

Advisory Memo to Juvenile Probation officers
“Use of MAYSI-2 During Covid-19 Restrictions”

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In response to Covid-19 conditions, some probation officers are required to do “intake” probation interviews from home or office with youth who are at their own homes.

QUESTION: Is there a way to give the MAYSI-2 under those circumstances?

ANSWER: For reasons explained below, our best advice is to read the 52 MAYSI-2 items to the youth by phone during your interview. Record the “yes-no” answers and proceed to score with paper-and-pencil methods or by entering responses into MAYSIWARE or Orbis Partners on-line MAYSI-2 if available in your office. Then use the “MAYSI-2 Second Screening” method, if necessary, to further inquire about certain scales. Reading to the youth item by item is awkward, of course. But below we explain other options we have considered and why they present considerable risks.

CONSIDERATIONS

There have been three ways to administer MAYSI-2: Paper-and-Pencil; MAYSIWARE; and recently some systems have subscribed to Orbis Partners’ online service (web MAYSI-2).

We know of no way to administer MAYSI-2 with MAYSIWARE or Orbis Partners online service when working from one’s computer to a youth’s computer at their home. . We considered the possibility of employing a Zoom platform, but that’s likely to be complicated. This leaves some version of the paper-and-pencil option.

Paper-and-pencil use has no per-case cost; probation offices that have purchased MAYSI-2 manuals may copy the enclosed MAYSI-2 Questionnaire for indefinite use. We believe it would be consistent with that practice if we (or a probation office that has purchased the MAYSI-2 manual) were to create a fillable PDF MAYSI-2 questionnaire. Could such documents be scanned, or emailed in the case of a fillable PDF, to a youth (if the youth has a computer, mobile phone, or notebook), then completed and returned to the probation officer?

There would be cases in which this would not be feasible (e.g., probation officer has no scanner; the youth has no access to a computer, lacks certain user skills, or has reading difficulties). But beyond those matters, there are two risks that make this option questionable:

1. Youths’ responses may be influenced by the presence of others while they are answering the items (such as parents in the room observing—or at worst, while sitting on a park bench with three friends who are all viewing the youth’s screen and

commenting). Thus, truthfulness and validity of the screening are compromised when the youth cannot be directly monitored.

This risk could be minimized by requiring that the youth answer all items at the time the probation officer sends the document, while the probation officer and the youth are in continued interview phone contact throughout the process. That might be possible, but it raises a second risk.

2. Using the above method, the youths would still have the MAYSI-2 questionnaire in their electronic files after they returned it via email attachment to the probation officer. We have no way of preventing them from sending the questionnaire electronically to other youths or to avoid its eventual posting on the internet (Kids will be kids). For twenty years we have strictly prohibited open-access internet posting of the MAYSI-2 questionnaire. Youths' access to the items on a wide-spread basis could influence how youths' respond when encountering MAYSI-2 in the future, rendering the tool less valid for probation offices nationwide.