

Using the CANS with Latino Clients

Best Practices

Introduce the CANS

“Today we will be working on a tool that’s called the Child & Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS). This will help us understand what are the needs and the strengths of your child and also prioritize needs so that we can begin to build a treatment plan. The CANS will help us measure how your youth is doing now, and in the future we will do this again to measure progress made. I will be asking you a variety of questions about your youth’s life to help inform the treatment plan which will determine what the best way to help is. We will be rating each answer to focus on the most important aspects of your youth’s life. Each answer will determine the severity of the action item. If you do not feel comfortable with any of the questions I ask, please let me know, we can always skip a question and come back to it later. Thank you for your active participation in this collaborative process.”

General Considerations

- Build rapport, and show genuine interest in getting to know the youth and family
- Provide immediate resources (i.e. flyers, brochures)
- Create an crisis plan together, with information on crisis resources
- Communicate explicitly the limits of confidentiality and provide examples to help inform and clarify the role of the mandated reporter
- Ask questions in a direct manner otherwise it sends a message that there’s something to be ashamed of
- Inform that “these questions are asked of everyone”

Engagement Approaches & Tips by Main CANS Domains

Life Functioning

- Be sensitive to the concerns that the youth and or family may have about making a report against them
- Understand that some aspects of functioning are easier to talk about than others (i.e. school vs. sexuality)

Child Strengths

- Ask about positive social relationships with peers and adults
- Ask youth what makes them feel good about themselves
- Ask about the youth’s engagement in activities or organizations
- Ask about religion and spirituality in general terms and the level of involvement if applicable

Behavioral/Emotional Needs

- Provide examples with the questions, to help the youth and family understand how to answer the question
- Send a message that you will prioritize and work on the behaviors that are most pressing and urgent to the family and 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
- Provide an opportunity to speak with the youth and family separate if needed and or more appropriate
- Remind youth you are not in a disciplinary role to help ease their anxiety about answering questions

Traumatic/Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Ask the questions in your own words instead of reading verbatim
- Give caregivers extra time to answer questions
- Make sure you have Kleenex on hand
- Offer to show caregivers the notes you take for this section, note taking may make caregivers nervous, therefore it is important to at least offer to show them the notes

Risk Behaviors

- Be clear and to the point (otherwise it might seem judgmental)
- Remind caregivers about confidentiality
- Provide clear examples of risk behaviors
- Ask youth questions about how they release their emotions

Cultural Factors

- Caregivers indicated that “cultural” should be left out when explaining this section, and suggested that only the word “factors” should be used.
- Instead explain this section with examples such as ethnicity, spiritual practices, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and community.
- 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

- Remind families and youth about confidentiality
- Provide examples for questions to help with clarification

Caregiver Needs

- Acknowledge that it’s important to understand the needs and strengths of the caregiver
- Frame this section as a way to help the caregiver help the youth

Reviewing the CANS Results

- Respect and hear when there is a difference between what is written in the assessment and what the caregivers have said

- Explain why the clinician identified a problem, and provide examples to explain why a problem was identified or why it is severe
- When discussing the presence of a psychiatric condition, clinicians should explain that other children also have these problems and they can be successfully treated
- Provide verbal or written recommendations to help caregivers cope with their youth's emotional/behavior problems
- Provide a copy of the assessment in Spanish

Resources

Israel, N. (2013). Engagement Strategies: Latino/Hispanic caregivers and multicultural-youth. San Francisco, CA: The San Francisco Department of Public Health