



*NAMI Supports Screening Children and Adolescents
For Mental Illnesses in Child Serving Agencies and Settings*

NAMI strongly supports Goal 4 of President Bush's New Freedom Commission report on mental health calling for early mental health screening. In this nation, approximately 10% of children and adolescents have mental illnesses, yet only 20% of them are identified and receiving services. Mental health screening is essential to address this gross under-identification of youth with mental illnesses. Research and science are solidly on our side. Research shows that early identification and intervention leads to better outcomes and may lessen long-term disability. It also avoids years of unnecessary suffering.

Screening for the health and well being of children is a well-established practice in this country. We screen for vision, lead poisoning, hearing, scoliosis, tuberculosis, appropriate developmental progress and more. Campaigns of misinformation, stigma and fear must not stand in the way of appropriately identifying youth with mental illnesses and intervening with appropriate services.

NAMI calls on federal, state and local leaders to immediately take affirmative steps to implement mental health screening for children and adolescents, **with the following guidelines and protections in place:**

1. Mental health screening must be voluntary and available for all children.
2. Parental consent or consent from legally authorized surrogates must be obtained for all mental health screening.
3. Mental health screening must not be used in a discriminatory manner.
4. All individuals administering mental health screening must be appropriately trained and qualified both to administer the screening instruments and to interpret the results.
5. All information related to screening must be kept strictly confidential and the privacy of youth and their families must be protected.
6. All mental health screening instruments must be shown to be reliable and effective in identifying children in need of further assessment.
7. Validity studies must be done to ensure that screening instruments are culturally and linguistically appropriate and administered in a manner appropriate for culturally and racially diverse communities.
8. Schools must never use mental health screening results or the refusal to consent to screening as a basis for any adverse action against a child or family.
9. All children identified through screening as potentially requiring mental health services must be referred for an immediate comprehensive mental health evaluation by a qualified and trained professional.
10. Children ultimately identified as requiring mental health services must be immediately linked to and offered appropriate treatment and services and provided with comprehensive information about treatment options, the mental health treatment system, and family and community support resources.

NAMI calls on national leaders to build a comprehensive children's mental health system of care for the millions of children and adolescents who require these services and their families. These families deserve nothing less.