

H.E.A.D.S.S - A PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVIEW FOR ADOLESCENTS

Introduction

Adolescence is the developmental phase between childhood and adulthood and is marked by rapid changes in physical, psychosocial, sexual, moral and cognitive growth. Dr. Cohen refined a system for organizing the developmentally-appropriate psychosocial history that was developed in 1972 by Dr. Harvey Berman.

The approach is known as the acronym **HEADSS** (**H**ome, **E**ducation /employment, **A**ctivities, **D**rugs, **S**exuality, and **S**uicide/depression). It was subsequently expanded to **HEADSSS** by adding **E**ating and **S**afety.

Preparing for the Interview

Parents, family members, or other adults should not be present during the HEADSS assessment unless the adolescent specifically gives permission, or asks for it.

Starting the interview

1. Introduction

Set the stage by introducing yourself to the adolescent and parents. If the parents are present before the interview, always introduce yourself to the adolescent first.

2. Understanding of Confidentiality

Ask the adolescent to explain their understanding of confidentiality.

3. Confidentiality Statement

After the adolescent has given you his/her views, acknowledge his/her response and add your views accordingly (confidentiality statement), based on the particular situation.

Table 1. Questions for the HEADSS interview

Item	Examples of Questions
H: <i>Home</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who lives at home with you? Where do you live? Do you have your own room? • how many brothers and sisters do you have and what are their ages? • are your brothers and sisters healthy? • are your parents healthy? What do your parents do for a living? • how do you get along with your parents, your siblings? • is there anything you would like to change about your family?
E: <i>Education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • which school do you go to? What grade are you in? Any recent changes in schools? • what do you like best and least about school? Favourite subjects? Worst subjects? • what were your most recent grades? Are these the same or different from the past? • how much school did you miss last/this year? Do you skip classes? Have you ever been suspended? • what do you want to do when you finish school? • how do you get along with teachers? How do you get along with your peers? • inquire about "bullying".
<i>Employment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are you doing any full time or part time job?
<i>Eating</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what do you like and not like about your body? • has there been any recent change in your weight? • have you dieted in the last one year? How? How often? • how much exercise do you get on an average day? Week? • do you worry about your weight? How often? • does it ever seem as though your eating is out of control? • have you ever made yourself throw up on purpose to control your weight?

Table 1. Questions for the HEADSS interview (continued)

Item	Examples of Questions
A: <i>Activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are most of your friends from school or somewhere else? Are they the same age as you? • do you hang out with mainly people of your same sex or a mixed crowd? • do you have a lot of friends? • do you see your friends at school and on weekends, too? • do you do any regular sport or exercise? Hobbies or interests? • how much TV do you watch? What are your favourite shows? • have you ever been involved with the police? Do you belong to a group/gang?
D: <i>Drugs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when you go out with your friends, do most of the people that you hang out with drink or smoke? Do you? How much and how often? • have you or your friends ever tried any other drugs? Specifically, what? • do you regularly use other drugs? How much and how often?
S: <i>Sexuality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have you ever been in a relationship? When? • have you had sex? Number of partners? Using contraception? • have you ever been pregnant or had an abortion? • have you ever been checked for a sexually transmitted infection (STI)? Knowledge about STIs and prevention? • for females: Ask about menarche, last menstrual period (LMP), and menstrual cycles. Also inquire about breast self examination (BSE) practices. • for males: Ask about testicular self-examination (TSE) practices.
S: <i>Suicide, Depression</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do you have difficulties to sleep? Has there been any change in your appetite recently? • do you mix around well others? Do you have hopeless/helpless feelings? • have you ever attempted suicide?
S: <i>Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have you ever been seriously injured? Do you always wear a seatbelt in the car? • do you use safety equipment for sports and or other physical activities (for example, helmets for biking)? • is there any violence in your home? Does the violence ever get physical? • Have you ever been physically or sexually abused? • have you ever been bullied? Is that still a problem? • have you gotten into physical fights in school or your neighborhood? Are you still getting into fights?

Suggestions for ending interviews with adolescents

- give them an opportunity to express any concerns you have not covered, and ask for feedback about the interview.
- ask if there is any information you can provide on any of the topics you have discussed. Try to provide whatever educational materials young people are interested in.