

Using the CANS with Cantonese Clients

Best Practices

Introduce the CANS to Caregivers

“The Child & Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) questionnaire is used to gather information to help understand how to help the youth and their family. The CANS will ask many questions to determine what is most important to work on. Each answer from the CANS will be given a rating to determine what action steps we need to take. The CANS will also be used as a measuring tool, to see how your youth is doing now and how they will be in a few months. The more information you provide me and the more we work together, the better we will be able to help your youth.”

General Considerations

- Build rapport, and show genuine interest in getting to know the youth and family
- Start assessment and services promptly, to lessen caregiver’s anxiety
- Provide forms in Chinese
- Clearly ask caregivers if there is anything they don’t understand during the assessment process
- Ask caregivers if it would be helpful for the clinician to call them and remind them of their appointment
- Provide immediate resources (i.e. flyers, brochures) & tip sheets for specific topics/behaviors
- It is important for youth and families to have a choice in the process, provide with the choice of where they would like to begin in the assessment
- Begin and work with a strengths-based mentality

Engagement Approaches & Tips by Main CANS Domains

Life Functioning

- Understand that some aspects of functioning are easier to talk about than others (i.e. school vs. sexuality), yet caregivers described the importance of asking direct questions about sexual functioning
- Understand that there is difficulty in the caregiver’s ability to talk to their youth about sexuality due to their own limited understanding of formal sex education as it is taught in American schools
- Ask indirectly about sexual orientation, instead explore what gender of friends or partners does the youth prefers

- Understand that youth identified feeling hesitant about disclosing family matters to a clinician due to a fear of the police called on their family members

Child Strengths

- Ask youth what makes them feel good about themselves
- Ask about the youth's engagement in weekend activities or organizations
- Caregivers stated they would prefer to have a list of religious or spiritual affiliations in which they can check off their own preference

Behavioral/Emotional Needs

- Ask the caregiver directly about an identified problem behavior
- Caregivers stated they would appreciate if the clinician observed the child in more than one environment (i.e. home and school) and obtain information from multiple sources (i.e. family friend)
- Do not use the word "abnormal" instead ask "how is your youth different from other youth?"
- Keep in mind this may be the toughest part of the assessment for a youth to speak about, be gentle in the way you approach these questions – youth stated that it would be the hardest to talk about eating disturbances and anger control.

Traumatic/Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Provide clear definitions about the type of behaviors and histories that are relevant and reportable
- Carefully explain what might happen after a report is made
- Obtain more information by asking in a calm, matter of fact way and not making strong facial expressions
- Ask the questions in your own words instead of reading verbatim

Risk Behaviors

- Begin talking about risk behaviors by asking a more general question like "what do you think is bothering you?"
- Provide clear examples of risk behaviors

Cultural Factors

- Ask youth to describe who they hang out with
- Recognize that youth do not define themselves, they are much more fluid in their way of thinking about their identities

Developmental Factors/History

- Be sensitive to the fact that if there are developmental issues, the family may feel ashamed to talk about these issues.
- Educate caregivers about difficult or special behaviors and provide concrete examples

- Provide a list of developmental history milestones or items grouped by age to the caregiver(s) to help check them off collaboratively

Caregiver Needs

- Be sensitive and avoid asking about “unhappy events in the marital relationship”, instead focus on building trust with caregivers first.
- Remind caregivers about the importance of confidentiality and the purpose of providing information to help understand the family background.
- It is recommend to ask about marital relationship matters directly with the caregivers, instead of the youth to avoid upsetting them.
- Ask specific behavioral questions about substance use, such as “do you use alcohol?” how often and how much?” but be careful to not use a judgmental tone when asking about sensitive topics.

Reviewing the CANS Results

- Do the assessment ratings together (clinician and assessor) as a way of ensuring that the assessment is done accurately.
- Provide a copy of the assessment in Cantonese.

Resources

Israel, N. & Oliver-Williams, L. (2013). Engagement Strategies: Cantonese caregivers and youth. San Francisco, CA: The San Francisco Department of Public Health