
The Beacon

Guiding You Through the Process of Change

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The Value of Psychological Assessment for Children

Children can present with a variety of complex psychological and educational issues that may be difficult to diagnose and successfully treat without clear information about the specific nature of the problem. Psychological assessment is a valuable resource that provides a means of comprehensively evaluating a child's cognitive, academic, emotional, and behavioral functioning. Testing can provide information about a child's intellectual and academic strengths and weaknesses, aid in the identification of learning disabilities or giftedness, diagnose attention problems or other psychological disorders, and identify specific traits, characteristics, or coping styles that may be influencing a child's social, emotional, and academic functioning.

Specific reasons that a parent, educator, therapist, or child's attorney may refer for psychological testing include:

- A child has been doing poorly in school, appears to be achieving "below their potential" or has demonstrated declining grades
- Difficulties are suspected in the areas of attention, memory, or learning
- Behavioral or emotional issues such as low motivation, depression, anxiety, or defiance are impacting school performance or social functioning

- A child consistently demonstrates difficulty relating to peers, teachers, or authority figures
- Developmental delays are suspected in the areas of communication, social skills, self-care, or motor skills

When a referral is made for psychological assessment, a battery of tests is selected that is designed specifically to address the unique concerns and issues of the child. These test batteries may include both objective and subjective measures. Objective tests are standardized, norm-referenced measures of a child's functioning, such as IQ tests or behavioral rating scales. Objective tests compare a child's functioning to that of other children of the same age, gender, or grade level. Projective tests provide a more subjective analysis of emotional and personality issues, and are based on a child's responses to less structured stimuli such as pictures, incomplete sentence stems, or inkblots.

Upon completion of the testing, parents receive a written report that can be shared with educators, therapists, and other treatment team members working with the child. This report provides a detailed explanation of test results, as well as recommendations regarding therapeutic intervention, school modifications, or specific instructional needs.

In short, psychological testing can provide insight, clarity, and direction to parents, teachers, therapists, and attorneys as they strive to help

children optimally function and cope in a complex world.

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Suggested Reading:

Straight Talk About Psychological Testing for Kids by
Ellen Braaten & Gretchen Felopulos. The Guilford Press,
2004

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