

Dear Parent,

This letter is for all Helena School District students. This is our 6<sup>th</sup> year providing this service at no cost to families.

It may be difficult to believe, but as many as one out of five teens today struggle with serious depression and anxiety, equaling six students in the average school classroom. Unfortunately, most teens with these problems are never identified. We at the Helena School District believe no student should suffer in silence when help is available. As a result, we are now partnering with the Columbia University TeenScreen Program and the Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative to make free, voluntary, confidential emotional health screening available to our students.

I am proud to be working in this way to safeguard the health and welfare of our students and hope that you will take advantage of this confidential service for your child. **Although your child may have participated in past years, we remind you that a child's mental health can change within the course of a year and an annual check up may be beneficial.** Please read the information below carefully and then sign the attached Parent Consent Form to indicate whether you want your child to participate. Your child cannot participate without your permission.

### **What is TeenScreen?**

TeenScreen is a health screening program developed by Columbia University to identify teens who may suffer from depression or other emotional problems and connect the teen with professional health resources in the community. In 2010 we screened over 300 students from 3 high schools. Parents expressed relief and support with the process.

### **How does the program work?**

Professionals contracted with the schools facilitate the program. Screening takes place during school hours in a private setting at school. Your child will be screened with your permission in three steps:

**Step One:** Students complete a 20-minute questionnaire about general health, depression, anxiety and substance use.

**Step Two:** Students meet briefly with Teen Screen staff to review the general results of the screening and to answer any questions. If your teen's answers reveal a potential problem or if he/she asks for help, he/she will then meet with a trained community mental health professional privately to double check the results and determine if further evaluation is recommended. Our health professional is Betty Gutman, Masters Level Licensed Clinical Social Worker with 24 years experience with child and families.

**Step Three:** You will be notified by program staff if your teen meets with a mental health professional and the professional recommends further evaluation for your child. If this is the case, the mental health professional will share the overall results with you and discuss options to ensure your child's well being. If your child's screen indicates that no further evaluation or services is needed for your child, you will receive a follow up letter in the mail.

This screening is provided at no cost. Although it does not provide further evaluation or treatment services, the mental health professional will provide a list of counseling resources in the community who see students on a reduced or free basis if other funds are not available. She will provide referral and follow up assistance at parent request.

On the next sheet are some common questions and answers about TeenScreen. Please review this information and, if you would like your child to participate, complete and return the enclosed parent consent form.

Please contact our TeenScreen student assistance staff if you have questions. Tracy Moseman, 324-1038. You may also find information about the TeenScreen Program at [www.teenscreen.org](http://www.teenscreen.org).

## **Common Questions and Answers about TeenScreen**

### **Are TeenScreen results confidential?**

In order to protect your child's privacy, his/her screening results and related files will not be stored with his/her academic records. Teachers, counselors, and administrators will not be involved in the screening procedure. If program staff believes that your child is at risk, they will take action notify appropriate personal and/or necessary authorities.

### **What if I provide consent, but my child doesn't want to participate?**

Because we believe screening should be totally voluntary, your child may refuse to participate or refuse to answer any questions during the screening. We will notify you by letter if your child chooses not to participate.

### **Does TeenScreen recommend treatment?**

The TeenScreen program and staff do not make any treatment recommendations. All possible treatment decisions are made by families in close consultation with a health professional after completion of the TeenScreen Program. Treatment recommendations are beyond the scope of the TeenScreen Program.

### **How accurate is the screening questionnaire?**

The screening questionnaire was developed by Columbia University and research has concluded that it is effective in identifying youth with possible emotional problems. However, the questionnaire results are not a medical diagnosis. Medical diagnoses are beyond the scope of the TeenScreen Program.

### **Can I see the questionnaire?**

Yes. If you wish to review the TeenScreen screening questionnaire, the assent form your child will be asked to sign prior to his/her participation in the program, and any instructional materials related to the screening, please submit a request form to:

TeenScreen Program Coordinator

Helena School District

55 South Rodney

Helena, MT 59601

You will be notified of the time and place where you may review these materials.

### **Where does TeenScreen get its support?**

The program is supported by foundations and local communities. It is operated as a non-profit public service and accepts individual's donations to help provide free screening services to local communities. The Helena program is funded by the Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative.