What is Psychological Assessment?

Psychological assessment is a process of testing that uses a combination of techniques to help arrive at some hypotheses about a person and their behaviour, personality and capabilities. Psychological assessment is also referred to as psychological testing, or performing a psychological battery on a person. Psychological testing is nearly always performed by a licensed psychologist, or a psychology trainee (such as an intern). Psychologists are the only profession that is expertly trained to perform and interpret psychological tests.

Psychological assessment should never be performed in a vacuum. A part of a thorough assessment of an individual is that they also undergo a full medical examination, to rule out the possibilities of a medical, disease or organic cause for the individual’s symptoms. It’s often helpful to have this done first, before psychological testing (as it may make psychological testing moot).

### **Frequently Asked Questions about Psychological Assessments:**

### **What is a psychological assessment?**

A psychological assessment evaluates thinking, learning and behaviour. The assessment may include interviews, observation, testing and consultation with other professionals involved in your child’s care. Testing includes pencil and paper tasks, puzzles, drawing, and games. The assessment covers many skill areas, such as general intellectual level, language, memory and learning, problem solving, planning and organization, fine motor skills, visual spatial skills, and academic skills (reading, math, spelling and writing). It also includes an examination of behaviour and emotions.

### **Why have an assessment?**

A psychological assessment is helpful in identifying your child’s strengths and weaknesses and will lead to recommendations for both academic and behavioural intervention. By detecting problems, an assessment can be used to assist in planning your child’s school program, to identify needs for special services in school, and to help you access resources in your community.

### **How should I prepare my child for an assessment?**

It is important to talk to children about what will happen before any procedure. Children feel less anxious when they know what to expect.

### Be sure your child knows that there will be no physical exam, so no needles or medicine. For younger children, you may wish to emphasize the play aspect, focusing on the puzzles and games. For older children, it is often helpful to describe both games and school-type work, but there are no marks or grades given.

### What should I bring on the day of the assessment?

If your child wears glasses or a hearing aid, please make sure to bring these to the assessment.

If possible, bring copies of recent report cards and any reports of previous assessments of any kind (e.g. psychological, psychiatric, speech and language, OT). If your child has an IEP (Individual Education Plan), please bring a copy of this as well.

### **Are there different kinds of assessments?**

Some children are assessed by a psychologist alone, or along with a psychometrist. Other children are assessed by psychologists who work with multidisciplinary teams, and therefore may also be seen by other professionals on the day of their assessment. Individual programs in the hospital focus on different areas of development. For example, some assessments may emphasize memory and learning, others may focus on language or academic development, and still others may highlight behaviour and emotional development. The type of assessment your child will receive will be related to the program in which he is seen, so that your child’s behaviour and learning are examined in the context of his medical status and reason for referral.

### **What can I expect after the assessment is completed?**

The psychologist will meet with you for feedback to discuss your child’s results. Sometimes feedback is offered on the same day as the assessment. Sometimes it takes place at a later date. In most cases with younger children the feedback sessions involve parents only, but if your child is older, you may wish to include your child. On some occasions, feedback can also be given over the phone.

A written report will be completed, outlining the results of the assessment and the recommendations for intervention. You will receive a copy of this report. A copy is also placed on your child’s hospital record and a copy is sent to the referring doctor. With your written permission, copies of the report can be sent to professionals involved with your child such as other physicians, therapists, or your child’s school. If an IPRC (Identification, Placement, Review Committee) is recommended for your child, we can, with your permission, provide copies of test scores to the psychologist associated with your child’s school.

We will remain available to you and your child for consultation should you have any concerns in the future.