

Frequently Asked Questions About

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

What is a Psychological Assessment?

A psychological assessment is a way of discovering more about how your child thinks, feels, behaves, and learns.

Why might the teacher suggest an assessment for a child?

Teachers usually ask for an assessment so that they can understand a child's needs better and provide the best help possible. People have assessments for many reasons. The reasons can be different for each person. A teacher might suggest an assessment when a child :

- Is having problems with learning – poor grades, having trouble learning or remembering or paying attention.
- Is having problems with behaviour-- getting along with teachers or other students, not coming to school regularly
- Seems to be feeling very upset or unhappy about something.
- Is trying to decide what to do for school or work as they get older.

If your child's teacher suggests an assessment, we invite you to ask questions to find out why and how an assessment could help

What's in it for me?

- It can give you information and help you know your child even better.
- It can give ideas to help your child feel, behave, or learn better.
- It can give parents and teachers information, so they can help, better.
- It can help develop an individual education plan.

Who does it?

A person trained in psychology does the assessment (e.g., Psychologist, Psychological Associate, Psychometrist). Assessors are either members of the College of Psychologists of Ontario, or under the direct supervision of a registered member.

What exactly happens during a Psychological Assessment?

An assessment usually involves several steps.

- Usually the assessor will first meet with you, your child, and with teachers/school staff to explain more about the assessment, to get your permission to go ahead with the assessment, and to collect information about your child. Parents/teachers may also be asked to fill out some questionnaires.
- The child is sometimes observed in his/her classroom.
- The assessor will meet individually with your child on several occasions. They will probably spend some time talking with your child about his/her life, concerns and feelings - the things your child likes and does not like.

- The assessor will also do some individual testing with your child. The tests are different than the tests that people do in school. Sometimes children are asked to do puzzles, complete drawings, tell a story about a picture, or answer questions. The testing is done at the school but outside of the classroom.
- Once the testing is finished, all the information is pulled together and a report is written. The assessor will meet with you again and then with teachers/school staff to share the information, results, and recommendations from the assessment.

What are some possible pros/cons of having an assessment?

Pros:

- Many people find taking part in an assessment enjoyable. For example, they find tasks interesting and appreciate the chance to talk with someone.
- The assessment can help provide answers, helpful suggestions, and recommendations to help out at school, home, and in the community.
- Assessment results can sometimes help gain access to additional services and resources.

Cons:

- Some people find parts of the assessment long or dull, or they may not feel comfortable talking about some of the things the assessor asks.
- Some people feel discouraged when doing tasks or discussing findings related to areas of difficulty.
- Sometimes the topics discussed can bring up sad, worried, or angry feelings.
- People may not agree with the results or suggestions from the assessment. It is important to know that you can express your opinions and can ask questions. If you believe that information is inaccurate or incomplete, you can discuss possible corrections with the assessor.

Some testing facts:

- Lots of people have assessments to help them learn more about themselves. In fact, people pay lots of money to have them done.
- You do not have to study for the tests.
- Test results do not influence report card grades.

Who gives permission or consent for the assessment to be done?

Usually the parent or legal guardian of a student under 18 years consents on their behalf. However, any capable person who understands the information about an assessment and who can appreciate the consequence of deciding about going ahead or not going ahead with an assessment can decide.

What information does the assessor collect?

- The assessor will ask you about your concerns and observations of your child as well as his/her strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. You will also be asked for some background information about his/her development, birth and medical history, and his/her feelings, behaviour, and social functioning. You may be asked to bring reports you already have for your child and to do some questionnaires.
- The assessor also often gets information from other people who know the child well such as teachers, principals, babysitters, doctors, and community workers. The assessor will want to talk with these people, in person or by phone, about their impressions of what things your child

does well and what things he/she needs help with. They may also be asked to send reports/written information. Sometimes the assessor will ask these people to complete questionnaires. All of this information will help the assessor to get to know your child better.

- You will be asked for permission (in writing) before the assessor collects or shares information about your child. Usually you provide permission upfront to talk with people who are involved with your child in school (e.g., teacher, principal, vice principal, special education services etc.). Specific forms are also completed to get information from people who do not work directly with the school board (e.g., doctor, therapist).
- The information that is collected during an assessment is called “personal health information” under the law. You have various rights related to personal health information. For example, you have to provide permission or consent for this information to be collected, used, and shared. Only information that is needed and important to the assessment will be collected. You can request access to this information and you are able to discuss possible corrections. The assessor will outline these rights in more detail during your first meeting.

What happens after the assessment?

- After the assessor has gathered all of the information, he or she writes a report. The report will include background information, observations, assessment results, and suggestions that the assessor thinks may be helpful.
- The assessor will meet with you to go over the report and answer any questions that you have. If you wish, you may invite other people to hear the results with you.
- The assessor will also then meet with people from the school/school board along to share information and the assessment results and to make suggestions. You will be asked and hopefully you can attend this meeting as well.

What happens to the report and the information collected during the assessment?

- The report and information will be stored in the Psychological Services File at the Education Centre.
- You can have a copy of the report.
- A copy of the report will also be kept in the Documentation section of your child’s Ontario Student Record (OSR), so that present and future teachers can have access to the information. If you do not want a copy in the OSR, just let us know.
- The report can only be released to another person (e.g. doctor, therapist, community worker) if you give your permission, in writing.

Who else can find out about the assessment information?

As you’ve read, you have to give permission for us to collect or give information out. Usually, that means no one but you and the school will know about the assessment, information, or results unless you give us written permission. When you have given permission for information to be given out, we will either talk to the person or send a copy of the report. You may choose to limit what information is given out, but we will have to let the person know that some of the information is not being shared.

Although the information about you/your child is usually kept “private” and “confidential”, there are some times when the law and our job say we cannot keep information private and when we would have to “break confidentiality” without your permission. These next 4 situations describe when we would not be able to keep information private and what we would have to do:

- if a court asks us for the information, we would have to provide this

- if the assessor is worried that the child is at risk for hurting himself or someone else, he/she would have to take steps to ensure that people are safe
- if the assessor is worried that the child is being abused (physical, sexual, emotional, or neglected) or is at risk of being abused, he/she would have to make a report to Family and Children's Services.
- if the assessor finds out that another registered health care professional (e.g., doctor, dentist, psychologist, psychological associate etc.) has sexually abused a client, he/she would have to report that person to their college.

Information may also sometimes be used for research projects. When assessment data is used for these projects, your child's identity will remain anonymous. In addition, you can be assured that an ethics review board has reviewed the project to look at its goals, benefits, and safeguards to information.

Do I have to have the assessment?

No, you don't have to, although there may be some good reasons to. Before the assessment starts, the assessor will explain all about the assessment and your rights and ask you to sign a form saying you want to go ahead with the assessment.

Write down any questions you want to ask the assessor and bring them to the meeting.

If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the assessment, or your rights or your privacy at any time, please first talk to the assessor.