TCOM
Transformational Collaborative Outcomes Management

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths
(CANS) USER TIP SHEET

The CANS is designed as a structured assessment strategy for identifying youth and family actionable needs and useful strengths. It provides a framework for developing and communicating about a shared vision and uses youth and family information to inform planning, support decisions, and monitor outcomes. It provides a common language for multidisciplinary settings for consensus building.

Guiding Principles

1. Items are included because they are relevant for planning and decision making.

2. Item ratings translate into action levels.

3. Focus is on the youth's needs, not interventions or services that could mask a need.

4. Consider culture and development before establishing action levels.

5. It's about the 'what,' not the 'why.' Don't explain away needs with what you think might be an underlying cause.

6. Specific ratings window (30-days) can be over ridden based on action levels.

Before rating an item, consider the following questions:

- Is there any evidence of a need or strength?
- Are you understanding the youth's behavior within normal development given her/his age?
- Have you considered the youth and family's culture? Does your approach to assessment and engagement communicate respect for the youth and family's culture?
- Is the need impacting the youth's functioning?
- How urgently is action required on a need? How useful is the youth/family strength in achieving targeted outcomes?
- Are you focused on describing the need or strength, and not the underlying cause?
- What services are already in place for the youth and/or family?

The majority of the CANS items are rated in the context of what is normative for the youth's age and developmental stage.

Item Rating: Action Levels

Rating Needs Domains		Rating Strengths Domains	
0	No evidence of need; no need for action.	0	Centerpiece strength; central to planning.
1	History of or possible need; watchful waiting/prevention/additional assessment.	1	Strength present; useful in planning.
2	Need is interfering with functioning; action or intervention required.	2	Identified strength; consider strength building or development activities.
3	Need is dangerous or disabling; immediate or intensive action required.	3	No strength identified; strength creation or identification may be indicated.