

Psychological or Neuropsychological Evaluation



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Children can face many challenges across their development and, in some cases, these challenges are severe enough that they need additional support. When a child is not meeting certain developmental milestones, experiencing a change in their cognitive or behavioral functioning, or they are struggling emotionally, it may be necessary for them to receive a psychological or neuropsychological evaluation.

Why have an evaluation?

An evaluation helps provide diagnostic clarity, advocate for necessary accommodations, track cognitive development, and form an individually tailored treatment plan. These evaluations are not therapy, but rather provide a valuable starting point for parents who are trying to understand their child better and ensure that they can get their child necessary services.

What happens during an evaluation?

Evaluations consist of testing, interviews, and behavioral observations over the course of days to weeks, culminating in a final report written by a psychologist. The report provides detailed results and recommendations to be shared with parents, schools, and other medical professionals.

What's the difference between the two types of evaluation?

The type of evaluation depends on the presenting problems of the child.

Presenting problems for a **neuropsychological evaluation** could include language difficulties, hyperactivity and inattentiveness, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, deficits in functioning related to a birth condition (i.e., cerebral palsy, seizure disorder), or traumatic brain injury. A neuropsychological evaluation is more involved and requires more time to administer a wide variety of tests.

A **psychological evaluation** is also diagnostic. However, presenting concerns are typically more related to emotional, behavioral, temperamental, and/or cognitive concerns. A psychological evaluation also involves various tests, interviews, and other diagnostic procedures, but it is usually not as in-depth as a neuropsychological

evaluation.

There is a great deal of overlap between the two types of evaluations, so talking with a psychologist who conducts these kinds of evaluations can be helpful for determining next steps.

Regardless of the specific type of evaluation, they can be very helpful for determining the unique strengths and weaknesses of a child and providing detailed recommendations for parents and schools. When a child is in need of academic accommodations, an evaluation can help ensure they get access to the different services schools offer. Children with psychological and neuropsychological diagnoses qualify for a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) through their school. After an evaluation, the detailed report written by the psychologist should be shared with the child's school to help inform 504 plans and IEPs.

Parents of children with disabilities or suspected disabilities should speak with their child's school about initiating a 504 plan or IEP. Visit www.nvpep.org or call 800-216-5188 for more information about how to get this process started

References:

Institute of Medicine, Board on the Health of Select Populations, & Committee on Psychological Testing, Including Validity Testing, for Social Security Administration Disability Determinations. (2015). *Psychological testing in the service of disability determination*. National Academies Press.