

Here are some steps that you can take to better understand depression:
(Click the links below to learn more.)



1. Educate yourself.

- [What is depression?](#)
- [What do I say to someone with depression?](#)
- [How to I help someone with depression?](#)

2. Be aware of available resources.

- [The Trevor Project](#): Mental health resources that focus on supporting the LGBTQ community.
- [Prevent Suicide PA](#): Resources, education and events aimed to prevent suicide and reduce stigma.
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#): General suicide prevention resources, information and help.
- [Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance](#): Information, trainings, events and information to identify your regional coordinator.
- [Jana Marie Foundation](#): Virtual and online trainings and events that promote mental well-being.
- [Penn State PRO Wellness MDD Awareness Video](#): The SHIELD study team designed a short video clip in conjunction with the study's stakeholder advisory board to empower adolescents to help peers with depression.

3. Participate in trainings.

- [Mental Health First Aid](#): Enroll in a course to gain the necessary skills to provide help to others when experiencing mental health challenges or substance use problems.
- [Questions, Persuade, Refer \(QPR\) Training](#): Learn the steps to prevent suicide through your words.