

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AGENT KNOWLEDGE BASE

PHQ-9 SCREENING TOOL

PHQ-9 Questions

"Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?"

Response Options: Not at all (0) | Several days (1) | More than half the days (2) | Nearly every day (3)

1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much
4. Feeling tired or having little energy
5. Poor appetite or overeating
6. Feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as schoolwork, reading, or watching TV
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite — being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way

PHQ-9 Scoring & Interpretations

Score Ranges:

- 1-4: Minimal depression
- 5-9: Mild depression
- 10-14: Moderate depression
- 15-19: Moderately severe depression
- 20-27: Severe depression

Response Templates by Score:

Minimal (1-4): "Your responses suggest minimal depression symptoms. This is encouraging! Here are some wellness strategies to maintain good mental health:

- Regular sleep schedule (7-9 hours nightly)
- Daily physical activity, even 10-15 minutes
- Mindfulness or meditation practice
- Healthy social connections
- Balanced nutrition and hydration"

Mild (5-9): "Your responses indicate mild depression symptoms that many students experience. Here's how I can support you:

- Stress management techniques like deep breathing
- Time management and study organization strategies
- Social support and connection activities
- Healthy lifestyle modifications
- Campus counseling services if symptoms persist or worsen"

Moderate (10-14): "Your responses suggest moderate depression symptoms that may be impacting your daily life and academic performance. I strongly recommend:

- Speaking with a campus counselor or mental health professional
- Implementing daily coping strategies
- Considering academic accommodations if needed
- Building a stronger support network
- Regular monitoring of your symptoms"

Moderately Severe (15-19): "Your responses indicate moderately severe depression symptoms. Professional support is highly recommended:

- Schedule an appointment with campus counseling services immediately
- Consider speaking with your academic advisor about support options
- Reach out to trusted friends, family, or mentors
- Implement crisis safety planning
- Follow up with me regularly for additional support"

Severe (20-27): "Your responses suggest severe depression symptoms requiring immediate professional attention:

- Contact campus counseling services today
- Reach out to your support network immediately
- Consider contacting your healthcare provider
- Use crisis resources if you feel unsafe
- Emergency services (911) if you're in immediate danger"

CRISIS RESOURCES & EMERGENCY CONTACTS

National Crisis Resources

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 988 (24/7)

- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline:** 1-800-656-4673
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-7233
- **LGBTQ National Hotline:** 1-888-843-4564

Campus Resources [CUSTOMIZE FOR YOUR SCHOOL]

- **Campus Counseling Center:** [INSERT PHONE] | [INSERT EMAIL] | [INSERT HOURS]
- **Campus Crisis Line:** [INSERT 24/7 CRISIS NUMBER]
- **Academic Advising:** [INSERT CONTACT]
- **Disability Services:** [INSERT CONTACT]
- **Student Health Center:** [INSERT CONTACT]
- **Campus Safety/Security:** [INSERT EMERGENCY NUMBER]

COMMON COPING STRATEGIES

Immediate Stress Relief (0-5 minutes)

- **4-7-8 Breathing:** Inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8 counts
- **5-4-3-2-1 Grounding:** 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste
- **Progressive muscle relaxation:** Tense and release each muscle group
- **Cold water on wrists/face:** Activates parasympathetic nervous system

Daily Maintenance Strategies

- **Sleep hygiene:** Consistent bedtime, no screens 1 hour before bed, cool dark room
- **Regular exercise:** 20-30 minutes daily, even walking counts
- **Mindfulness practice:** 5-10 minutes daily meditation or breathing
- **Social connection:** Daily meaningful interaction with others
- **Gratitude practice:** Write down 3 things you're grateful for daily

Academic Stress Management

- **Time blocking:** Schedule specific times for study, breaks, and self-care
- **Pomodoro technique:** 25 minutes focused work, 5 minute breaks
- **Break large tasks into smaller steps**
- **Set realistic daily goals (3-5 maximum)**
- **Create study groups for accountability and support**

Long-term Mental Health Maintenance

- Regular therapy or counseling
- Medication management if prescribed
- Strong social support network
- Regular physical activity routine
- Hobbies and enjoyable activities
- Stress management skills practice

MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS - BASIC INFO

Depression Signs & Symptoms

- Persistent sadness or hopelessness
- Loss of interest in activities
- Fatigue or low energy
- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite changes
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Anxiety Signs & Symptoms

- Excessive worry or fear
- Restlessness or feeling on edge
- Difficulty concentrating
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbances
- Avoidance behaviors
- Physical symptoms (rapid heart rate, sweating)
- Panic attacks

Academic Stress Indicators

- Declining grades or academic performance
- Procrastination or avoidance
- Perfectionism and fear of failure
- Overwhelming feelings about coursework

- Social isolation from classmates
- Physical symptoms during exams/assignments

STUDENT-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Academic Support

- **Tutoring services:** [INSERT CAMPUS TUTORING INFO]
- **Writing centers:** [INSERT WRITING CENTER INFO]
- **Study groups and peer support**
- **Academic accommodations through disability services**
- **Time management workshops**
- **Study skills training**

Financial Support

- **Financial aid office:** [INSERT CONTACT]
- **Emergency financial assistance:** [INSERT PROGRAMS]
- **Food pantries:** [INSERT CAMPUS/LOCAL OPTIONS]
- **Scholarship and grant information**

Social Support

- **Student organizations and clubs**
- **Residence life programming**
- **Peer support groups**
- **Cultural and identity-based organizations**
- **Volunteer opportunities**
- **Campus recreation activities**

MENTAL HEALTH APPS & ONLINE RESOURCES

Recommended Apps

- **Headspace:** Meditation and mindfulness
- **Calm:** Sleep stories, meditation, relaxation
- **Daylio:** Mood tracking
- **Sanvello:** Anxiety and mood tracking with coping tools
- **PTSD Coach:** Trauma-informed coping strategies

Helpful Websites

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):** nami.org
- **Mental Health America:** mhanational.org
- **Crisis Text Line:** crisistextline.org
- **Active Minds:** activeminds.org (student mental health advocacy)
- **JED Campus:** jedcampus.org (college mental health resources)

CONVERSATION STARTERS & RESPONSES

Empathetic Responses

- "That sounds really challenging to deal with."
- "Many students experience similar struggles - you're not alone."
- "It makes complete sense that you'd feel that way."
- "Thank you for sharing that with me - that took courage."
- "Your feelings are valid and understandable."

Gentle Probing Questions

- "Can you tell me more about what that's like for you?"
- "How long have you been experiencing this?"
- "What does a typical day look like when you're feeling this way?"
- "What usually helps you feel better, even a little bit?"
- "Who in your life provides support when you need it?"

Transitioning to Resources

- "I have some strategies that other students have found helpful..."
- "There are some great campus resources that might support you..."
- "Let's explore some coping techniques that might fit your situation..."
- "Would you be interested in learning about some immediate relief strategies?"

REFERRAL GUIDELINES

When to Suggest Campus Counseling

- PHQ-9 scores of 10 or higher
- Persistent symptoms lasting 2+ weeks
- Symptoms interfering with academic performance
- User expresses interest in deeper therapeutic work
- Complex trauma or family history concerns

When to Recommend Medical Evaluation

- Mentions of medication concerns
- Physical symptoms accompanying mental health issues
- Sleep disorders or significant appetite changes
- Substance use concerns
- Previous psychiatric hospitalization

When to Involve Academic Support

- Declining grades due to mental health
- Difficulty with concentration or memory
- Need for academic accommodations
- Considering leave of absence
- Exam anxiety significantly impacting performance

SAFETY PLANNING ELEMENTS

Warning Signs to Monitor

- Increasing isolation from friends/family
- Declining self-care or appearance
- Giving away possessions
- Sudden mood improvement after depression (can indicate suicide plan)
- Increased substance use
- Reckless behaviors

Safety Plan Components

1. **Personal warning signs** specific to the individual
2. **Internal coping strategies** they can use independently
3. **People and social settings** for support and distraction
4. **Family members or friends** to contact for help
5. **Professional contacts** including therapists and crisis lines
6. **Environmental safety** by removing potential means of harm