

Pennsylvania's
Student Assistance Program:
SAP Liaison Frequently Asked Questions
and
Best Practice Responses



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PNSAS-Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services

www.pnsas.org

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Letter of Agreement

1. What should be in the letter of agreement and how detailed should it be?

The letter of agreement reflects the role and scope of both the agency and school district/LEA related to what each will do over the course of the school year.

A copy of the letter of agreement should be shared with the SAP Team and liaison. It should include:

Agency:

- a designated contact person for the school and agency
- the frequency of attendance for liaisons at SAP team meetings
- the role of the liaisons in the school SAP process
- referral procedures
- school and agency responsibilities and expectations
- a list of services to be provided and their accompanying cost, if any, to the school
- record-keeping requirements
- a procedure for conflict resolution
- applicable confidentiality regulations

District/LEA responsibilities – District/LEA will provide:

- necessary student information (including compiled behavior checklist, discipline records, nurse, and guidance records, etc.)
- a confidential area for screening/assessment
- locked cabinet for SAP records
- access to telephone in a private area
- a representative from the school district to participate in County Coordination and/or District Council meetings

2. What is the role of SAP liaison in crisis response?

It is a local decision as to the services the agency should provide and what a school requests. Each agency should develop a letter of agreement with each school district it serves to outline the role of the liaison, particularly in a crisis situation. However, it is not the role of the agency staff to “act as a school staff member” during a crisis situation. At a minimum, the liaison should have a copy of and have reviewed all school crisis policies for the schools they serve. Additional training may be warranted, depending on the requests from the school district and the expertise of the liaison. Also, it may be beyond the scope of a liaison to provide crisis response services and schools may need to contract with other agencies for additional services.

Additionally, liaisons can provide postvention services. It is recommended that in the aftermath of a crisis, liaisons assist the SAP team to ensure calm among the school community.

3. Are Letters of Agreement between schools and liaison agencies required?

Letters of agreement should be written and signed annually. The Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) requires Single County Authority (SCA) funded liaison agencies to execute a letter of agreement between the liaison agency and the school. DDAP requirements regarding letters of agreement can be found in the [DDAP Prevention Manual](#).

4. If you are given an unsafe place to meet with students, can you refuse?

This should be addressed in the letter of agreement. Rather than refuse immediately, identify the reason for concern about the meeting place and speak with an administrator who might be able to offer an alternative. If the liaison is truly uncomfortable, it should be communicated to the liaison's supervisor and the school contact. If no resolution is achieved after following the conflict resolution process outlined in the letter of agreement, then the liaison agency can refuse to provide services.

Parent Consent

5. What do liaisons need to do regarding parent/legal guardian permission for a screening/assessment?

First and foremost, the liaison must ensure a signed school SAP consent has been obtained from the parent/legal guardian giving the team permission for the student to be involved in SAP services. A liaison should not meet with a student without written parent consent for screening/assessment. It is important the school and agency both be aware of how parent permission for screenings or assessments will be obtained. Liaisons need to discuss this with the participating school and outline the procedures in the letter of agreement. Where agencies conduct assessments in schools, parent permission should be on agency letterhead. In some schools the team case manager is responsible for acquiring the consent and in other schools the liaison may obtain the consent.

6. Are non-custodial caregivers (who do not have legal guardianship, but care for the child) permitted to sign for a SAP screening or assessment?

These caregivers may have "education rights", allowing them to make educational decisions, but not medical decisions. Liaisons should follow their agency policy on parent/guardian permission.

7. If a student is over age 18, do you have to get parent permission prior to screening or assessing?

First, check the district policy on obtaining consent for students over age 18. Unless legally emancipated, most districts continue to require parent consent for students over age 18. If legally emancipated, then a copy of the document should be obtained by the school. Liaisons should follow their agency policy on parent/guardian permission.

Program Fidelity/Infrastructure

8. How can liaisons best help teams maintain program fidelity?

Connect the SAP team to their Regional Coordinator for assistance. Encourage the team to participate in team maintenance. Review best practices with the team. Bring any concerns to the team's attention when they come up.

9. What do liaisons do/say if there are problems with the team functioning and process, (since they have an allegiance to teams but this may conflict with agency role)? Examples: Team is not meeting, team uses meeting time to discuss inappropriate topics, team is not utilizing data such as behavior checklists, etc.

The liaison is a team member and can provide technical assistance on appropriate SAP process and procedures. It could be appropriate to suggest best practice to the team. Liaisons should follow the conflict resolution process and speak with their supervisor about any greater concerns that affect team functioning or their role as a liaison.

Some suggestions are:

- Suggest teams check [PNSAS website](#) for sample forms such as behavior checklists and meeting agenda and other team maintenance tools such as the fidelity checklist or satisfaction surveys.
- Team maintenance should be scheduled once per year.
- The liaison supervisor could conduct supervision meetings and attend team meetings. This could be an opportunity for someone that does not have a personal connection to the team to provide unbiased feedback.
- The liaison supervisor could meet with the building principal.
- Ask Regional Coordinator for technical assistance.
- A Regional Coordinator can provide suggestions and options to address team concerns at a Networking Day or SAP Coordination/District Council meetings.

10. If your team has few referrals, is it acceptable to not participate in team meetings?

If referrals are lacking, the liaison could assist the team with marketing SAP and in-service to educate school staff on appropriate referrals using observable behaviors. It would not be appropriate to stop attending meetings, as this may further reduce the number of referrals. Also, it is necessary for each agency to complete their contract with their county SCA or MH office and involve the county in concerns prior to considering reduction in services. If a team is not meeting or meeting very infrequently, it may be appropriate for a liaison and county to refrain from providing liaison services. This should only be done after following the conflict resolution process as outlined in the letter of agreement between the agency and school. If your school is very small and has few students, there may be options you can discuss with your PNSAS Regional Coordinator.

Groups

11. Should agency staff facilitating support groups sit on the SAP team if another staff person is the designated SAP liaison for that team?

No, the role of the group facilitator is different than that of the SAP Liaison. The group facilitator should have a contact person on the team with whom they communicate. It is imperative that a communication mechanism be developed so appropriate “need to know” group information is relayed back to the SAP Team. This assures that roles are not blurred and that appropriate agency personnel are on the teams. This also prevents a conflict of interest with group facilitators referring students to their groups, when this is the role of non-biased team members. Group facilitators could be invited at the end of a group cycle to report out on the conclusion of the group or share any additional concerns.

12. Can I run a group without school personnel co-facilitating?

It is best practice to have a school co-facilitator. However, agency personnel may run groups without a co-facilitator. If there is no co-facilitator, some mechanism for assistance must be developed in case assistance is needed during a group session. Be sure this is approved by both the agency and the school and outlined in letter of agreement.

Professional Development/In-Service/Training

13. Can I provide team maintenance to my own teams?

As a member of the team, the liaison should not facilitate team maintenance. It is advisable for the facilitator to not be a member of the team. Examples of facilitators include a PNSAS Regional Coordinator or PA Approved SAP Training Provider.

14. Can liaisons provide in-service to school district faculty or the PTO/PTA regarding SAP?

Yes, the liaison can assist the team with in-service and other appropriate duties as time permits.

15. What is my role with SAP County Coordination?

County Coordination is a team comprised of representations from SAP child-serving systems that meet regularly to provide the leadership, planning and coordination necessary to implement effective SAP services at the county or county joinder level. SAP Coordination Team membership can change from county to county. County Coordination Guidelines are available at: www.pnsas.org.

Each SAP County Coordination Team may have different expectations for liaisons. In some counties, there is one drug and alcohol and one mental health liaison represented, in other counties, only agency supervisors are represented on County Coordination Team. The role of County Coordination Team is to assure that questions, concerns, feedback, or suggestions are delivered to appropriate channels or services rendered. SAP County Coordination Guidelines are available at: www.pnsas.org. Reach out to your [PNSAS Regional Coordinator](#) to connect with your County Coordination Team.

16. What is my role in District Council or SAP Networking?

District Council is a team sharing and problem-solving forum. Networking can be associated with a training event, such as Networking Day. This generally is a professional development opportunity extended to SAP teams.

Each District Council or Networking may have different expectations for liaisons, but it is appropriate for liaisons to participate in these activities.

17. Are SAP liaisons required to attend PA SAP K-12 training?

SAP K-12 training is required for all SAP liaisons.

18. What type of professional development is available for SAP liaisons?

Opportunities may include: PNSAS Liaison Networking calls and Regional Coordinator updates/trainings, County SAP Networking, PA Association of Student Assistance Professionals conference or webinars, and other DDAP and OMHSAS trainings.

Screening/Assessment

19. What is the difference between screening and assessment?

Screening can identify areas of concern and determine if further evaluation is necessary. A screening does NOT determine if treatment is needed nor what level of care might be needed.

Assessment determines if treatment is needed and what level of care is needed.

20. How does a liaison determine whether to do a screening or an assessment?

Often it determined by the county contract whether the SAP liaison will complete a screening, assessment, both or neither. Depending on this contract, the liaison may just conduct the screening then refer the student for assessment to another agency.

21. What screening or assessment tool should we use?

It is up to each SCA and County MH office to determine their expectations for screening or mental health assessment tools. This should be decided at the agency level in conjunction with the SCA and county MH office. PNSAS does not mandate a screening tool for either mental health or drug and alcohol. DDAP requires the ASAM Criteria, 2013 be used for drug and alcohol level of care assessments.

22. Are there things we should ask in a screening?

Liaison screenings should ask questions about a student’s mental state (e.g. if they have felt depressed, sad or hopeless) and substance use. Screenings should remain brief and should use validated screening tools when possible.

23. Are there things we should not ask in a screening?

A screening should only ask enough questions to ascertain that there are indications of a concern with substance use, mental health, or other issues. Probing questions that will assist with identifying the level of care needed should be limited to assessments. This should be developed in consultation with the county SCA and MH offices.

24. What do I do (as a liaison) with a student who does not follow-through with my screening/assessment recommendations?

Discuss it with the SAP team. The SAP case manager could follow-up with the student and family to discuss the importance of the recommendations. With appropriate student consent, the liaison could contact the parent to review recommendations, obtain updates, and offer assistance if needed (this can be done more than once depending on agency role). Additional options may be viable depending on the letter of agreement with the agency and school.

Records

25. How long should agencies maintain screening records?

It is the responsibility of the agency to decide what type of record a SAP screening would be classified as. Once determined, the SAP screening would be retained following the established agency procedures for those types of records.

26. How long should agencies maintain assessment records?

SAP assessments are agency records and are maintained in accordance with established policy and procedures for all assessments conducted by the agency. Length of time maintained would be determined by adopted policy and procedures. However, records must be maintained for 6 years according to HIPAA or longer if any state requirement exceeds the HIPAA requirement. Assessments are subject to the same records policies regardless of whether conducted in the school or at the agency.

27. Where should records from screenings and assessments be kept?

Screening and assessment records should be kept at the agency in a secure, locked file and should not be kept in a school. Screening and assessment records generated at the school should be transported to the agency as soon as possible. While in transit, all records should be kept in a file box, locked in the trunk or in a locked car.

28. Who at the agency has access to liaison screening/assessment files?

There should be restricted access to files, along with written log of those who accessed the file.

29. What should liaisons keep as part of a SAP agency record?

- Signed parent/guardian consent form
- Signed parent/guardian refusal form
- Dates and notes from SAP meetings where referred student was discussed (i.e. referral reason, grades, etc.).
- Dates/notes from all parent/guardian contacts
- Screening/Assessment
- Recommendations
- Any applicable releases of information
- Confirmation/Denial of services
- Monitoring/progress notes or reports
- Any additional documentation required by the agency

30. Can liaison screening records be monitored by county and/or state agencies?

Mental health screening records are not monitored by state agencies. DDAP screening records can be monitored by state agencies. However, both mental health and drug and alcohol screening records are subject to monitoring by County Mental Health or Drug and Alcohol funding agents in accordance with the county service contract.

31. Can liaison assessments completed in schools be monitored by county and/or state agencies?

Yes, assessments are under the applicable regulations of DDAP and the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), regardless of being completed in the schools.

32. What is a liaison allowed to share from a screening or assessment to the school?

Liaisons completing a screening can share recommendations the liaison has for a student, as long as there is an informed, written release signed by parent/guardian. If the screening asks about substance use, liaisons should follow their agency policy regarding whether written student consent is needed to share recommendations.

In the case of a drug and alcohol liaison that completes assessments, the student must sign the release of information. In the case of a mental health liaison that completes assessments and the student is over 14, the student must sign the release of information.

The agency should not provide the school a copy of the completed screening or assessment. However, they can provide a copy of the blank assessment tool at the beginning of the school year.

In the event a student discloses threat to self/others, the liaison should follow procedure in notifying appropriate individuals (parent, school, emergency delegate, or possibly the police).

Reporting

33. Does data from the SAP Liaison Annual Report need to be completed for students from the elementary schools?

Yes, all liaison screenings and assessments for all ages should be included in the annual report.