

Treatment access for youth with substance use disorders is at a 20-year low. School-based screening with a GAIN-Short Screener can quickly identify youth needing help.

## Schools are the Most Effective Source of Help for Substance Use

Substance use and mental health disorders are among the leading causes of preventable harm for youth. Yet, treatment access is at a 20-year low. Only one in 14 adolescents and one in 30 young adults with behavioral health needs receive care.<sup>1</sup>

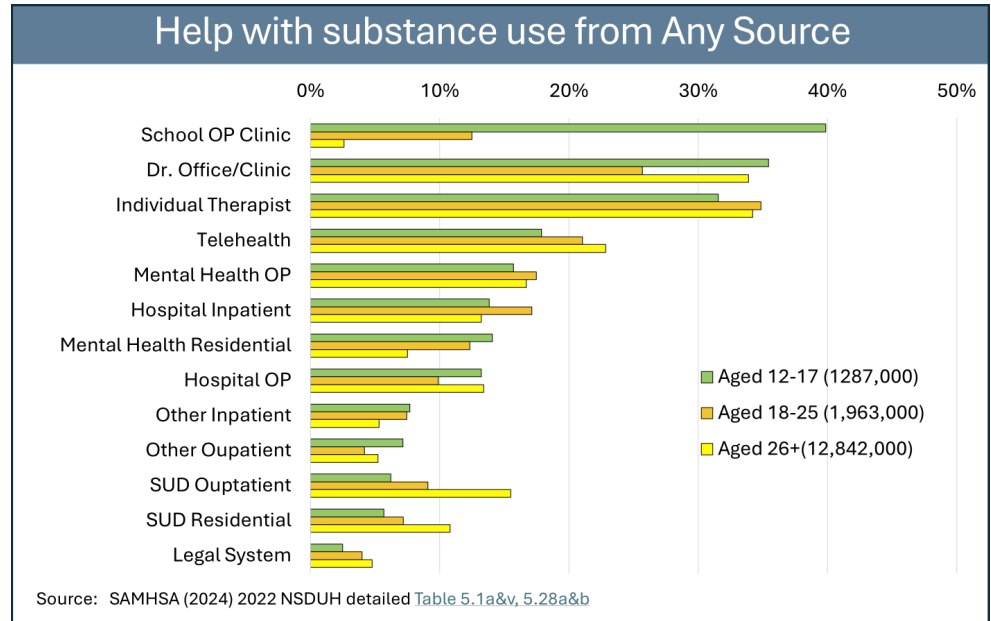
By 12th grade, 47% of students have tried illicit drugs and many struggle with depression or anxiety as well.

Schools are the most common and effective point of contact for this age group.

Screening for both substance use and mental health issues in schools helps:

- Reach students earlier
- Reduce disparities in treatment access
- Improve academic performance
- Decrease absences and disciplinary actions

Youth ages 12–25 are at high risk because judgment and reasoning areas of the brain develop last. Early screening matters, 90% of individuals with a substance use disorder started before age 18, and untreated mental health issues can persist for decades.



The GAIN-Short Screener (GAIN-SS) is a 23-question tool (5–15 minutes) that helps schools identify individuals who have one or more behavioral health disorders with an accuracy rate over 90%.<sup>6</sup>

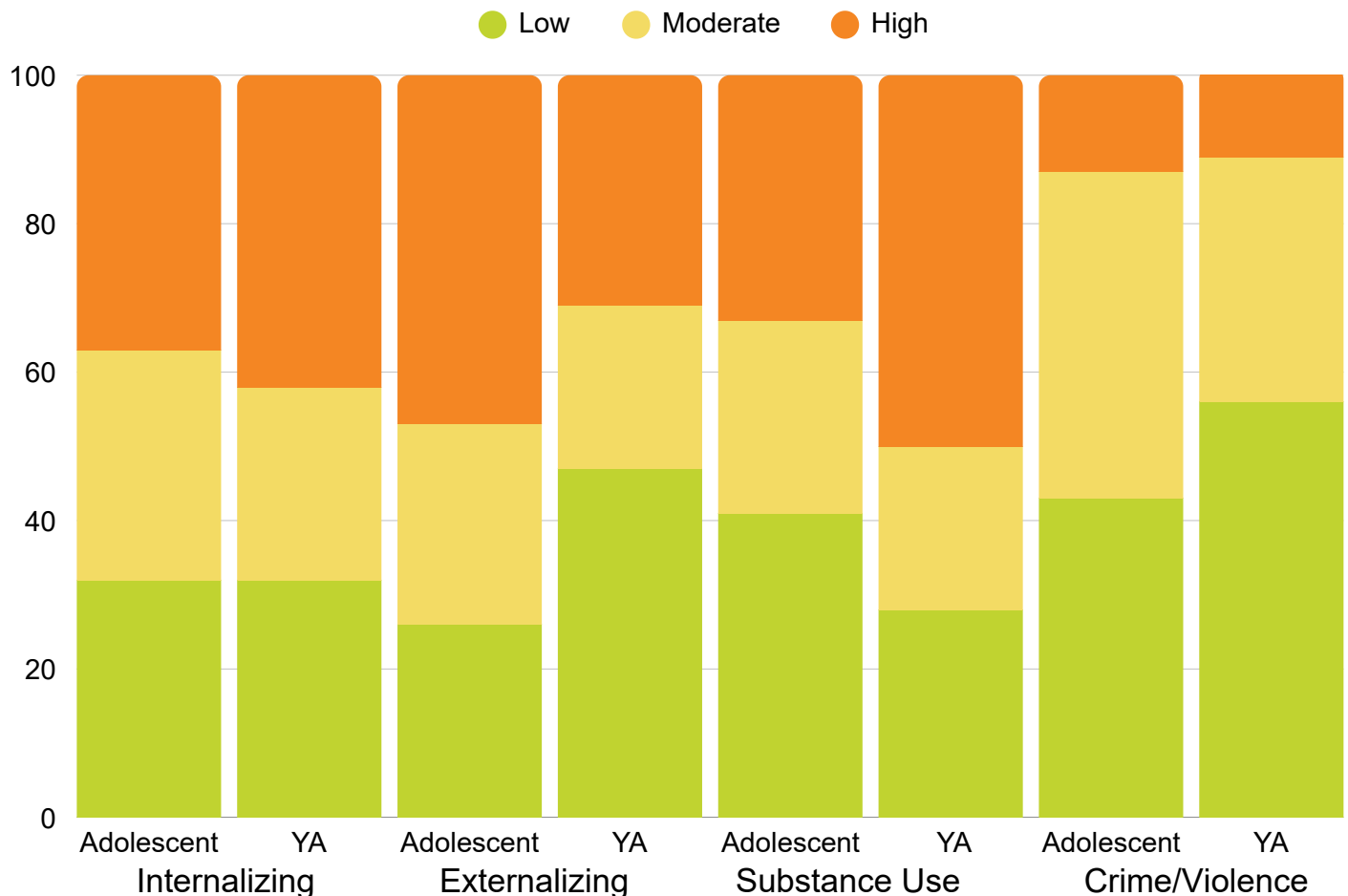
Easy to use by staff with minimal training, the screener supports early identification and referral. If concerns are flagged, a full GAIN assessment can provide a detailed profile and treatment planning recommendations

## The Benefits of a Multi-Dimensional Tool

- A simple screener can identify complex problems
- Target services to those who need them most
- Identify problem areas before they start services
- Prioritize interventions
- Increase buy-in and engagement

## Insights Achieved with the GAIN-SS

The GAIN-SS screens across four key behavioral health areas: substance use, internalizing mental health (anxiety, depression, trauma, suicide risk), externalizing mental health (ADHD, conduct disorder), and crime/violence. It measures problem severity and recency, scoring risk as low, moderate, or high.



Twenty years of GAIN data show that behavioral health issues often overlap.

Among youth in treatment or legal settings, 59% of adolescents and 72% of young adults had moderate to severe substance use issues, and most also had mental health concerns—74% with internalizing disorders and up to 74% with externalizing disorders.

**Young adults are least likely to get care, making school-based screening critical for early intervention.**

## References

- <sup>1</sup> SAMHSA (2024) 2022 NSDUH detailed [Table 5.1a&v, 5.28a&b National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics \(2024\)](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [Center for Drug Abuse Statistics \(2024\)](#)
- <sup>3</sup> Rattermann, M. J. (2014). Measuring the impact of substance abuse on student academic achievement and academic growth. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 7(2), 123-135.
- <sup>4</sup> SAMHSA (2023) 2021 NSDUH detailed [Table 1.6b, 1.7b 2.9b, 5.4a](#)
- <sup>5</sup> Dennis, M. L., et al. (2005). The duration and correlates of addiction and treatment careers. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 28(2), S51-S62.
- <sup>6</sup> Dennis, M.L. Chan, Y., Funk, R. (2006). Development and validation of the GAIN Short Screener (GSS) for Internalizing, Externalizing and Substance Use Disorders and Crime/Violence Problems Among Adolescents and Adults. *Crime/Violence Problems Among Adolescents and Adults. The American Journal on Addiction*, 15, 80-91.