

Differentiating between Substance Use and a Substance Use Disorder in Teens

This fictitious case is based in part on SASSI-A2 scale scores that were called into our clinical help desk. The client, Josh (not his real name), is a 17-year-old male who was a senior in high school at the time of the assessment.

Josh was referred to the school counselor after he was caught drinking beer on the school campus with some of his friends during a school-sponsored activity. Josh, an above-average student with no prior history of alcohol or drug-related problems, plans to attend college in the fall. His parents reported that Josh had been staying out later than usual on some weeknights and that they confronted him once about alcohol on his breath.

The SASSI-A2 was administered as part of the assessment to rule out the possibility of a Substance Use Disorder. The scores are illustrated in the accompanying profile. The results indicate that Josh has a Low Probability of having a Substance Use Disorder (Rule 1-9 answered "no"). The VAL and SCS scales are not elevated, suggesting that there is not a particularly high likelihood that the SASSI incorrectly missed identifying Josh as having a Substance Use Disorder. He appears to have responded to the instrument in a forthright manner and therefore probably provided a reasonably accurate account of his alcohol and drug-related experiences (DEF=4). On the FVA items he reports using to cope with problems, moderate loss of control (drinking more than he intended to once or twice), and negative consequences including the current incident and confrontation with his parents. Given the Low Probability outcome and scale scores in the average range, it is reasonable to infer from these results that Josh is most likely involved in a pattern of substance use that is experimental/recreational in nature. However, given that he has begun to experience some issues of loss of control and negative consequences, he may be at risk for developing a substance use problem if he does not receive adequate assistance and support for behavioral change. This may be a particularly important consideration when he goes to college and is likely to be exposed to peer groups in which regular substance use is the norm.

Treatment Recommendations:

The SASSI-A2 results indicate that Josh is not likely to have a Substance Use Disorder at this time. Additional assessment information did not indicate that Josh has been experiencing risk factors over and above what was already indicated on the SASSI-A2. He will most likely benefit from a cognitively based educational/prevention program geared towards increasing his awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol use. Values clarification and exploring alternate means of peergroup support may also be effective in helping Josh make healthier social choices.

Name Josh Gender M Age 17

Client ID _____ Test Date _____

Adolescent Male Profile									
Face Valid Alcohol	Face Valid Other Drugs	Family-Friends Risk	Attitudes	Symptoms	Obvious Attributes	Subtle Attributes	Defensiveness	Supplemental Addiction Measure	Correctional
FVA	FVOD	FRISK	ATT	SYM	OAT	SAT	DEF	SAM	COR
6	0	3	4	2	5	4	4	2	5

LOW PROBABILITY
of having a Substance Use Disorder

↓

Check the appropriate line(s) below

If VAL is **5 or more**, or
If SCS is **16 or more**, consider further assessment, particularly for a mild Substance Use Disorder.

THE DECISION RULE:

1. ANY rule marked "yes"?
2. ALL rules marked "no"?



VAL	Validity Check
4	
SCS	Secondary Classification Scale
9	

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HIGH PROBABILITY
of having a Substance Use Disorder

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Check the appropriate line below

___ If SCS is **15 or less** a mild Substance Use Disorder is more probable.

___ If SCS is **16 or more** a moderate to severe Substance Use Disorder is more probable.