USING MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING TOOLS
IN THE WORKPLACE

WHAT IS A MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING TOOL?

A mental health screening tool is a way to measure if someone is experiencing or showing symptoms of a mental health issue. The screening tool is usually in the format of a self-reported survey (either administered online or on paper). Screening tools for serious mental illnesses are typically administered by a medical professional, while screenings for depression or anxiety can be taken on their own or under the supervision or guidance of a medical professional.

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE HEALTH SCREENING TOOLS?

Screening tools that have been peer-evaluated by an academic and/or medical institution typically have higher credibility and use. It also depends on which tool is used and what mental illness is being measured.

IS THERE A SUICIDE RISK ASSESSMENT TOOL?

To date there is no reliable, valid screening tool for suicide risk and the US Preventative Services Task Force does not recommend screening for suicide. However, screening for depression is recommended and tools such as the PHQ-9, ASQ, or Beck Depression Inventory can be used. Note that screening for depression is not synonymous with screening for suicide, as depression is neither a necessary, nor a sufficient risk factor for suicide.

WHY SHOULD EMPLOYERS NOT OVERLOOK MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING TOOLS?

It's in an employer's best interest to encourage employees to seek greater awareness of their overall health status—including their mental health status. It's evident that early detection of mental health issues means greater likelihood of effective treatment for depression or other mental illnesses. By providing education about and access to mental health screening tools, employers improve the overall health of their workforce leading to reduced cost burdens associated with an unfit workforce.

ONE STEP AHEAD
PREVENTING SUICIDE IN THE WORKPLACE
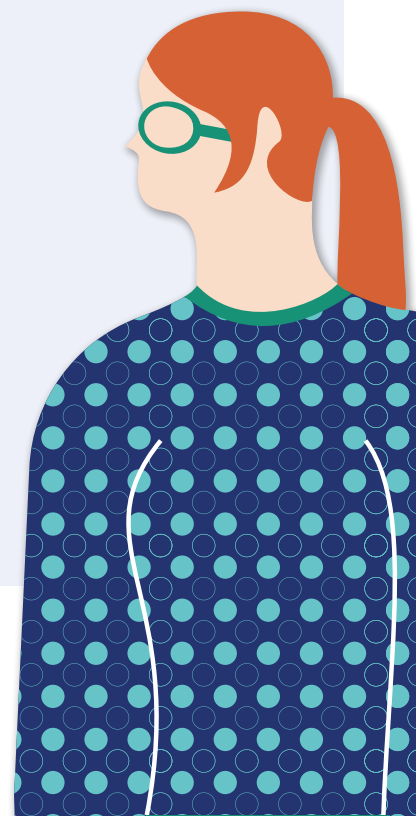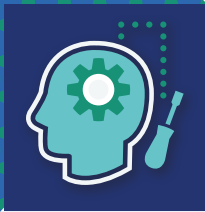
CONSIDERATIONS FOR USE OF SCREENING TOOLS IN THE WORKPLACE:

Mental Health Screenings are meant for employers to provide support to employees, not as a tool to measure a worker's performance. Mental Health Screening results should be protected information and ensure absolute privacy of the employee.

Employers should not administer health screenings until appropriate resources for interventions are in place. Employers should also be in contact with external resources, services, and organizations that are equipped to do this.

- **INCLUDING HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENTS (HRA) INTO WORKPLACE WELLNESS:**
  Health Risk Assessments, also known as Health Risk Appraisals, are one type of screening tool appropriate for the workplace. Although there is no uniform definition for an HRA, it was defined by the CDC as "a systematic approach to collecting information from individuals that identifies risk factors, provides individualized feedback, and links the person with at least one intervention to promote health, sustain function and/or prevent disease." Questions related to mental health are one part of a comprehensive HRA questionnaire. Other topics covered include nutrition, fitness, biometrics (blood and cholesterol tests), sleep, and stress which are all important contributing factors to an individual's mental health. Companies with Employee Wellness programs can provide access to and encourage use of HRAs to provide individuals with greater awareness of their own lifestyle choices and to become aware of and address their health risks.

- **MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING THROUGH AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP):**
  An Employee Assistance Program can be defined as a work-based intervention program designed to assist employees in resolving personal problems that may be adversely affecting the employee's performance. Employers that utilize EAP services should check with their EAP as to whether or not they provide mental health screening tools and which screening tools they use.

- **COMMUNITY BASED SCREENING PROGRAMS**
  Community based screening programs are services provided by nonprofit or groups independent of internally administered HRAs or use of EAPs. Less is known about the effectiveness of the multitude of mental health screening programs available, so be mindful in your research and ask for references if this option better suits your company.

If your company would like SAVE to review the safety of a screening tool, please contact us at save@save.org.