

HEADS-ED Under 6 screening tool

What is HEADS-ED Under 6?

HEADS-ED Under 6 is a validated, brief and easy-to-use screening and triage tool for anyone who works with children under the age of 6 looking to identify the young child's mental health and developmental needs.

The tool helps to guide the conversation with the child's family in several areas of mental health and development and provide a scoring matrix to help assess level of risk, facilitate clinical decision making and guide next steps in care.

Early years mental health importance

Healthy social-emotional development in early childhood is an essential building block for good mental health throughout life. A troubling number of children experience social-emotional vulnerability in their earliest years, and many service providers feel unprepared to screen, manage, or refer very young patients effectively, due in part to a lack of information about early years mental health and available local services.

How HEADS-ED Under 6 is paving the way

The child and youth mental health system is complex and fragmented, making it difficult for both families and primary care providers to find the right support for children Under 6. The HEADS-ED Under 6 is a tool that can be easily implemented across services, therefore enhancing connection and communication between providers and agencies.

Our work on integrated care pathways using HEADS-ED Under 6 is about forging and strengthening connections to help families access the quality, timely support they need. We've now completed two validation studies supporting the use of the HEADS-ED Under 6 in the sector and continue our work to mobilize the tool across Ontario (and beyond) with our various partners. This includes developing standardized clinical pathways that support screening and triaging to services that will meet children and families' needs, and piloting the integration of standardized tools, such as HEADS-ED Under 6 in primary care practices.

What's next?

We are exploring how primary care providers and early childhood educators can use the HEADS-ED Under 6 to help them screen and connect children with the services that will meet their needs. We are also looking to evaluate this process by interviewing primary care providers and early childhood educators.



Discover our current and upcoming projects by visiting the Knowledge Institute's website at cymha.ca/en/projects/heads-ed-pathways.aspx.

	0 No action needed	1 Needs action but not immediate/moderate functional impairment	2 Needs immediate action/severe functional impairment
Home & caregivers Example: What's it like caring for your child? How does your family get along with each other? Is your own physical and/or emotion health getting in the way of caring for your child?	☐ Supportive/ responsive to child's needs/ secure attachment	☐ Conflicts / difficulty meeting child's needs/ attachment concerns	☐ Chaotic / dysfunctional/unable to meet child's needs / placement breakdown / severe attachment problems
Eating & sleeping Example: How has your child been sleeping? How has your child been eating?	☐ No concerns	☐ Disrupted sleep/moderate eating disturbance (overeats/under eats)	☐ Sleep deprived / severe eating disturbance /failure to thrive
Activities & peers Example: How does your child get along with other children? Does your child participate in any activities with other children?	☐ Age appropriate social skills and engaged in activities	☐ Restricted range or interest in social and peer activities/limited social skills, friends	☐ Withdrawn or extremely restricted range of activities/ unable to function in a social context
Development, speech/ language/motor Example: Do you have any concerns with your child's growth, language, eye contact, etc.?	☐ Age appropriate development	☐ Moderate deficits in one or more areas	☐ Severe or profound deficits in one or more areas
Safety Example: Do you have any concerns that your child will hurt him/herself or others? Is your child in physical distress (listless, fever, labored breathing, etc.)?	☐ No concerns	☐ Moderate level of risk/dangerous impulsive behaviour / serious health issues	☐ Imminent risk / requires medical intervention /life threatening impulsive behaviour
Emotions, behaviours Example: Is your child difficult to calm or sooth? Is your child aggressive? Is your child overly fearful?	☐ No concerns or mildly anxious / sad / acting out	☐ Moderately anxious /difficult to soothe / aggressive	☐ Significantly distressed / unable to function / out of control or aggressive
Discharge or current resources Example: Does your child/you have any help or are you waiting to receive help (e.g, family therapy, speech therapy)?	☐ Ongoing / well connected	☐ Some / not meeting needs	☐ None / on waitlist / non-compliant

Want to learn more?

If you'd like to explore using HEADS-ED or have any questions, contact Mario Cappelli, senior clinician-scientist, at cappelli@cymha.ca. For more information, scan this QR code or visit heads-ed.com

