

A psychoeducational or educational assessment investigates **learning potential and academic skill development**. In simple terms, during an educational assessment a psychologist will **determine a person's cognitive abilities** and then see if their **academic achievement** is at a **comparable level**. It is common sense to predict that a person with an average intelligence will complete math, spelling, reading, writing and other academic tasks within the average range. A psychologist will find out whether a client's academic performance is equal to their cognitive skills using testing, clinical observation and statistical analysis.

What may be keeping the individual from performing at their level of cognitive ability? It could be problems with visual or verbal memory. It could be that their brain cannot track and scan written text as quickly as most people. Perhaps they have been told they don't pay attention but actually their brain cannot process verbal information as efficiently as other people. Alternatively, a person may find it extremely difficult to begin a task, plan and organize a task, and/or monitor their performance as they work along. The truth is there are many reasons that a person is not meeting their cognitive potential.

Why would a person need an educational assessment?

An educational assessment completed by a qualified psychologist could formally establish a need for an academic program at school that is specifically tailored to the student's learning style. If you know a person's potential for learning and their present level of achievement, you know the academic strengths and needs of that student at that moment.

When will I know if I, or my child, need an educational assessment?

Sometimes delays in some areas of development are obvious very early. For example, if your child is developing language or fine motor skills more slowly than other children, he or she may need an educational assessment at some point. If your child has difficulty following directions or routines at home or daycare you may consider watching their development more carefully. If your child begins school and experiences difficulty learning numbers, the alphabet, days of the week, colours and shapes, maintain close contact with his teacher to monitor his progress. If your child seems extremely restless, easily distracted and/or has trouble interacting with peers it is possible that he has some attentional or behavioural problems that may require assessment at a later stage.

Perhaps a parent has noticed their child is struggling at school. Often, it is a teacher who has alerted a parent that their child has been experiencing difficulty working at the same level as other children in their class even though they are trying their best. Crying over homework, repeatedly asking a teacher to go over the same work, signs of low

self-esteem because they fear they are “not smart” are all signs that a child’s academic performance should be monitored.

It is important to note that a person seeking an educational assessment is not always a child. Sometimes, an adult decides to complete academic upgrading or apply as a student to college or university while acknowledging that he or she experienced some earlier learning difficulties as a child. Many adults in this situation decide to investigate their learning style because there is more modern scientific knowledge about learning disabilities now and they hope that more sophisticated help will be available. As children, these individuals knew they were smart and capable but just couldn’t read, spell, or perform mathematics as quickly as other people in their class. This adult has made a decision that they could succeed if they could find out more about the way they learn.

One step at a time.....

Find a psychologist who completes educational assessments in your area. Your child’s pediatrician may be able to make a suitable referral for an educational assessment. Make an appointment to meet with a psychologist and consult with them at their office. It is best for parents to meet for a one-hour interview to determine whether their child’s specific needs. It is inadvisable to take your child with you to this first meeting. Parents will always speak more plainly about their concerns if their child is not present. More importantly, the child will not be distressed by their parent’s concerns or teacher reports. If the appointment is for an individual 18+ years they generally attend an intake interview on their own.

What do I tell my child or teen about having an educational assessment?

It is important for any client, young or old, to understand that an educational assessment can identify strengths that can help the client improve academic weaknesses. Speak positively about the upcoming experience. For example, say, “you are going to meet a person who likes people and wants to find out how children learn. When they do, they help you improve on a subject that is really tricky and challenging for you.”

What can I expect when I, or my child, begin an educational assessment?

Expect that you or your child will attend an assessment session soon after the intake session. Remember, a psychologist wants to find out about your academic and cognitive abilities. For example, if you hear a story could you repeat it? How about the same story after 30-minutes? Could you remember that as well as the story, or better? Could the client’s brain process what he or she has heard or seen easily or not?

Eventually, the psychologist will want to find out how and what you have learned at school including math, spelling, writing, listening and, reading.

An educational assessment is a labor-intensive piece of work; that's definite. Once all the data has been gathered, the psychologist will begin to score the tests, read the documents provided by parents and teachers, and interpret the findings. As the evidence becomes clear to the psychologist and the difficulties (should there be any discovered) determined, they will begin to write up the report to present to parents and/or school.

Coming in for the feedback session.....

Sometimes, parents have anticipated the results of the assessment and experience a sense of relief that their child can finally begin to get the academic support they need and improve their school experience. At other times, parents dread that the findings will confirm their worst fears, a diagnosis of Learning Disability or another diagnosis. It is possible that the parents may wish to meet with the psychologist more than once, particularly if the clinic can offer services that exceed a school's budget or time.

Recommendations in the Educational Assessment

An essential component of the educational assessment is the recommendations that can help school personnel determine whether the student will be identified as an exceptional learner or not. The recommendations will address the learning deficits and how to accommodate the student's specific learning style. The whole purpose of the educational assessment is to provide parents, teacher, and the student, with recommendations that are educationally relevant.

Consider some of the recommendations specifically designed for a child with reading problems ~ A young child who has difficulty understanding the sounds that letters or groups of letters make could experience significant difficulty learning to read. This is especially true if that child also finds it difficult to 'code' or file this information in long term memory and then retrieve the information when it is needed. The recommendations for this child may include considerable instruction on phonological skill-building, shared reading experiences, phonemic awareness training and, organized, explicit phonics decoding instruction and practice. The child could benefit from individualized reading lessons with attention to the construction of meaning and comprehension.

Another client with slow processing speed might benefit from timed drills in math facts to increase speed of math fact recall/retrieval. Other types of recommendations may include accommodations, such as extended time, taped presentations of reading material, shortening or modifying the format of assignments, and breaking large tasks into smaller ones.