

A Guide to Your Child's Psychological Evaluation

Provided for you by the Massachusetts School Psychologists Association, Inc.

Why are students evaluated?

When children go to school, there is an assumption that they will be able to keep up with the pace of their grade level peers. Sometimes, for many different reasons, they cannot meet the demands of their schoolwork. When that happens, it is important to determine their learning difficulty in order to find ways to help them make appropriate progress in school. This is when it is necessary to have an evaluation completed by your school psychologist. You may choose to request an evaluation, or you may consult with your child's teacher or principal concerning a psychological evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation will be to identify the learning problem, and to establish a plan to help your child be successful in school.

The school psychologist examines the cognitive, social, emotional and environmental factors affecting your child's learning processes using a wide variety of techniques. It is important to integrate relevant information from individual assessments of your child's functioning with other information that is available. This includes an educational, social, and medical history, relevant family information, and an understanding of the context of the classroom in which your child is expected to learn. The school psychologist brings to this task a strong background in diverse learning strategies, as well as knowledge of specific factors that could impede the learning process.

Who are school psychologists?

School psychologists are equipped to deal with a wide range of problems which children, parents, teachers and administrators face. They are committed to the prevention of health and learning problems. They have expertise in evaluation and assessment. School psychologists are well trained in crisis interventions. They provide individual and group counseling services and social skills training. They use research to promote effective educational planning and use data collection to evaluate programs. School psychologists are experienced in co-teaching and collaboration. They provide parent and staff training on topics of specific interests or needs. They are committed to the development of the full potential of each child, which requires an understanding of:

- developmental psychology,
- academic difficulty,
- behavioral adjustment,
- social skills,
- family stress,
- health issues,
- systems concerns, and
- community pressures.

Massachusetts Department of Education licensed school psychologists and Massachusetts licensed educational psychologists are found primarily in school systems but also work in private practice, hospital settings and clinics. All school and educational psychologists have advanced graduate level training, some at the doctoral level. The school psychologist's services are unique.

The discipline of school psychology is the only one among education related fields to prepare its professionals to understand and integrate a variety of perspectives concerning children in schools. The school psychologist uses a problem-solving framework to advocate not only for the individual child but also for all adults who care for children within the school community.

What is the evaluation like?

When your child is evaluated, he or she is seen alone by the school psychologist in a quiet room where the evaluation can occur with little interference. In the beginning, the psychologist may simply talk with your child to help him or her relax and be comfortable in the session. Due to the game like quality of some of the exercises, younger children enjoy much of the testing activities, and frequently appreciate the special attention they are given.

To gain a thorough understanding of intellectual functioning, the school psychologist may assess visual-spatial processing, verbal processing, language, motor skills, attention, concentration and memory. During the actual evaluation, children are typically given a test of academic aptitude during which they answer general questions, share knowledge of vocabulary, and solve a variety of problems. They may also be asked to copy designs to see how well they coordinate their eyes and hands, which is related to handwriting. Children are asked to read words aloud, work with number problems and occasionally to spell words. Sometimes they may be asked to tell stories, or to explain what pictures mean to them. Older children may also be asked to finish incomplete sentences, tell stories or complete questionnaires or rating scales. Most children leave the testing sessions feeling positive about the experience.

It is important for the school psychologist to evaluate your child's ability to adapt in a variety of academic and social situations. The psychologist may gather information by observing your child in the classroom, on the playground, and in other school settings. The psychologist may meet with your child's teacher(s) and with you, as part of the evaluation process. From their knowledge of school programs and resources, the school psychologist along with parents, teachers, and other specialists will work together to maximize your child's learning and your child's functioning in school.

For more information regarding the process of individual psychological evaluations or other issues regarding school psychological services, please visit the MSPA website:

<http://www.mspa-online.com/>

The Massachusetts School Psychologists Association, Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting mental health and providing educational support services to meet the many and varied needs of children, families and schools. In order to achieve this goal, the Massachusetts School Psychologists Association, Inc. advocates for children's needs, informs the public of the value of school psychologists' services, provides continued professional development for school staff and parents, and conducts research.

***MSPA position papers are available through this website: <http://www.mspa-online.com>.

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