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ESTER: Introducing a fourth generation risk-need assessment instrument for youth with or at risk for conduct problems

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ESTER

What is ESTER?

- **ESTER is an assessment system that includes**
 - (1) a screening system (ESTER-screening)
 - (2) a structured research-based professional risk-need instrument (ESTER-assessment).
 - ✦ An easy-to-use computerized system that helps visualize and interpret assessments.
- **Aims to facilitate assessment and follow-up assessments of risk and protective factors for conduct problems among youths (0-18 years) with or at risk for conduct problems.**
 - Thus, for use in both *preventive* and *treating* settings

Developed by researchers in collaboration with practice

- **Developed by the researchers Henrik Andershed & Anna-Karin Andershed**
- **Comments and suggestions from**
 - Practitioners in various youth-related organizations
 - Professors in the field
- **Has been formed together with practice via practical testing**
 - Pilot version (October 2007) – Practical testing - revisions
 - Version 1 (April 2008) – Practical testing - revisions
 - Version 2 (October 2008) -> Practical and scientific testing
 - Now widely spread in Sweden

The ESTER system

- **ESTER-manual**
 - Explains use and the research behind the risk and protective factors that are assessed
- **ESTER-screening**
 - Short questionnaire to screen for strengths and difficulties – Main focus on risk factors
- **ESTER-assessment**
 - Professional structured assessment of risk and protective factors for conduct problems among youths (0-18 years) with or at risk for conduct problems
 - A support for decisions concerning interventions
 - Easy-to-use computerized system

Can be used by all professions and organizations and to improve collaboration

- **ESTER can be used by professionals working with assessment and interventions of youths with or at risk for conduct problems.**
 - E.g., intake assessment and follow-ups
- **Can be used by all organizations that work with youths**
 - E.g., preschool, school, social service, child and adolescent psychiatry, juvenile justice institutions, etc
- **Uses a neutral behavior-focused language that can be accepted by all professions**
 - Can improve collaboration between organizations
- **The computerized system is designed to facilitate collaboration**
- **No previous education or specific background is needed to use ESTER. A one-day training is required.**

Developed for practice

- **ESTER is developed for practice**
 - Should be easy to use and not too comprehensive
 - Not focused on ALL known risk and protective factors
 - ✦ Focus on the most practically useful factors

Assesses the most practically useful research based risk *and* protective factors

- **ESTER-assessment focuses on 19 factors that are:**
 - Dynamic and potentially changeable via intervention.
 - Directly rather than indirectly related to the youth's risk for conduct problems.

Risk factors assessed in ESTER-assessment

Youth risk factors

- 1. Defiant behavior, anger or fearlessness.**
Definition: Defies parents and others wishes and demands – are disobedient- or easily becomes very angry and irritated. Seems fearless or doing risky and dangerous things.
- 2. Overactivity, impulsiveness or concentration difficulties.**
Definition: Is very physically active and restless. Is impulsive and has difficulties to wait for his/her turn and to think before he/she does something. Has difficulties to retain attention and to concentrate for longer times.
- 3. Difficulties with empathy, feelings of guilt or regret.**
Definition: Has difficulties with empathy or doesn't care about others or what they feel and think. Doesn't seem to feel guilt and regret when he/she has done something wrong or hurt someone.
- 4. Insufficient verbal abilities or school performance.**
Definition: Has difficulties with speech, reading- or writing abilities. Insufficient school performances.
- 5. Negative problem solving, interpretations or attitudes.**
Definition: Uses negative/destructive behaviors/problem solving strategies to solve different situations or has a negative way to interpreting others behavior and purposes. Express negative antisocial and status focused and materialistic attitudes and values.
- 6. Depressive mood or self harming behavior.**
Definition: Is sad, depressed or has a self harming behavior.
- 7. Conduct problems.**
Definition: Breaks norms, rules or laws in an aggressive or non-aggressive way.
- 8. Alcohol- or drug abuse.**
Definition: Uses alcohol for intoxicated purposes or uses other drugs.
- 9. Problematic peer relations.**
Definition: Has difficulties to keep, or is not interested in relations with prosocial peers. Spends time with peers with conduct problem behavior or attitudes, or who uses alcohol or other drugs.

Family risk factors

- 10. Parents own difficulties.**
Definition: Parents have economical problems or are sad, depressed. Parent/s often consumes a lot of alcohol or have a criminal behavior.
- 11. Difficulties in parent-youth relations.**
Definitions: Parents are in conflict with or are not engaged in the youth. They have difficulties to show love and affection or have difficulty to accept and emotional attach to the youth.
- 12. Parents difficulties with parenting strategies.**
Definition: Parents doesn't strongly condemn non-desired behavior or have little knowledge about the youth's behaviors and activities. They have difficulties being consequent in their reactions to the youth's behavior or use harsh discipline towards the youth.

Protective factors assessed in ESTER-assessment

Youth protective factors

13. Positive school attachment and performance.

Definition: Has a positive attachment to school and the school work and enjoys school work and as well as school-peers and teachers. Performs at least on an average level in all subjects.

14. Positive attitudes and problem solving strategies.

Definition: Is happy, helpful, polite or has positive and constructive ways of solving problems and stressful/pressed situations.

15. Positive relations and activities.

Definition: Has positive and prosocial peer relations and supports. Participate regularly in structured activities or spend a lot of his/her spare time on positive and non-normbreaking activities.

16. The youth's awareness and motivation.

Definition: Is aware of his/her own problematic behavior or is motivated to change.

Family protective factors

17. Parents energy, engagement and support.

Definition: Parents have a lot of time and energy to engage in the youth's life or are generally interested and engage in the youth's life. They have support from other people or have the ability to use the support the society offers.

18. Parents positive attitudes and parenting strategies.

Definition: Parents are clear with the youth in their attitudes against conduct problem behavior and drugs, and encourage positive activities. They are very consistent in their reactions to the youth's behaviors or know much about the youth's life and activities.

19. Parents awareness and motivation.

Definition: Parents know and seem aware of the youth's problems and possibly their own problems, which can affect the youth's behavior. Parents are motivated to change.

Explicitly developed for repeated assessments

- **Made for repeated measures**
 - Should facilitate repeated-measurement-thinking
 - ✦ Get more people in practice to do "before-and-after-intervention" assessments.
 - One can conduct an unlimited number of follow-up assessments with ESTER
 - Meaningful changes should be detected
 - ✦ ESTER-assessment uses a five-point response scale
 - The computerized system makes the changes of risk and protective factors over time easy to follow

A specific period back in time is assessed

- **In ESTER-assessment a period ranging from 1 to 36 months back in time can be assessed in the particular assessment.**
 - The professional conducting the assessment makes this decision before the assessment is started.
- **Follow-up assessments can be done as often as once a month if needed.**

Involves structured documentation of planned and performed interventions

- **The professional can in a structured way document planned and performed interventions**
 - E.g., what is being done, goals, which risk and protective factors are focused, who will be involved, etc.

ESTER-assessment

- Professional structured risk-need assessment instrument
- 19 risk and protective factors
- Fourth-generation risk-need assessment instrument
(see Andrews et al., 2006 concerning the generations):
 - ✦ It is structured, research based, and explicitly developed to be used from first assessment/intake to case closure
 - ✦ Support for decisions for interventions rather than an actuarial instrument
 - ✦ Use of the assessment for preventive/intervening purposes rather than prediction

ESTER-assessment (cont.)

- An "ESTER-assessment book" is used for each assessment:
 - Background
 - Information base
 - Rating of the 19 risk and protective factors
 - Planned interventions
 - Performed interventions
 - Follow-up analysis

ESTER-assessment (cont.)

- Multiple informants (e.g., parents, teachers, the youth) and types of information (e.g., files, interviews, etc) should be used to rate the 19 factors
- Total mean time appr. 4-8 hours to conduct
- Made for follow-up assessments (must not do follow-up assessment)
- Easy-to-use computerized system

Assessment of risk factors

2. Overactivity, impulsiveness or concentration difficulties

Definition: Is very physically active and restless. Is impulsive and has difficulties to wait for his/her turn and to think before he/she does something. Has difficulties to retain attention and to concentrate for longer times.

WHICH BEHAVIORS?
*Have any of the behaviors below occurred during the period in question?
Mark accurate descriptions with a cross.*

Overactivity

❖ Walks, climbs or runs around constantly or cannot sit still – stands out in situations where sitting still is demanded.

Impulsivity

❖ Seems to do or say things without thinking or has difficulties to wait for his/her turn.....

Concentration difficulties

❖ Has difficulties to concentrate longer times or to keep attention on what is supposed to be in focus....

Other

❖ Other observed behaviors which are consistent with the definition of "Overactivity, impulsiveness or concentration difficulties" (specify):
.....

HOW PRONOUNCED?
*How frequent or problematic has this been during the period in question?
Make a summarized judgement.*

X Not known	0 Not present	1 Weak	2 Evident	3 Pronounced	4 Very pronounced
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The information is insufficient concerning all these behaviors during the period in question.	None of the above behaviors have occurred during the period.	Does not occur often or is only causing very limited problems for the youth or his/her surroundings.	Occurs pretty often or is causing problems to some extent for the youth or his/her surroundings.	Occurs often or is causing extensive problems for the youth or his/her surroundings.	Occurs very often or is causing extensive and serious problems for the youth or his/her surroundings.

Rating of the risk factor's frequency and problem-level

HOW PRONOUNCED?

*How frequent or problematic has this been during the period in question?
Make a summarized judgement.*

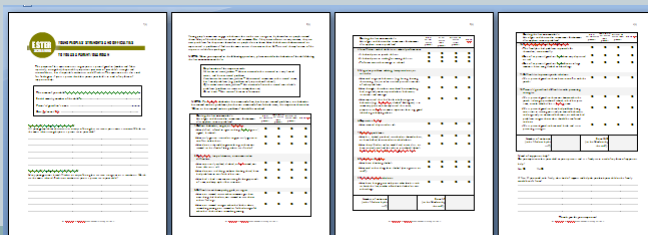
<i>X Not known</i>	<i>0 Not present</i>	<i>1 Weak</i>	<i>2 Evident</i>	<i>3 Pronounced</i>	<i>4 Very pronounced</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The information is insufficient concerning all these behaviors during the period in question.	None of the above behaviors have occurred during the period.	Does not occur often or is only causing very limited problems for the youth or his/her surroundings.	Occurs pretty often or is causing problems to some extent for the youth or his/her surroundings.	Occurs often or is causing extensive problems for the youth or his/her surroundings.	Occurs very often or is causing extensive and serious problems for the youth or his/her surroundings.

ESTER-screening

- **Short screening questionnaire to screen for strengths and difficulties**
 - Main focus on risk factors
- **Main purpose:**
 - ✦ To screen for youths in need for more detailed assessment/interventions
- **4-pages (appr. 15 minutes)**
- **Versions to:**
 - ✦ Parent/guardian
 - ✦ Professional (e.g., teacher, treatment staff, etc)
 - ✦ The youth (when 10 years or older)

ESTER-screening (cont.)

- Two open-ended questions about perceived strengths and difficulties
- A number of questions with a three-point scale about risk factors of the youth and the family (family part is optional to include)
- One open-ended question about perceived need of help or support



ESTER-screening: Focus on risk factors

During the last ____ month/s: Has any of the behaviors below been present or been a problem?	No or has not caused problems	Sometimes or has caused some problems	Often or has caused serious problems	Do not know
1. Defiant behavior, anger, or fearlessness				
a Have defied, refused to agree to things, been "against", argued, bickered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b Have easily gotten irritated or angry – easily gotten in conflicts with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c Have done risky and dangerous things, or have not seemed to be afraid of things others are afraid of.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Overactivity, impulsiveness, or concentration difficulties				
a Have constantly walked, climbed, or run around, not been able to sit still.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b Have done or said things without thinking ahead, have had problems to wait for his / her turn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c Have had a hard time concentrating for longer periods of time, and keep up his / her attention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Difficulties with empathy, guilt, or regret				
a Have not seemed to care when someone gets hurt over things he / she does, not seemed to care about others' feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b Have not seemed to regret when he / she has done something wrong, not seemed to feel bad or regretful when he / she has done something wrong.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Open-ended questions in ESTER-screening

Your child's strengths and resources?

All young people have characteristics or ways of being that are seen as positive or a resource. Which are the most salient strengths you as a parent see in your child?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Your child's weaknesses and difficulties?

Many young persons have difficulties or ways of being that are seen as negative or as a weakness. Which are the most salient difficulties or weaknesses you as a parent see in your child?

.....

.....

.....

.....

A computerized system

- **An easy-to-use system**
- **Web-based**
 - On secure server, with double-layered pass-word, encryption, etc.
- **Facilitates:**
 - Understanding of the assessment
 - ✦ Visualizes the results in an easy-to-understand way
 - I.e., the reports that are produced can be used directly with the parents and the youth
 - Collaboration between colleagues and different organizations
 - ✦ Can share and move clients to other uses.

Easy-to-use computerized system

Startpage for Charlie Andersson

ESTER Clients Documents Help Log out Vald Klient: Charlie Andersson

Name and contact information

Bakgrund

Assessments

Add new assessment

	Started:	Completed:	Period:
Assessment 1	3/7/08	3/9/08	6 month/s
Assessment 2	4/7/08	4/9/08	1 month/s
Assessment 3	5/8/08	5/11/08	1 month/s

Add professional

Move client

Delete a client

Summary

- ▶ Total summary
- ▶ Short summary
- ▶ Endast bakgrund
- ▶ Only assessment 1
- ▶ Only assessment 2
- ▶ Only assessment 3
- ▶ Only summary over time

Easy-to-use computerized system (cont.)

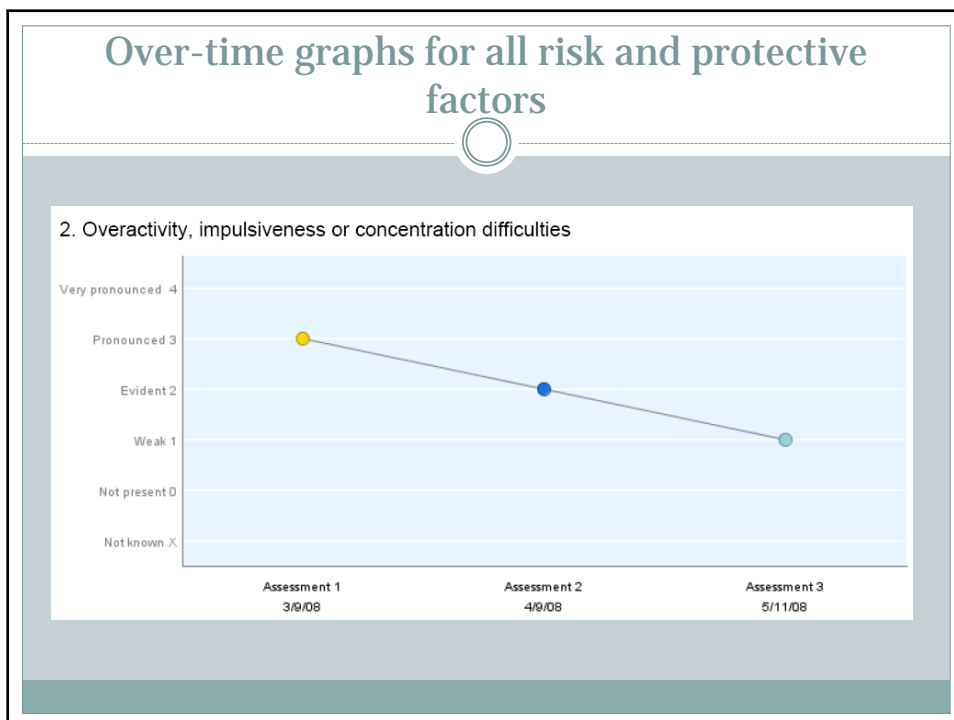
- **A number of different reports can be produced just by clicking a button**
 - The information in "ESTER-assessment book" gained in the assessment is put into the computerized system
 - PDF-reports can then be produced just by clicking
 - ✦ All information that have been put into the system comes out in professionally formatted PDF-reports

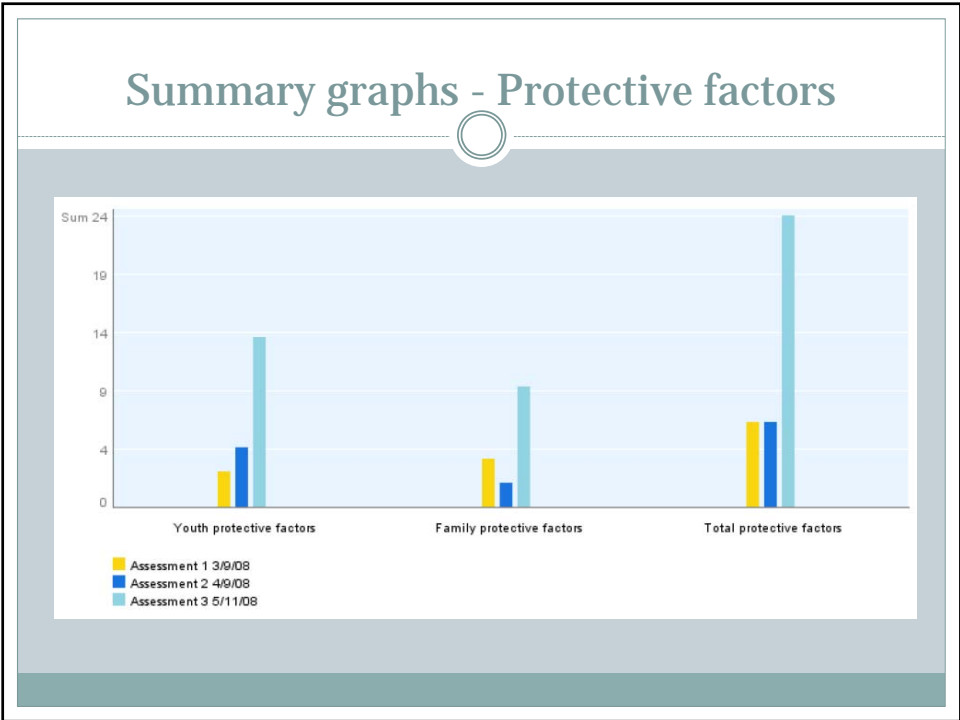
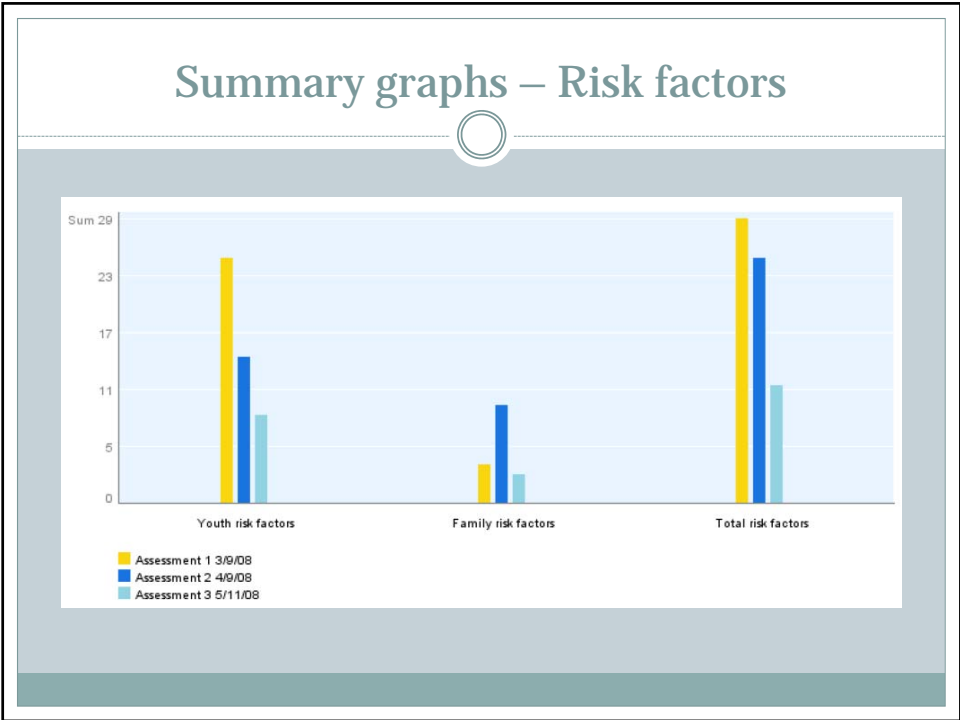
Risk-need profile

All risk and protective factors ratings on one single page

Assessment 1
This assessment was finalized 3/9/08.
This assessment is based on the latest 6 months.

Youth risk factors	1 Not known	2 Not present	3 Weak	4 Evident	5 Pronounced	6 Very pronounced
1. Defiant behavior, anger or fearfulness						
2. Overactivity, impulsiveness or concentration difficulties					✓	
3. Difficulties with empathy, feelings of guilt or remorse			✓			
4. Insufficient verbal abilities or school performance						✓
5. Negative problem solving, interpretations or attitudes						✓
6. Depressive mood or self harming behavior					✓	
7. Conduct problems				✓		
8. Alcohol- or drug abuse			✓			
9. Problematic peer relations						✓
Sum youth risk factors = 24 (0 Unknown)						
Family risk factors						
10. Parents own difficulties					✓	
11. Difficulties in parent-youth relations			✓			
12. Parents discipline difficulties			✓			
Sum family risk factors = 4 (0 Unknown)						
Sum risk factors = 28 (0 Unknown)						
Youth protective factors	0 Not known	1 Not present	2 Weak	3 Evident	4 Pronounced	5 Very pronounced
13. Positive school attachment and performances			✓			
14. Positive attitudes and problem solving strategies		✓				
15. Positive relations and activities			✓			
16. The youth's awareness and motivation			✓			
Sum youth protective factors = 3 (0 Unknown)						
Family protective factors						
17. Parents strength, engagement and support				✓		
18. Parents positive attitudes and discipline strategies			✓			
19. Parents awareness and motivation			✓			
Sum family protective factors = 4 (0 Unknown)						
Sum protective factors = 7 (0 Unknown)						





Research support

- Andershed, H., & Andershed, A-K. (2010). Risk-need assessment for youth with or at risk for conduct problems: Introducing the computerized assessment system ESTER. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 377-383.
- Andershed, H., Fredriksson, J., Engelholm, K., Ahlberg, R., Berggren, S., & Andershed, A-K. (2010). Initial test of the new risk- need assessment instrument for youths with or at risk for conduct problems: ESTER-assessment. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 488-492.
- Bond, H., Rudenhed, M., Bergquist, E., Andershed, A-K., & Andershed, H. (2013). Further testing of the inter-rater reliability of ESTER-assessment – A risk-need assessment instrument for youths with or at risk for conduct problems. *American Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2, 16-21.
- Andershed, A-K., Andershed, H. (in prep.) Structured assessments of youth at risk for criminal behavior are significantly better than unstructured. A case vignette study. Manuscript in preparation.
- Andershed, H., & Andershed, A-K. (in prep.) Structured assessments of risk and protective factors is associated with better treatment outcome. Manuscript in preparation.

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