

Havel, A., & King, L. (2017, February). Almost everything you wanted to know about psychoeducational assessments. Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities Newsletter.

Almost Everything You Wanted to Know about Psychoeducational Assessments



Prepared by Alice Havel and Laura King, research associates with the Adaptech Research Network. Alice is on the Board of the MCLD and Laura is a teacher of English as a second language at Cégep André-Laurendeau.

Dr. Marlene Desjardins, Executive Director of the Montreal Fluency Centre and Jillian Budd, a doctoral student in the School/Applied Child Psychology Program at McGill University were consulted in the writing of this article to make certain that the information presented is accurate.

Before you go ahead and read this article Alice and Laura would like to make two disclaimers. The article below is a collaboration of their understanding of psychoeducational assessments; it does not reflect a position held by the MCLD. Secondly, they do not have any professional conflict of interest regarding this topic as they do not conduct psychoeducational assessments. They work in postsecondary education, are researchers in the field of disabilities, and most importantly, have children who have gone through the assessment process. Lastly, although the focus is on the psychoeducational assessments of children, much of the information can apply to teenagers and adults as well.

As a parent you have decided that your child should have a psychoeducational assessment. We say "you have decided" because if your child is under age 14, you need to give your authorization. There could be a variety of reasons for your decision. Maybe a teacher, other school personnel or tutor has strongly suggested that your child could have a learning disability or ADHD. It might be because you feel that your child is bright but struggles academically or on a regular basis, they don't want to go to school. Sometimes the motivation for an assessment is that homework has become a real struggle and is disrupting your family life. Whatever the reason, you probably have a lot of questions about what's involved in a psychoeducational assessment. You might be very concerned if there are any negative repercussions of having your child "labelled" if they are found to have a learning disability. Besides wondering how the results of the assessment might impact on your child's schooling, you may be worrying about how much it will cost. We thought that we'd try and anticipate some of your questions and provide you with some answers.

What is the purpose of a psychoeducational assessment?

A psychoeducational assessment may be useful in figuring out the answers to a variety of questions such as why your child is struggling in school, why they study yet fail exams, or if they have a specific learning disability. A psychoeducational assessment usually measures your child's cognitive skills (the ability to perform mental activities associated with learning and problem solving), academic skills (e.g., reading, writing, math, oral language, etc.), and the underlying cognitive processes of obtaining and storing knowledge (e.g., memory, attention, executive functioning, speed of processing, etc.). The results of the assessment can provide you with a profile of your child's strengths and



weaknesses, include recommendations for school-based accommodations and suggest strategies specific to your child's learning needs. If your child is identified as having a learning disability, they may be eligible for academic accommodations (e.g., extended time for tests, use of assistive technology, etc.), specialized programs or services and even tax benefits. The assessment is often used in the development of an individualized educational plan (IEP). Once the psychoeducational assessment has been completed, you can choose to give a copy of the report to the school or the teacher for it can serve as a useful tool to open the discussion regarding your child's learning needs.

What to expect in terms of the assessment process?

A psychoeducational assessment is a process of history taking, psychometric testing and observations that helps a psychologist understand how your child learns and processes information. It is made up of five parts.



1) Parent Interview

The first part of the assessment is an interview that generally lasts between 30 to 90 minutes. It's usually best if both parents attend so that the psychologist gets the most comprehensive view of the child as possible. Usually, the psychologist will ask questions about your child's school history, current academic functioning, family history, relationship with family and peers, etc. Sometimes the psychologist will ask you to fill out a form about your child's medical and developmental history. You may be asked to bring along copies of any reports you have from

other professionals as well as report cards that include both grades and teachers' comments. In some cases, your child may be asked to participate during part of the interview as their perspective of the school and home situation is very important. The initial interview is a good time for you to express any concerns you have, to ask questions about the process, and to discuss specific questions you want to have addressed in the assessment. The psychologist uses the interview to determine whether a psychoeducational assessment is necessary. If the decision is to proceed with an assessment the psychologist will clarify what is involved (including costs if applicable) and will ask you to sign a consent form. Note that the information gathered during the assessment and the report are confidential and cannot be released to others without your written consent. The only exception to this ethical obligation of confidentiality is if the psychologist has strong reason to be concerned about your child's safety or the safety of someone else.

2) Psychometric Testing

Preparing your child for a psychoeducational assessment can reduce their anxiety and encourage their cooperation throughout the testing. Reassure your child that the reason for the assessment is to better understand their strengths and difficulties, and to show parents, teachers and other adults how they learn best and how to help them with things they find difficult. Explain that there will be a variety of questions, puzzles, drawings, stories and games and that these will be neither painful, nor will they be expected to complete all of them.

Usually tests are administered on a one-on-one situation and may take place over several appointments. The length of each session is based on your child's age, individual needs, developmental level and referral question(s). There are tests for measuring cognitive ability, sometimes referred to as intelligence. Other tests measure your child's skill level in reading comprehension, oral reading, math skills, writing and so on. Further testing can provide supplemental information on things such as auditory processing, speed of processing, short and long term memory, executive functions and social skills. If your child is in a bilingual setting a decision needs to be made regarding the language of testing; conducting it in English and French results in a longer process.



3) Assessment of Social-Emotional and Behavioural Functioning

This part of the assessment involves gathering descriptive information that allows the psychologist to better understand your child. Depending on the reason for the assessment and the psychologist's approach, questionnaires may be distributed to you, the teachers with your consent and even to your child if they are old enough to participate. As well, in some cases the psychologist may request permission to observe your child in the classroom.



4) Report and Recommendations

The psychologist first needs to score the test results, comparing them to other children of the same age and grade level. They then review your child's scores to figure out what are their strengths and weaknesses, and look for patterns that might be indicative of a specific learning disability. The psychologist will also factor in information gathered during the initial interview, observed during testing and through the responses provided to questionnaires. The report should do more than compile and report the test scores; it should also include an interpretation of the test results, which pulls everything together to explain your child's learning profile, as well as any applicable diagnoses. Recommendations should be provided for relevant accommodations and support measures for the classroom and at-home. Referrals to other specialists (e.g., speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists and audiologists), intervention programs (e.g., specialized tutoring) and technology (e.g. organization and productivity software) may be suggested.

5) Feedback Session with Psychologist

You as parents, along with your child if it is felt to be appropriate, will meet with the psychologist to go over the report. At this time the psychologist will explain the results, discuss the recommendations and answer any questions that you may have. If there are inaccuracies, or if there is information you are not comfortable with, discuss this with the psychologist. Keep in mind that you may need to, or want to, share the report with others who work with your child. Thus the report should definitely be made available to you in a written format. You may want to make a paper copy or electronic version of the report and put it in a secure place so that it will be readily accessible to you.

Who can conduct a psychoeducational assessment?

A psychoeducational assessment is usually conducted by a licensed psychologist who has both the necessary training and experience. If you need to find someone to conduct the assessment privately, you can ask your pediatrician, school staff or other parents for their recommendations. You can use the directory of the l'Ordre des psychologues du Québec to verify if the person has the required psychologist permit. <https://www3.ordrepsy.qc.ca/en/public/find-a-professional2/referral-service.sn> Before you commit to someone, you may want to enquire about their professional qualifications, procedures and fees. For example, do they have experience working with your child's age group? How comprehensive are their assessments? Do they complete all of the psychoeducational testing in one session or book it over several sessions? Don't be shy to ask these questions! As a consumer, you want to be sure you are spending your time and financial resources well.



Speech and language pathologists evaluate a variety of learning related skills including language abilities (e.g., vocabulary, telling a story, understanding what others say, etc.), reading and writing, and can thus identify dyslexia and dysgraphia. However, they are not licensed to conduct a psychoeducational assessment as intelligence testing is part of the process and can only be done by a licensed psychologist. There are times when an assessment by a speech and language pathologist may be more appropriate than a psychoeducational assessment. This is something you can discuss with the psychologist during the parent interview.

How much does a psychoeducational assessment cost?

Some school boards conduct psychoeducational testing if they feel that there is a significant problem that requires investigation. In such cases, you will not have to pay for the assessment. However, resources are usually limited and waiting times can be lengthy. Even children who are placed on a priority list for assessments can end up waiting for several years as board funds are also needed to support those children who have already been diagnosed. If your child's school does not feel that an assessment is necessary but you feel it is warranted, if the waiting list appears too long and your child is not receiving the support they need or if your child is attending a private school, you may decide to go ahead and arrange for the assessment yourself.



There is no specific answer as to the cost of a psychoeducational assessment done privately as it varies depending upon factors such as the experience of the psychologist, the complexity of the assessment (i.e. bilingual assessment) and the amount of time required to complete the process. You can conservatively expect to pay anywhere between \$1500 and \$2500 (Please

remember this is only an estimate). The cost of the assessment, along with the terms of payment, should be agreed to before the testing takes place.

Unfortunately psychoeducational testing, if done privately, is not covered by Medicare. However many private health insurance plans do cover some psychological services. It is important to call your insurance company to check your coverage carefully and determine what fees are covered and whether there are any special requirements that need to be met. Some insurance companies require a doctor's referral and many have a maximum coverage per session or per year. Discuss with the psychologist if there are ethical ways to arrange for billing that would be advantageous for you. For example, if your insurance plan has an annual maximum coverage for psychological services you could ask if the assessment could be started at the end of one calendar year and completed at the beginning of the next, thus splitting the cost over two years. For those of you who have an employee assistance program (EAP), you can check if children are covered for school related difficulties. Any expense for psychological services that is not covered by an insurance company or EAP program can be used as a deduction on your income tax return, under medical expenses.

What can I do if I can't afford a psychoeducational assessment?

No one wants to spend money needlessly but think carefully before you conclude that you can't afford a psychoeducational assessment. Is it that you'd prefer to go on a family vacation or renovate the house? If you are a family that is really not in a position to afford an assessment, what are your options? You can start by having an open discussion about your situation with your child's school and see what they suggest. As well, you can contact private assessment clinics as some of them have bursaries available for those who can demonstrate a need by providing their notice of assessment from filing their income tax. You might also try contacting the teaching clinics affiliated with two English universities in Montreal.



1) McGill Psychoeducational & Counselling Clinic ecpclinic.education@mcgill.ca

For information or to request a service, email or call: 514-398-4641 and speak to the Clinic Coordinator regarding low-cost, psychological services.

2) Concordia University Applied Psychology Centre (APC) Assessment Services apc@concordia.ca

Contact 514-848-2424 ext. 7550 or email to find out about the sliding fee scale for school evaluations.

Maybe we haven't answered all your questions but hopefully we've got you off to a good start! If you are interested in reading more on the subject you can find lots of information on the Internet but make sure you only refer to reliable sites.