



Center for Behavioral Health Studies

The Challenge of Adolescent Assessments

By Mona Sumner, Chief Operating Officer, Rimrock Foundation

The challenge of evaluating adolescents is well known by most professionals working in the addictions field. Despite the fact that there is a range of assessment instruments available, most of these fail the "lie" test. In spite of weaknesses inherent in some testing instruments, we have experienced significant success with a pilot project implemented for School District II in Billings. This is the largest school district in Montana with over 17,000 students.

The "Truancy Project" program involves assessing students referred to the district's truancy center after being suspended from school.

The Assessment Process

Rimrock Foundation's assessment process consists of three sessions. Parents are required to escort the student to their first day at the Truancy Center, at which time a brief history is taken.

This **first session** involves orienting the student to the evaluation process, obtaining releases, building rapport and administering a variety of testing instruments. A collateral school contact is made to obtain their academic history and the school's view of the student's problems and usage. If the child is on probation, the probation officer will also be contacted.

The **second session** consists of developing a standard clinical history and interview, during which the student's own view of the problem is encouraged. At this time, the clinician clarifies any questionable test responses with the adolescent.

The **third session** includes the student, parents and clinical assessment team. During this session, the clinical findings and recommendations are presented. At the very least, the team will offer recommendations and, when needed, negotiate a no-use contract with the adolescent.

Inexpensive drug testing kits are also offered to parents. If treatment services are indicated, these options will be explained during the third session as well. A 90-day follow-up visit is scheduled in order to continue monitoring the child's and family's progress.

The Instruments

Because we've learned that kids are likely to be more honest in responding on a computer or with paper and pencil, **Rimrock uses multiple assessment instruments**, to include:

- MMPI-A or Millon Inventory
- Shipley Hartford Screen (intellectual/cognitive functioning)
- Adolescent Alcohol Inventory Scale
- Marijuana Self-Assessment
- Drug Abuse Screening Test
- Beck Depression Inventory
- Marijuana Involvement Test

The MMPI-A is used to identify co-occurring problems and substance abuse, while the Millon is useful for identifying adolescent delinquency and other behavioral patterns.

Two additional screening tools developed by Rimrock are the **Adolescent Screening Inventory and the Adolescent Self-Report**. These tests are designed to elicit responses to issues or questions that kids frequently lie about in face-to-face encounters with clinicians.

The CRAFFT Test

Rimrock Foundation has incorporated a new instrument called the **CRAFFT test**. This instrument was developed with funds from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). It takes five minutes to administer, with two or more "yes" responses being predictive of a substance use disorder.

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The acronym stands for key words in the questionnaire: car, relax, alone, forget, friends, trouble.

1. **Car** - Have you ridden in a car driven by someone (including yourself) who was high or who had been using alcohol or other drugs?

2. **Relax** - Do you ever use alcohol or drugs to relax, feel better about yourself or fit in?

3. **Alone** - Do you ever use alcohol/drugs while you are by yourself, alone?

4. **Forget** - Do you ever forget things you did while using alcohol or drugs?

5. **Friends** - Do your family or friends ever tell you that you should cut down on your drinking or drug use?

6. **Trouble** - Have you ever gotten into trouble while you were using alcohol or drugs?

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