

# Using the CANS with Kids and Families

## Introducing and Completing the CANS

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You may be unsure about when and how to introduce the CANS measure to the family and how to engage family members in the process of completing the tool. Likewise, there are often questions about how the CANS may be used to discuss their clinical conceptualization and engage in treatment planning with the family. While there is no one way to do these things, the pointers below are meant to give you ideas about how to engage the family in treatment with the use of the CANS.

We encourage you to introduce the CANS early in the assessment process, shortly after the family presents for treatment. It's important to let families know that you are working together to do an assessment of their needs and strengths so that you can collaboratively develop a plan for their treatment and identify goals for treatment. As part of this process:

- Describe the general domains and basic 0-3 framework (“where 0 is good and 3 is crisis or critically challenging”)
  - Note – the CANS Introduction for Families handout may be useful here
- Plan to bring them a summary of the CANS scores at the end of the assessment to see if you got it right
  - Sharing the scores is an opportunity to get the family’s feedback and to begin treatment planning
  - Are any of these scores surprising? Is there anything I got wrong? What are your ideas about how the needs on the CANS might fit together? Here’s how I think that these needs fit together, what do you think about that?
- Discuss the benefits of using the CANS (see below)
- Ask if/how they’d like to complete the CANS ratings together
- Discuss how the scores will assist in prioritization of needs and treatment planning
  - This is helpful for us to see the ‘big picture,’ of your needs, while prioritizing your most important needs.

Information all family members provide as part of the initial assessment and over time should be reflected in the CANS scores, but this can be done in a number of ways.

- The CANS may be completed by the staff after meeting with the family.
- Activities can be designed to create an interactive scoring experience
  - Write 0, 1, 2 and 3 on yellow index cards and each item on blue index cards. Then the card for each item can be laid next to a yellow score card.
  - Shoeboxes with 0, 1, 2 and 3 written on them can be laid out and the items can be cut out on paper. Each item can do in a box.
- Staff can show the CANS items and the CANS manual to the family, either with the caregiver alone and/or with the youth.
  - Here, the CANS scoring is completed in the moment with the family.
  - This approach may be best when used by staff that have experience and familiarity with the CANS.
  - Use caution with this approach, as it could take an excessive amount of time and may be overwhelming for the family.

## Key benefits of using the CANS:

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Below are benefits that can be shared with families to help them understand the usefulness of the CANS. You should feel free to use the exact language below, or to adjust it in a way that is more natural for you, in discussing the CANS with clients.

### DECISION MAKING

- CANS can be used to develop decisions collaboratively with the family and all members of the treatment team.
- We use the CANS to show families how and why you wrote specific treatment goals and types of treatment interventions.
- To work with the child and the family to come up with ideas about how the different types of needs the child has might be related or might fit together
  - If you focus on one area, you might see improvements in other related areas.
- Looking together and highlighting which areas the parents might be able to focus on at home.
- You can also review the CANS scores together with the family over time to see how their child's emotional and behavioral needs change and improve.
- You can show CANS scores over time to build consensus for referrals, linkages and discharge planning.

### COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY:

- Remind the family that the CANS is a way of summarizing how the child is doing over all, across a broad range of areas.
  - We don't want overlook something important or spend time in treatment working on areas where the child has no problems.
- It also helps us recognize areas where the child is doing particularly well and has strengths.
  - It is important for both children and caregivers to be aware of strengths so that these qualities can be emphasized both in therapy, at home and in other settings.
- Make sure the families you work with understand that you use the CANS because you recognize the importance of being open and transparent with them about what is going on with their child.

### INTEGRATING INFORMATION

- The CANS is a place where all of the different information I get (from the client, the family, other professionals in the child's life and their own professional opinion) can be integrated in one place.
  - This helps us get to most accurate picture of the child and see the child in a holistic way.
- The CANS helps me learn that different people in the child's life may have different information or even different opinions about the child's needs.
- We may all learn things about your child that we would not otherwise have known or even asked about your child.
  - Note – this is a great opportunity for trauma informed psychoeducation for the child and family

*\*\*Developed in collaboration with the Northwestern – NCTSN Center for Child Trauma Assessment and Service Planning\*\**