



Student and Community Services *Psychological Services*

Learning Disability

Psychological Assessment Checklist

A full assessment should include:

- Developmental History: cover prenatal, birth history and early development
- OSR Review: document social/communication problems that interfere with classroom performance
- Observation: direct behavioural observation of the child should be pursued, with a particular focus on unstructured social settings, such as the school yard, daycare or home
- Cognitive Assessment: evaluate cognitive ability and any other learning disorder

Other sources of information:

Communication Assessment: to be completed by a Speech-Language Pathologist. This would include examining vocabulary, semantic and syntactic knowledge, as well as features of communicative intent and language pragmatics. In a nonverbal child, nonverbal communicative skills would be evaluated (use of gestures and pragmatic skills). Hearing should also be checked.

Medical Assessment: to be completed by a physician (e.g., pediatrician, neurologist, psychiatrist, etc.). This type of assessment is recommended to determine the need for other medical studies (e.g., genetic studies, neurological assessment, endocrine studies etc.) There may also be co-morbid neurological and psychiatric conditions, such as ADHD, tics and anxiety disorders which also need to be addressed.

Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities: The Specifics

In diagnosing Learning Disabilities, behavioural observations, psychometric measures, clinical judgement and qualitative information must be considered in coming to the diagnosis. It is also important to consider a wide range of childhood disorders that could account for the symptoms, before making any diagnosis.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario has endorsed the following definition:

An ongoing neurologically based condition characterized by the student demonstrating significant difficulties in attention, information processing and/or language processing, as diagnosed by a regulated, qualified practitioner. Learning disabilities are demonstrated by a significant discrepancy between average or above average intellectual ability and academic achievement.

- **Developmental History:**

Be sure to obtain information about pregnancy and the child's early development, developmental course of the symptoms, and the current symptoms. Enquire about motor development, emotional attachments, communication and language development and self-care skills. Screen for prenatal stress, prenatal complications, degree of environmental stress, and deprivation. Probe for present and past stresses in the family that could impact on the child.

Also obtain a medical history from the parent (or medical practitioner), including allergies, gait abnormalities, infectious history and courses of treatment. Also, vision and hearing should be checked.

- **Review of the OSR:**

Seek information on academic and behavioural symptoms reported since school entry and the course of the symptoms.

- **Observation:**

Direct behavioural observation of the child should be pursued, with a particular focus on unstructured social settings, such as the school yard, daycare or home.

- **Cognitive Assessment**

A complete cognitive assessment is very important. Cognitive levels (demonstrated

average ability) and patterns of strengths and weaknesses are necessary for educational identification and placement purposes. The WISC-III/WIAT is recommended in order to quantify the significance level of the ability-achievement discrepancy. Evidence of the specific learning disability should also be documented (e.g., memory deficits, attention deficits, language deficits, etc.).

Suggested Cognitive Measures:

DAS
Leiter-R
Stanford-Binet – Fourth Edition
WAIS-III
WISC-III with Canadian Norms
Woodcock-Johnson Revised Tests of Cognitive Ability

Perceptual/Memory Measures:

Bender
Children's Memory Scale
DTLA-4
VMI
WMS-III
WRAML

Suggested Academic Measures:

KTEA
TOWL-3
WIAT
Woodcock-Johnson Revised Tests of Achievement

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