

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SCREENING TOOL

The HITS questionnaire (Hurts – Insults – Threatens and Screams) for victims of domestic violence<sup>1</sup> is a validated, brief questionnaire for determining domestic violence. It is useful as a quick tool for screening for domestic violence among patients during a routine medical examination. This tool has been extended to screen for abuse of children living in the home, and to screen for perpetrators of domestic violence.

Although the first concern in situations of domestic violence is to remove the victims from imminent harm, prevention of domestic violence includes self-identification of the transgressor. If physicians can identify patients who are perpetrators of domestic violence, they can offer them treatment.

Many perpetrators of domestic violence were themselves victims of abuse as children. Physicians can offer treatment which may avert intergenerational propagation of violence.

Perpetrators of domestic violence may suffer from PTSD, traumatic brain injury, rage disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, alcohol or drug addiction, or excessive irritability associated with chronic sleep deprivation, perhaps due to an inflammatory condition, such as fibromyalgia or chronic pain, that has gone undiagnosed or is inadequately treated.

Screening of patients for domestic violence transgressions, as well as for victims, should be part of new patient interviews and annual physical exams.

Even when it does not identify abuse, it sends a teaching message that corporal punishment, verbal abuse, and violence are neither normal nor acceptable in family situations. When assistance is offered in a non-judgmental manner, it lets patients know that help and alternatives are available.

The original HITS test ranked each item from one to five; if the total score from the four items was ten or greater, it indicated that intimate partner violence was occurring.

The Home Life Survey on the following page has been modified so that it uses a range from zero to four. This was done to emphasize that zero is the appropriate norm for domestic or partner abuse. Thus, in this modified format, a score of six or greater is evidence of domestic violence on this HITS tool.

The HITSP (HITS Perpetrator) and HITSC (HITS Child) have not yet been validated. Nevertheless, a similar score of six or greater should be regarded as problematic, and merit follow-up. The tool can be used to open discussion with the patient about problems in the home. It can serve as breadcrumbs to look for conditions and disease states that may underlie the aggression and strife, and that are amenable to and in need of, treatment. In the case of a positive HITSC, the dysfunction might arise from a child with ADHD or other condition that makes the child difficult to manage.

When offered as non-judgmental assistance, both victims and perpetrators are usually grateful for help in overcoming their turmoil.

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<sup>1</sup> HITS: a short domestic violence screening tool for use in a family practice setting. Sherin KM, Sinacore JM, Li XQ, Zitter RE, Shakil A. *Fam Med.* 1998 Jul-Aug;30(7):508-12. PMID:9669164 Used with author's permission.

# HOME LIFE SURVEY

If you are in an intimate relationship, please check the boxes that best indicates the frequency with which you and your partner engage in the following behaviors.

How often does your partner?

|                            | Never<br>0 | Rarely<br>1 | Sometimes<br>2 | Fairly Often<br>3 | Frequently<br>4 |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Physically hurt you        |            |             |                |                   |                 |
| Insult or talk down to you |            |             |                |                   |                 |
| Threaten you with harm     |            |             |                |                   |                 |
| Scream or curse at you     |            |             |                |                   |                 |

HITS Score<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you?

|                                     | Never<br>0 | Rarely<br>1 | Sometimes<br>2 | Fairly Often<br>3 | Frequently<br>4 |
|-------------------------------------|------------|-------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Physically hurt your partner        |            |             |                |                   |                 |
| Insult or talk down to your partner |            |             |                |                   |                 |
| Threaten your partner with harm     |            |             |                |                   |                 |
| Scream or curse at your partner     |            |             |                |                   |                 |

HITSP Score \_\_\_\_\_

If you have a child or children staying in your home:

How often do you?

|  | Never<br>0 | Rarely<br>1 | Sometimes<br>2 | Fairly Often<br>3 | Frequently<br>4 |
|--|------------|-------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Physically hurt the child, including spanking or other corporal punishment |            |             |                |                   |                 |
| Insult or talk down to or berate the child                                 |            |             |                |                   |                 |
| Threaten the child with physical or emotional harm                         |            |             |                |                   |                 |
| Scream or curse at the child   |            |             |                |                   |                 |

HITSC Score \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>2</sup> The HITS Tool, © Kevin Sherin, 2003