

Screening and Assessment

What is screening and assessment in victim services?

The terms **screening** and **assessment** are often used interchangeably in victim services. Although they are related and share some similarities, screening and assessment are distinct **information-gathering processes**.

A **screening** is a brief starting point to determine whether someone is eligible and appropriate for various types of victim services, and to identify their most pressing needs. In contrast, an **assessment** is a more comprehensive, detailed process aiming to establish an in-depth understanding of clients, their experiences, and their needs for services.

Screening	Both Screening & Assessment	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually brief • Completed for all people seeking services • Typically does not require a high level of training for staff to administer • Includes mostly yes or no questions • Determines if someone is eligible and appropriate for more comprehensive assessment and/or services • Is not diagnostic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information-gathering process • Identifies client needs • Should infuse principles of trauma-informed care • Useful for guiding decisions about appropriate services • Should include informing clients how information will be used • May identify clients' strengths and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive • Completed when appropriate based on initial screening • Typically requires advanced training for staff to complete and/or a professional license • May include multiple sources of data (e.g., interviews, observations, questionnaires) for the person seeking services and for other important people connected to them • Helps inform plan for a client's services by capturing experiences in context • Can be diagnostic

How should I select screening and assessment instruments?

Screening and assessment strategies must collect the information needed to help clients receive the most effective services possible. Screening and assessment processes should be supported by research evidence that is applicable to the circumstances and client population of focus. A research basis can help ensure that procedures and instruments are reliable (meaning they will yield similar information for similar people), valid (meaning they are accurately assessing what you intend them to assess), and culturally-relevant.

Evidence-based screening and assessment procedures and instruments exist and are **strongly** recommended. If service providers find that existing resources are not an exact match for their agency or client needs, it may be possible to modify existing tools or develop new ones. In this case, it is important to track implementation of adapted and new tools (e.g., by **partnering** with a researcher) to ensure they effectively and consistently capture the intended information.

When selecting screening and assessment tools, victim service providers should consider the following characteristics:

1. **Purpose.** *Does the tool match the goals of our screening or assessment?*
2. **Validity.** *Does it measure what it is supposed to measure?*
3. **Reliability.** *Does it provide consistent results?*
4. **Cultural relevance.** *Is it appropriate for our clients' cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds?*
5. **Feasibility.** *Can it be used with the resources available (e.g., staffing availability and credentials, funding)?*
6. **Timeliness and efficiency.** *Are the tool's implementation timing and duration suitable?*
7. **Guide service delivery.** *Do the results answer questions about next steps for further assessment or treatment?*

What are the best practices in victim screening and assessment?

The following practices can maximize the effectiveness of these information-gathering processes.

1. **Approach screening and assessment as important steps in the rapport-building process.** If possible, let clients know whether the staff conducting screening or assessment will be their ongoing service provider. Either way, a supportive and respectful approach can foster a positive first impression of the organization and set the tone for later service delivery.
2. **Infuse principles of trauma-informed care.** Be aware of the sensitive and emotional nature of sharing experiences of victimization and trauma. Offer choices, allow the client to set the pace, and conduct the screening or assessment in a safe, comfortable environment.
3. **Respect client confidentiality and time.** Describe the purpose, expectations, and confidentiality limitations of the screening or assessment, as well as how information gathered will be used. Consider ways to minimize the time burden and repetition of questions for clients and explain why some questions are asked again, such as to ensure nothing has changed since screening or to comply with regulations.
4. **Be mindful of the language and terminology used.** Some people may not describe themselves as “victims” or use other terms common with professionals. Using behaviorally-specific language can help direct clients to describe their experiences in concrete, meaningful ways. This prevents people — either the provider or the client — from interpreting questions based on their own experiences, biases, or backgrounds.
5. **Assess for strengths and resources.** Avoid focusing only on problems and symptoms.
6. **Consider using different information-gathering methods.** Clients often differ in literacy levels, cultural backgrounds, and comfort answering difficult questions. Some prefer using paper or electronic surveys, whereas others feel better sharing information in-person.
7. **Allow for ongoing and/or repeated assessments.** Ongoing assessment may allow clients to share more in-depth information as they become comfortable with the service provider. Also, clients' situations will change over time; repeated assessments can help providers make timely referrals for the most needed services.

Visit the [CVR website](#) for more information and links to screening and assessment tools.

Find us online at [VictimResearch.org](#) [@VictimResearch](#) [@CenterVictimResearch](#)

vision 
OVC-Funded Project