

Introduction to the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths 0-5 year-old version

The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths 0-5 year-old version is a multi-purpose tool developed to support care planning and level of care decision-making, to facilitate quality improvement initiatives, and to allow for the monitoring of outcomes of services. The CANS was developed from a communication perspective in order to facilitate the linkage between the assessment process and the design of individualized service plans including the application of evidence-based practices.

The CANS gathers information on clients' and caregivers' needs and strengths. Strengths are areas of a youth's life where he or she is doing well or has an interest or ability. Needs are areas where a youth requires help or serious intervention. Staff at Seneca Family of Agencies use an assessment process to get to know the child or youth and families with whom they work and to understand their strengths and needs. The CANS can help staff decide which of a youth's needs are the most important to address in a treatment plan. The CANS also helps identify strengths, which can be the basis of a treatment plan. By working with the client and family closely during the assessment process and talking together about the CANS, staff can develop a treatment plan that addresses a youth's strengths and needs while building strong engagement.

The CANS is made of domains that focus on an area in the child's life. Each section is made up of a group of specific items. There are sections on how a child functions in everyday life, on specific emotional or behavioral concerns, on risk behaviors, on strengths and on skills needed to grow and develop. There is also a section that asks about the family's beliefs and preferences, and a section that asks about general family concerns. The staff gives a number rating to each of these items. These ratings help the staff understand where intensive or immediate action is most needed, and also where a child has strengths that could be a major part of the treatment plan.

Of course, ratings do not tell the whole story of a child's strengths and needs. Each CANS section is merely the output of a comprehensive assessment process and is documented alongside narratives where a staff member can give more information about that area of life. The staff can note questions that need to be explored further, or areas where people involved with the child or youth have different ideas.