The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention’s (AFSP) Interactive Screening Program (ISP) provides a mechanism to reach out to students who are at risk for depression, suicide, and related problems, and encourages them to get help. By proactively engaging those in need, ISP supports student mental health and helps create a campus culture that recognizes that stress and depression are common and treatable problems in today’s world.

ISP starts with a brief, confidential online Stress & Depression Questionnaire that students are invited to complete. The questionnaire incorporates the PHQ-9, a 9-item standardized depression screening scale, as well as questions about suicidal ideation and attempts, problems related to depression such as anger and anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, and eating disorder symptoms. The questionnaire contains 35 questions and normally takes less than 10 minutes to complete. To fully protect their anonymity, students identify themselves only with a self-assigned user ID. Each student who submits the questionnaire receives a personal written response from a campus counselor, offering options for follow-up evaluation and treatment. Students may “dialogue” with the counselor online while maintaining their anonymity, schedule a telephone or in-person meeting, or request a referral for treatment or support services. Each college or university that implements the ISP has its own customized, secure website that is fully managed by AFSP. The website houses the Stress & Depression Questionnaire and supports all online exchanges between students and counselors.
When implemented in a college setting, the ISP should:

1. Identify students who are depressed and/or at risk for suicide.
2. Engage these students in a supportive and meaningful way.
3. Refer students to an appropriate mental health care provider for evaluation and possible treatment.

Implementation Essentials

- The program counselor should be comfortable interacting with those at risk for depression and suicide, and able to use the basic technology (email, web forms) inherent with ISP.
- School or community-based mental health professionals need to be available for referrals from the program counselor.

2012 NSSP Objectives Addressed:

Objective 8.3: Promote timely access to assessment, intervention, and effective care for individuals with a heightened risk for suicide.

Links within this resource
[1] mailto:mmortal@afsp.org

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