Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia

Instructions for self-training.

How to administer the Pencil & Paper version of the ASSIST V3.1 (Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screening Test) and linked Brief Intervention.

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Introduction

This brief guide aims to facilitate the self-training of healthcare workers (eg. social workers, community health workers, psychologists, GPs etc) in appropriate and effective use of the Pencil & Paper format of the ASSIST V.3.1 and linked Brief Intervention. Specifically, a number of steps are provided to guide healthcare workers in developing the necessary skills and confidence to both personally use these tools, as well as assist colleagues and students/trainees in acquiring the necessary skills and confidence. Training in the use of the ASSIST and linked Brief Intervention is particularly useful for healthcare professionals whose role may potentially involve contact with substance users, or who work with individuals whose substance use may place them at increased risk of harm compared with the general population.

This guide is to be used in conjunction with the training manuals listed under the list of materials required for self-training below, as well as the online resources outlined. Upon working through the steps provided, should you have any further questions or queries regarding appropriate use of the ASSIST and associated tools please contact Dr. Rachel Humeniuk (rachel.humeniuk@sa.gov.au) or Dr. Chris Holmwood (chris.holmwood@sa.gov.au).

Background on the ASSIST and Brief Intervention

In response to the overwhelming public health burden associated with problematic substance use, the World Health Organisation (WHO) in collaboration with specialist addiction researchers and clinicians developed the ASSIST in 1997. The ASSIST and Brief Intervention were developed for use in primary health care settings, with the main aim of facilitating the early detection and treatment of substance misuse problems. Overall, the ASSIST provides a brief yet comprehensive overview of a client’s lifetime and recent substance use, as well as an opportunity to identify and discuss problematic or harmful substance use patterns.

The ASSIST V3.1 is an 8-item interviewer administered questionnaire, which screens for the use of a variety of substances including: tobacco products, alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), sedatives and sleeping pills, hallucinogens, inhalants, opioids and other drugs. The Pencil & Paper version of the ASSIST takes around 7 to 11 minutes to administer and score.

From clients’ responses to items on the ASSIST, an overall risk score for each substance is recorded on the ASSIST Feedback Report Card and used to facilitate discussion (ie. brief intervention) regarding individuals’ substance use. Risk scores obtained for each substance (ie. ‘lower’, ‘moderate’ or ‘high’ risk), determines the most appropriate intervention for the individual depending on their level of use (ie. ‘no treatment’, ‘brief intervention’, ‘referral to specialist treatment’ etc.).

The ASSIST-linked Brief Intervention is a short (3 to 15 minute) intervention specifically designed to be administered to clients’ at ‘moderate risk’ from their substance use. That is, individuals who are not dependent, but whose current substance use may be causing health, social, legal, occupational or financial problems. Feedback and discussion around the scores on the ASSIST Feedback Report card form the basis of the Brief Intervention, as well as take home materials including the “Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use: A guide”. The Brief Intervention is not designed to treat individuals who are dependent or at ‘high risk’ from their substance use, but can be used to encourage such clients to accept a referral to specialised drug and alcohol assessment and treatment.
Materials required for self-training using the Pencil & Paper ASSIST V3.1 and linked Brief Intervention

1. Training manuals:
   - ‘The Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST): Manual for use in primary care’ (ensure that the appendix is also printed).

These are available from the SA Health website on the ASSIST page under ‘Self-training resources for clinicians’. (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST)

2. Print a hard copy of administration tools, training resources and client self-help materials:

   Administration tools
   - The ASSIST v3.1 for health professionals
   - ASSIST v3.1 Response Card for clients
   - ASSIST v3.1 Feedback Report Card for clients (print feedback report card as a double-sided A3 and fold into booklet)

   Training resources
   - Two client scripts (‘Chloe’ and ‘Dave’)
   - The ASSIST Brief Intervention- 10 simple steps

   Client self-help materials
   - ‘Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use: A guide'
   - ASSIST Risk of injecting card for clients

These can be individually accessed through the SA Health website on the ASSIST page (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST)

3. Additional training resources:
   - Demonstration WHO ASSIST V3.0/3.1 (print)
   - Demonstration WHO ASSIST V3.0/3.1 Feedback Report Card (print).
   - ASSIST demonstration DVD
   - Brief Intervention demonstration DVD

   The completed ASSIST questionnaire (WHO ASSIST V.30/3.1) and Feedback Report Card can be printed, and used to follow along with the ASSIST and Brief intervention demonstration clips. These resources are available on the SA Health website on the ASSIST page (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST)

4. Additional information on the ASSIST
   A number of research publications relating to the development and validation of the ASSIST, as well as general fact sheets are available from the SA Health website on the ASSIST page (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST)
Step-by-step Instructions for *Pencil & Paper* administration of the ASSIST V3.1 and linked Brief Intervention.

Please note that the following is just a guide, and that individual learning style as well as previous drug and alcohol related knowledge and experience should be considered when working through these steps.

**Step 1:** Ensure that you have access to the materials listed under ‘Materials required for ASSIST self-training’ (p.3).

**Tips/recommendations:**

- Access to the training manuals and administration tools are your first priority; other training tools (e.g. scripts, demonstration clips) can be accessed at a later stage.

**Step 2:** Familiarise yourself with the content of the *The Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST): Manual for use in primary care*. This manual details use of the actual screening tool.

**Tips/recommendations:**

- Please note that both the ASSIST and Brief Intervention manuals are quite comprehensive and may require more than one sitting to work through.

- It is recommended that when working through the ASSIST manual that you have an ASSIST questionnaire in easy reach to refer to the specific questions discussed, as well as to add personal notes/reminders (e.g. scoring guidelines).

- Chapters 2 to 6 provide a comprehensive introduction to the ASSIST, information on who should use the ASSIST and with whom, as well as the rationale behind screening for substance use. It is imperative that the intended use of the ASSIST, as well as its limitations (i.e. it is not a diagnostic tool) are well understood prior to its use.

- Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the problems related to substance use, and the health problems associated with use of particular substances. Time spent familiarising yourself with these chapters will depend on your previous drug and alcohol related knowledge and field experience. Knowledge of the health problems associated with each substance facilitates smooth and comprehensive ASSIST administration and feedback provision, as well as more in-depth discussion regarding clients use (i.e. allows the use of prompts).

- Chapters 9 and 10 specifically focus on administration of the ASSIST. It is helpful to review Chapters 9 and 11, which focus on additional factors related to administration (e.g. the importance of empathy and being non-judgemental, the need to rephrase items for some clients etc.) even if you have previous experiencing administering screening tools/health related measures.

- Chapters 13 to 15 focus on the scoring of the ASSIST and how to link ASSIST scores with Brief Intervention. The trickiest aspect of ASSIST scoring relates to classification of clients frequency-related responses into the ASSIST categories (e.g. ‘monthly’, ‘weekly’ etc). Page 22 and 23 provide a guide on classifying frequency responses, as well as some practice questions to test your knowledge. The answers to the practice questions are provided in Appendix F of the ASSIST manual.
Step 3: Familiarise yourself with the content of the Brief Intervention training manual. This actually details how to administer a brief intervention in response to the findings of the screening tool.

Tips/recommendations:

- Chapters 2 and 3 provide an overview of the Brief Intervention, its use and the importance of brief intervention in primary care. As with the ASSIST, it is important that you are aware of both the intended use, and limitations of the Brief Intervention prior to administration.

- Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical basis for the intervention, as well as components and motivational interviewing. Ensure that you are familiar with stages of behaviour change (Chapter 4), as well as components of effective brief intervention - FRAMES and motivational interviewing (Chapters 5 & 6).

- Chapter 7 provides a step by step approach to administering the ASSIST-linked brief intervention. Work through this carefully, and ensure you are familiar with the sequence of questions, when to refer to the ASSIST Feedback Report Card, how to personalise feedback, how to best word advice and encourage clients to raise their own concerns regarding their use in a non-judgemental way. Examples of administering the Brief Intervention are provided in Chapters 9 and 10. (The procedure for administering the brief intervention will become clearer when viewing the demonstration clip - Step 6).

Step 4: Take time to familiarise yourself with the self-help materials provided to clients following the Brief Intervention. These include both the ‘Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use: A guide’ and the ‘ASSIST risk of injecting card for clients’.

Tips/recommendations:

- Clients at high risk from their substance use may require further assessment and intervention. To facilitate prompt referral to appropriate services, familiarise yourself with your state or territory specific specialist drug and alcohol and communicable disease services.

- It is important that you are familiar with the resources being given to clients, should they have any questions, or wish to further discuss the strategies listed in the guide.

- In addition to the resources listed above, ensure that your work place (eg. community health setting, psychology practice, GP clinic etc.) has educational materials (eg. brochures etc.) on the specific substances screened by the ASSIST (eg. alcohol, tobacco, cannabis etc.), to provide to clients to take away with them.

Step 5: View the ASSIST and Brief Intervention demonstration clips available on the ASSIST page (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST) on the SA Health website.

Tips/recommendations:

- Prior to viewing the ASSIST and ASSIST-linked Brief Intervention demonstration clips of the website, ensure that you have access to the completed questionnaire and report card to follow along with (Demonstration WHO ASSIST V3.0/3.1 and Demonstration WHO ASSIST V3.0/3.1 Feedback Report Card).
• Pay special attention to the way in which the interviewer asks and clarifies questions, uses reflection and summarises the client’s concerns, provides objective advice, as well as her overall communication style (ie. respectful, non-judgmental, empathetic and objective).

• It may be useful to view these clips more than once to ensure you are comfortable with the ASSIST administration and scoring procedure, as well as administration of the Brief Intervention before practising with a volunteer or colleague.

**Step 6:** Practice administration and scoring of the ASSIST with a volunteer or colleague using the practice scripts.

**Tips/recommendations:**

• Two client scripts (‘Chloe’ and ‘Dave’) are provided in Appendix G of the ASSIST Manual. These are to be used in role plays with two people (one playing the health worker and one playing the client) to practice using the ASSIST and getting administration and scoring correct prior to use with clients. A copy of the ASSIST v3.1 questionnaire and ASSIST v3.1 Response Card will also be needed for this activity.

• Ensure that any discrepancies between the scores calculated by the interviewer, and the correct scores provided with the script are highlighted, discussed and corrected. Further referral to the chapters outlining ASSIST scoring may be required (Chapters 13 to 15).

**Step 7:** Practice administration of the Brief intervention.

**Tips/recommendations:**

• Review the scripted example of the suggested 10 step ASSIST-linked brief intervention for a 22 year old female client scoring in the moderate risk range for amphetamine-type stimulants, tobacco and cannabis (Chapter 9 in Brief Intervention Manual).

• Review the scripted example of a longer intervention for a 33 year old male client scoring in the moderate risk range for cannabis use (Chapter 11 page 34-37 in the Brief Intervention Manual).

• Using the scores provided in the client scripts (‘Chloe’ and ‘Dave’), practice administering the ASSIST-linked brief intervention to a volunteer or colleague for one of the ‘moderate risk’ substances (eg. Cannabis for the David script).

**Step 8:** Review

• Work through the ‘Checklist for ASSIST self-training’ provided below.

• Review content of ASSIST and Brief Intervention manuals, and skill development activities (eg. demonstration clips, practising with client scripts) as required.
Checklist for ASSIST V3.1 and Brief Intervention self-training:

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I am familiar with the content of the ASSIST Manual (eg. administration, scoring).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I am familiar with the content of the Brief Intervention Manual (eg. model of behaviour change, motivational interviewing etc).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I am confident in my knowledge of the problems related to substance use (Chapter 7 ASSIST Manual).</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>I am familiar with specific health problems associated with each substance (Chapter 8, ASSIST Manual).</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>I am familiar with the client-related resources (eg. self-help strategies guide, and self and ASSIST risk of injecting card for clients).</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>I have viewed the ASSIST and Brief Intervention demonstration clips</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>I have had the opportunity to practice administering and scoring the ASSIST with a volunteer or colleague using the scripts (‘Chloe’ and ‘David’) provided.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I have had the opportunity to review the scripted examples outlining administration of the Brief Intervention (Chapter 9 and 11 in Brief intervention manual).</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I have had the opportunity to practice administration of the Brief Intervention with a volunteer or colleague.</td>
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