

Department of Psychology  
Faculty of Medicine, Health, and Human Sciences  
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109



Phone: +61 (2) 9850 8032  
Email: ron.rapee@mq.edu.au

## Youth Mental Health Screening in Schools School Principal Information and Consent Form

**What is this study about?** We are developing a mental health screening tool for students to do in school. It aims to identify students who may be going through a difficult time and need mental health support. We will provide schools with different pathways to care and referral options, which schools can provide to students who need additional support, in consultation with their parents.

### What does it involve?

**Student participation:** Students in Year 4, 5 and 6 / Year 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 will complete an online survey (about 30 min long) during class time either in 2021 or in 2022, that asks them about any negative feelings, behaviours, or difficulties in their life. Students will complete the screening tool for a second time 6-9 months later, so that we can observe changes over time. Students who may need additional support will be confidentially identified to you and your school welfare staff, who will inform parents and support students to get help (a list of support options will be provided to your school that you can use).

**Parent participation:** Parents and students will be invited to participate in clinical interviews via Zoom or by telephone (outside of school time). Parents will also be asked to complete an online survey on their child's mental health and thoughts on youth mental health screening in schools. Finally, we will also ask parents' permission to access data from the school on their attendance and grades. For parents who consent to this, you will be asked to provide this data about their child.

**School staff participation:** School welfare/health teachers, school psychologists, and yourself will be asked to complete a brief, confidential online survey that will take about 10 minutes. You and school staff will be asked to complete the survey before students participate in our mental health screening tool, and once after they participate in the screening tool about 6-9 months later.

**Why have we been invited to participate?** We are inviting all primary and secondary schools in NSW to participate.

**I would like my school to participate**

To participate, please complete the Consent Form on page 4 and return it to the Research Coordinator, Dr Rebecca Kuhnert, by replying directly to this email.

**I do not want my school to participate**

No need to do anything further.

**I want to know more**

Please read on for more detail about this study. If you have any questions or would like more information, you can always contact the Research Coordinator, Dr Rebecca Kuhnert, at [rebecca.kuhnert@mq.edu.au](mailto:rebecca.kuhnert@mq.edu.au)

**You can choose to withdraw your school from the study at any time.** Just notify our Research Coordinator, Dr Rebecca Kuhnert, at [rebecca.kuhnert@mq.edu.au](mailto:rebecca.kuhnert@mq.edu.au)

The Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University is developing a youth mental health screening tool that will be delivered to students in Year 4 to 11 in schools across NSW. The screening tool will determine whether any young people are going through current difficulties, and a variety of referral options and services will be available to those young people. This project is being conducted in partnership with the NSW Department of Education, Catholic Schools NSW and the Association of Independent Schools NSW, and is funded by the Bupa Health Foundation.

### **Student participation**

Students whose parents provide **passive consent** (i.e., those who choose not to opt out) will complete a mental health screening tool during class time (typically these are done during health/PDHPE lessons). The screening tool will include measures to assess how students are feeling about themselves, their friends, family and school, their body and their life. It will also ask questions about their lifestyle habits. The screening tool takes about 30 minutes to complete and will be administered by the students' classroom/PDHPE teacher. Your school will be randomly allocated to start screening either in May 2021 (Term 2, 2021) or in February 2022 (Term 1, 2022). Students will complete the screening tool again approximately 6-9 months later (depending on your school's schedule). This will allow us to observe changes in students' mental health over time.

The aim of this screening tool is to detect any students who may be struggling with their emotions or behaviours and may need extra support. We will notify you of students who are identified through the screening tool as experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, emotional disorders – for students who indicate risk of suicide or self-harm, we will notify you within 24 hours so that you can provide immediate support. We will provide a list of options for additional support that you and your welfare staff can draw upon when providing a care plan to students who are struggling, if students require support from external services.

### **Parent participation**

In order to test our screening tool, we are going to compare results from the screening tool with a number of other measures. We will ask parents to provide **active consent** (i.e., parents will need to return written consent for participation) for them and their child to each participate in a clinical interview, conducted by a psychology researcher outside of school time via Zoom or telephone. We will also send an online survey for parents to complete, asking about their child's mental health. Finally, we will also seek permission from parents to allow us to access school data on their child's school attendance and academic performance (grades). You will be asked to provide us with this data for students whose parents consent to their data being released to us.

### **School staff participation**

Given the important role that school staff play in youth mental health screening, we would like to ask you about your thoughts and experiences with mental health screening in schools. We will also be asking welfare/health teachers and your school psychologist. If you (or other school staff) consent to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey on youth mental health screening, your previous experiences with screening and supporting students to access the local health system, barriers to screening and referral, and factors that would help schools to implement screening and support their vulnerable students. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You will be asked to complete the survey twice – once before students complete the screening tool for the first time, and once again after they complete the screening tool for a second time (this will be about 6-9 months later).

If you choose to participate in our research as outlined above, your school will need to:

- Circulate information about the study to parents/guardians and collect their consent for participation (this will be written for you)
- Arrange a time and provide supervision for students to complete the screening. Screening will take approx. 30 minutes and will be completed online. All screening materials, delivery, and scoring will be provided by Macquarie University
- Ensure that a member of staff with mental health expertise (e.g., school counsellor) is available on the day of testing

- Provide appropriate information about relevant services to students who showed up on the survey with symptoms of (emotional/psychological) distress and their parent(s). Macquarie University will provide your school with a list of students who score high on emotional health symptoms and will work with your staff and local mental health services to help you to identify the best pathways to care.
- Provide the Macquarie University Research Team with student data on school attendance and academic performance (only for students whose parents provide consent for this)
- Provide feedback to us about how you found the experience

In turn, your school will receive:

- Information and skills development for relevant staff in conducting this screening and identifying local services.
- A list of identified students from your school who are currently struggling with emotional distress. Many of these students will be known to you – but some will be newly identified.
- A detailed report on the findings of the screenings, including aggregated data for your school overall
- A comprehensive list of referral services and resources, developed by experts in youth mental health, that will be evidence-based and local to your school community
- Support along every step of the way from our dedicated researchers

Some of the questions in the screening tool will ask students to reflect on their mental state and potentially harmful thoughts and behaviours. It is critically important to ask students such questions in order to identify and support those who need help. However, students may find some questions distressing. A list of mental health support services will be provided to all students at the end of the screening tool, and is also given to all parents in their Information and Consent Form.

Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not want to for any component of our study, and are free to withdraw at any time and will be reminded of this prior to commencing each component of the study. If a participant chooses to withdraw, or if you choose for your school to withdraw, there will be no adverse consequences and it will not affect any existing or future relationship with Macquarie University or your school.

To ensure confidentiality, participating students will use a generic login. Only you and your school staff will be able to identify students in the data by decoding their Student Registration Number and matching their name. No one else will be able to identify any individual student because all data will only include the Student Registration Number. Information about students needing additional support will be reported to you under strict confidentiality and will not be shared with anyone other than those students' parents/carers who you will notify.

All study data will be downloaded to a secure server at Macquarie University in a de-identified format. This de-identified data may be used, at a group level, to report outcomes from this project and may be published in scientific papers. No individual will ever be identified for research purposes. In years to come we anticipate this survey will provide us with data to advise programming as well as monitor the emotional health of individuals and cohorts.

Your school's participation in this important research is highly encouraged and voluntary. **If you wish for your school to participate in this study, please complete the consent form below**, and return it to the Research Coordinator for this study, Dr Rebecca Kuhnert, at [rebecca.kuhnert@mq.edu.au](mailto:rebecca.kuhnert@mq.edu.au). You can also contact Rebecca or myself if you have any questions or would like more information about this project.

Kind regards,

Professor Ron Rapee (Chief Investigator)

Distinguished Professor and ARC Laureate Fellow

Centre for Emotional Health, Macquarie University

## School Principal Consent Form

I have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understand the information above. Any questions I have asked were answered to my satisfaction. I consent for my school to participate in this research study on youth mental health screening in schools.

School name:

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(Block letters)

Your name:

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(Block letters)

Your Signature:

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This study has been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics & Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email [ethics@mq.edu.au](mailto:ethics@mq.edu.au)). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.