NOTE: This a template – please customize to your CAC

CAC Mental Health Screening Policy and Protocol

The National Children’s Alliance Mental Health Accreditation Standard defines the mental health services to be delivered to children seen at CAC required for a CAC to be accredited.

The MH Standard component C requires the provision of “Evidence-supported, trauma-focused mental health services for the child client are consistently available and include:

1. Trauma-specific assessment including traumatic events and abuse-related trauma symptoms

2. Use of standardized assessment measures initially to inform treatment, and periodically to assess progress and outcome

3. Individualized treatment plan based on assessments that are periodically reassessed

4. Individualized, evidence-supported treatment appropriate for the child client and other family members

5. Child and caregiver engagement in treatment

6. Referral to other community services as needed.

**Purpose of the Mental Health Screening**: To identify which children coming through the CAC would benefit from a more comprehensive trauma-informed mental health assessment to identify the potential effect of the trauma experience. The Screening is the first step in the CAC response to the provision of MH services. There are a number of MH screeners available that are appropriate for use by CACs. One or more screeners are identified as appropriate for CAC use.

**Guidelines for Administering and Scoring Mental Health Screeners**;

* Age Range: All children over the age of three coming through the CAC will be screened when the child is seen for an interview or a medical exam.
* (Identify the screener or screeners that will be used in a given CAC)
* Victim Advocates will administer the screening and consult with mental health providers, when needed.

The screener is administered by a non-mental health professional and is most often administered by the CAC Victim Advocate The Victim Advocate should be well trained in the use of the screener including how to introduce the screener to the caregiver, how to administer the screener, how to score and how to share the results with the caregiver. This screening process offers the Victim Advocate an opportunity to strengthen the engagement of the caregiver in any mental health services identified as needed.

The purpose of the screener is to identify a need for a referral to a mental health provider to determine the need for mental health treatment for a child. As not all children who experience maltreatment or trauma develop symptoms that require mental health treatment, the use of the screener can serve as a method for triaging those children who are in need of treatment services and those who are not. The results of the screener determine the need for a referral for a comprehensive mental health assessment including the assessment of the impact of the trauma of maltreatment.

**In order to address the potential mental health needs of the children served by the CAC, the CAC will implement the following screening protocol**:

The Victim Advocate or other designated and trained CAC staff member will administer the (name of screener) to each caregiver and/or child following the completion of the Forensic Interview. The administration of the screener including the scoring will take place prior to the family leaving the CAC following the Forensic Interview. This is due to the fact that the screener may identify risk to the child that needs to be addressed immediately, i.e. suicide feelings/thoughts, use of drugs and/or alcohol or the risk of problematic sexual behaviors.

**CAC Response to Risk identified through the Screener. (Implement the CAC Crisis Response Protocol)**

1. Identify the required response
2. Consult your CAC Crisis Response Protocol
3. Consult with a Mental Health provider
   1. Is it safe for the child to go home?
   2. Is Mental Health referral sufficient?
   3. Will a safety plan be sufficient?
   4. Is a mental health assessment needed?
   5. Should a crisis referral be made?
   6. Is an immediate psychiatric evaluation needed through the ER?
   7. What is the response of the caregiver to this risk?

**The Screening Process and the NCA MH Accreditation Standard:** Remember, the screening is the first step in determining the need for a comprehensive mental health assessment by a mental health professional. When the score on the screener does not indicate a need for further assessment that information is shared with the caregiver with a request from the VA to follow-up in two to four weeks with the caregiver as the need for services may occur over time.

When the score on the screener indicates a need for further MH assessment, the VA will share this information with the caregiver, as well as information about the need for and purpose of the MH assessment as defined under component C of the MH Standard; 1. Trauma-specific assessment including traumatic events and abuse-related trauma symptoms and; 2 Use of standardized assessment measures initially to inform treatment, (determine the need for MH treatment and the most appropriate treatment)

The VA then identifies a mental health professional who is trained and experienced in providing a standardized mental health assessment and who is willing to collaborate with the CAC on identifying any treatment needs for the child and family.

The VA then shares information about the mental health assessment with the caregiver and/or child as well as information about the training, experience and competency of the mental health providers being referred to.

The VA also helps the caregiver and/or child identify any questions he or she wants to ask the MH provider when they meet.

The VA explains the need for the caregiver to sign a release of information so that the results of the screener can be shared between the mental health professional and the CAC to support the need for collaboration regarding the needs of the family and services provided.

The VA then makes a face to face referral for the caregiver and/or child to the MH provider and facilitates the caregiver and/or child getting answers to their questions.

The VA shares a copy of the release of information signed by the caregiver and a copy of the screener with the MH professional and secures a commitment from the MH professional for collaboration regarding the outcome of the assessment and recommendation regarding services needed and provided to the family.

When the MH assessment indicates a need for mental health treatment the results of the assessment are used by the MH professional to collaborate in the development of a 3. Individualized treatment plan and 4. Individualized, evidence-supported treatment appropriate for the child client and other family members based on assessments that are periodically reassessed.

**Documentation and Follow up of the Screener**

Mental Health Screening will be documented in NCA Trak or (another case monitoring system)

1. Advocacy Tab – Services Log – Emotional Support Screening Tools
2. Mental Health Tab – Assessment - Add New Assessment
3. Hard copy of the Screener will be filed in child folder
4. If screener indicates a need for a comprehensive Mental Health Assessment, the screener should be shared with the MH provider identified to administer the MH Assessment