



Holistic Student Assessment Information for Parents

What is the HSA survey?

The HSA stands for Holistic Student Assessment. It is a resiliency inventory developed by Dr. Gil Noam at PEAR: Partnerships in Education and Resilience to help schools and programs better understand the social-emotional strengths and struggles of the youth they work with. The HSA is a self-report survey that students take electronically during a 30-minute period at school. Although the HSA tool has the word “assessment” in its title, we want to be clear it is an inventory, not a ranking system. Students report how they feel and what their strengths and struggles are from a social-emotional lens.

Who is Dr. Gil Noam?

Dr. Noam is an internationally recognized developmental psychologist, an Associate Professor at Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital, and trains Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Residents at Mass General Hospital. He is an associate professor at Harvard Medical School focusing on prevention and resilience and leads the Institute for the Study of Resilience in Youth (ISRY) at McLean Hospital. He served as the director of the Risk and Prevention Program and is the founder of the RALLY Prevention Program, a Boston-based intervention that bridges social and academic support in school, afterschool, and community settings.

What is The PEAR Institute?

Partnerships in Education and Resilience (PEAR) has contributed to the social-emotional and STEM education fields for the past 20 years. The organization was founded in 1999 by Dr. Gil Noam while he was a professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) and Harvard Medical School’s psychiatric teaching hospital, McLean Hospital where it was called the Program in Afterschool, Education, and Research (PAER). In 2007, PEAR moved from its primary location at HGSE to McLean Hospital and became The PEAR Institute. In the fall of 2020, PEAR spun off from McLean Hospital and became a Benefit Corporation.

PEAR takes a developmental approach to the study of new models of effective educational programming and incorporates educational, health, public policy, and psychological perspectives. Its programs and projects are a part of a number of schools and afterschool programs across the United States and internationally. Our staff is comprised of experienced psychiatrists, social workers, instructional specialists, school and classroom teachers, former school and out-of-school time (OST) administrators. PEAR partners with school districts, out-of-school-time programs and youth-serving organizations to promote social-emotional development in the service of student engagement, academic achievement, and life success.



What does the HSA measure?

There are several versions of the HSA, but the most common version looks at three domains of social emotional development: resiliencies, relationships, and learning and school engagement. Within these three areas, there are 14 scales (defined in the table below).

Domain	HSA Scale	Definition	Sample Item
Resiliencies	Action Orientation	Engagement in physical and hands-on activities.	I like being physically active and moving my body.
	Assertiveness	Confidence in putting oneself forward and standing up for what one believes.	I defend myself against unfair rules.
	Perseverance	Persistence in work and problem solving despite obstacles.	I keep going with work even when it takes longer than I thought it would.
	Empathy	Recognition of other’s feelings and experiences.	I like to help people with their problems.
	Reflection	Inner thought processes and self-awareness, and internal responsiveness toward broader societal issues.	I try to understand the world I live in.
	Emotional Control	Self-regulation of distress and management of anger.	I react to things so quickly I get in trouble.
	Trust	Perception of other people as helpful and trustworthy.	I trust other people.
Relationships	Optimism	Enthusiasm for and hopefulness about one’s life.	I have more good times than bad times.
	Relationships with Peers	Positive and supportive social connections with friends and classmates.	I have friends I can trust.
Learning and School Engagement	Relationships with Adults	Positive connections and attitudes toward interactions with adults.	There are adults I look up to and admire.
	Learning Interest	Desire to learn and acquire new knowledge.	I like to learn new things.
	Critical Thinking	Examination of information, exploration of ideas, and independent thought.	I try to look at a situation in different ways.
	Academic Motivation	Incentive to succeed in school, without necessarily including general interest in learning.	I want to be a good student.
	School Bonding	Positive personal connections and the sense of belonging in one’s school.	I feel like people understand me at my school.



What is the SDQ?

The SDQ, or Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, provides an initial, brief behavioral screen for 11 to 16-year-olds. Developed by Robert Goodman, Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College London, the SDQ assesses positive and negative aspects of behavior and indicates whether additional or preliminary clinical interventions are needed. The SDQ is included in the survey alongside the HSA.

SDQ Scale	Definition	Sample Item
Hyperactivity/ Inattention	Checks for any possible indications of ADHD or ADD, looks for hyperactivity, difficulty staying still and concentration levels.	I am constantly fidgeting or squirming.
Conduct Problems	Checks for conduct disorders, whether the respondent is able to control his temper, has aggressive or violent tendencies, and whether he violates others or social norms.	I am often accused of lying or cheating.
Emotional Symptoms	Checks for any possible emotional disorders, such as depression or anxiety, or simply indicates if the respondent is experiencing emotional difficulties.	I am often unhappy, depressed, or tearful.
Peer Problems	Checks for social difficulties, whether the respondent feels she is able to interact with her peers, and if she feels she is liked and appreciated.	Other children or young people pick on me or bully me.
Prosocial	Checks for general and positive social skills, perspective taking, empathy, kindness and sociability.	I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset, or feeling ill.

What do you mean by strengths and resiliencies?

Resiliencies are skills and characteristics that help all of us carry on through challenging times. They help us to navigate change or loss and to take care of ourselves when things get tough. Identifying and increasing resiliencies in young people is especially important as they enter adolescence, increase their independence in the world and prepare for young adulthood. In this sense, strengths are resiliencies – our strengths help us to manage challenges. The HSA identifies strengths in young people to help them become more resilient. Although the adults in a young person’s life know a lot about that young person’s strengths, allowing them to tell us about their experiences and self-perceptions can help us to communicate better with them. When a young person reports a strength that we haven’t previously noted, we can build on that strength and find new opportunities for them to express it. We can also identify where they may need additional support from teachers, parents and others.

How will this help build greater resiliency in my child?

That is the goal! Identifying strengths is one important step toward building resiliency. Identifying challenges or vulnerabilities can ensure that we give your child the support they need in order to grow into healthy young adults.

How are confidentiality and privacy maintained?



Every student taking the HSA survey must have parental consent. Once consent is obtained, the students take the survey. PEAR creates a 6 digit ID number that will be connected to the student's roster information. Only authorized personnel at the school/program will be given access through the data through a secure account created in PEAR's data reporting platform. When storing data, PEAR removes names from all data associated with the students and utilizes the student's confidential ID number as a label.

How has this tool been tested for reliability and validity?

The psychometric properties of the HSA have been established in a 2012 journal article co-written by Dr. Gil Noam, Advisory Board Chair of PEAR, and two of his colleagues: Dr. Tina Malti (University of Toronto) and Dr. Martin Guhn (University of British Columbia) and again in a 2017 article by Malti, Dr. Antonio Zuffianò (Liverpool Hope University) and Noam. These papers lend support to the HSA as a valid and reliable measure of children and adolescents' resiliencies. PEAR research regularly evaluates reliability measures, using Cronbach's alpha during the processing and analysis of each school/program's survey data.