

The PHQ-2/9 are validated as self-administered measures. When necessary, they can also be administered by clinical staff via paper copy or electronically, prior to coming to the office, while in the waiting room, or during rooming.

If you are administering the PHQ-9 verbally you must ask the questions exactly as they are written to ensure accurate data.

Strategies for Screening

When discussing mental health difficulties, it is important to use plain, non-stigmatizing language. As an introduction to the topic, discuss and describe a holistic approach to wellness which includes both mental and physical wellbeing.

Explain to patients that **everyone** is asked the same questions.

"We ask everyone the same questions in order to assess all areas of life."

Make sure to ask for **consent** before proceeding with the questions/assessment.

"Would it be ok if I proceeded with my questions?"

Use **open-ended questions**.

"What stressors do you have in your life at the current time and how does this stress impact you?"

Reflect back what the patient shared to **communicate understanding** and **validate** the patient's experience.

"It sounds like you have a lot of responsibilities and many different things you have to take care of."

Assess for symptoms in a **conversational** tone and **normalize** the experience.

"Sometimes when people are really stressed out, the stress can impact their mood, sleep, and other aspects of their life. In the last couple of weeks have you felt [insert depressive symptoms here]?"

Assess the patient's **support system** and current **coping mechanisms** to better understand how they manage their various stressors.

"How do you deal with the various stressors in your life? Who makes up your support system? What kinds of things do you do to make yourself feel better during moments of high stress?"

Ask for **consent** to offer resources.

"Would it be ok if I offered you some information on additional resources of support?"

Use non-clinical language to discuss resources – **formal therapy is not the only option.**

"There are different resources available if you feel you could use some support as you continue navigating the various responsibilities in your life. There are online resources, support phone lines, and also therapy which some people find useful, just to have a place where they can unload their stress to an objective person, or to feel like they have someone on their side."

Thank the patient at the end of the assessment and **check to see if any important information was missed.**

"Thank you so much for sharing all of that information. Was there anything with regard to your health and wellness that I didn't explicitly ask about but that you think I should know?"

Common Patient Questions

Why do I need to fill this out?

"Like taking your blood pressure, we want to address your overall health and well-being."

If in treatment:

"Your provider wants to know more about your overall health so they can gauge how well your treatment is working."

Do I need to fill this out even if I don't have these problems?

"Yes, it's just as important as tracking your blood pressure and other vitals. Like those as well, we want to track it over time."

Ask the patient if they have concerns. If they do tell them you'll let their provider know and they will discuss.

Do I have to fill this out if I'm not comfortable answering these questions?

“You never need to answer questions that you’re not comfortable with, but we encourage you to do so to help us provide the best care possible. If you’d prefer to discuss with your provider that is no problem.”

Can I talk to my provider about these questions instead of filling this out?

“Yes.”

I don’t understand some of these questions.

“If you need any clarification your provider will discuss with you.”

Sources

<https://mshp.mountsinai.org/web/mshp/blog-barriers-to-screening-for-depression>

https://aims.uw.edu/sites/default/files/Talking%20with%20Patients%20about%20the%20PHQ-9_MA%20%26%20Office%20Staff.pdf