

Test for Success: The Psychoeducational Assessment

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Throughout life, people can encounter a number of difficulties with school, work or home situations. A Psychoeducational Assessment can be used to identify an individual's profile of strengths and needs in order to help them achieve their potential while realizing their goals. Such an evaluation also provides substantially more information than more traditional group testing and can tell about a person's IQ or intellectual ability, attention, and social-emotional functioning - things that are not generally assessed by schools or employers.

In the early school years, parents often wonder why their child struggles with homework, takes longer than expected to complete tasks or just doesn't seem to be able to perform up to their potential. This typical "underachieving" for one reason or another is probably the most likely reason that people seek or are referred for a Psychoeducational Evaluation. Other reasons include a possible lack of interest or motivation,

A child should be tested when the parent thinks the child is not doing as well in school as he or she could, if the child continually complains about school or if the parent thinks the child may be "gifted and talented".

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sometimes even boredom (in the case of bright or intellectually "gifted" children), attentional, social-emotional or learning problems, behavioural concerns, difficulty completing homework or just poor grades. Until this person's special needs are formally identified, they may become anxious, depressed or give up entirely. These problems can even have an impact on the entire family, possibly causing marital tensions or a situation whereby siblings may resent the amount of parental time the affected child is receiving. Fortunately, a Psychoeducational Assessment can facilitate early intervention which can help treat these issues.

Sometimes problems are not evident until high school or college/university. At this time, independent work is emphasized and personal organizational skills are required. The demands upon the individual student become much greater as the workload increases. This includes significantly longer classes, more frequent and lengthier reading assignments, and detailed writing tasks that require in-depth independent research. Often, one or several of these school requirements result in multiple failures or a decision to drop out entirely. This latter problem occurs in as many as one quarter to one third of all students enrolled in the school system. Even those who do pass are often not performing up to their potential and become increasingly frustrated and may lose interest in education altogether. This can also be avoided with timely intervention.

Many adults who may have experienced previous problems but have survived until entering the workforce, may come to the conclusion that they are not "successful". The individual definition or concerns may vary widely but often include thoughts of being inefficient or having poor time management skills, not making the best career choice, experiencing interpersonal conflict, or general job stress. Other concerns may also include home issues such as relationship problems, parenting issues, concerns with self-worth, or a persistent problem with motivation. This is another example of where an evaluation that determines individual functioning and potential can

prove most useful. Having this objective information is what enables the person to make educated choices about their current and future situation.

Just how does this formal evaluation process facilitate the gathering of prompt and accurate information about an individual's needs? First of all, a Psychoeducational Assessment includes a detailed review using a semi-structured clinical interview of all relevant background information such as family and school history, medical information (a current medical check-up should be recommended), developmental issues, and current concerns, along with general interests and social relationships in school and at home. However, the method of evaluation varies based on age (e.g. child, adolescent or adult). Ideally, this process also gathers feedback from self-, parent-/guardian-, and teacher-completed child behaviour rating scales and direct behavioural observations - in both clinical and natural (classroom) settings where appropriate. For adults, a friend or partner may also be a good source of information. Prior report cards (including teacher comments) and assessments, where available, should also be exhaustively reviewed.

Key Considerations for a Psychoeducational Assessment

- < **Expect direct observation in natural and/or clinical settings (when appropriate), the completion of behaviour rating scales, and personal interviews**
- < **Testing should include comprehensive evaluation of psychological, social-emotional, attention and learning issues, a review of prior school and medical records along with possible career and educational profiles**
- < **Make sure that the clinician is an expert in the area being evaluated - ask about credentials, experience, and perhaps even references where relevant (knowing someone's professional degree is not an assurance of expertise)**
- < **Ask about the cost - often covered by extended health plans or EAP's and tax deductible, most clinics charge by the hour and full assessments typically range from about \$1000-\$1500 but can be obtained for much less (about \$500-600 from a non-Registered but Certified professional for the identical testing)**
- < **Ensure that you will be given concrete and easily-implemented strategies**
- < **Referrals to other professionals may also prove beneficial**
- < **All results are strictly confidential and are only released with the client's consent**

Standardized areas that are usually tested using a comprehensive and multi-dimensional evaluation include an assessment of aptitude or cognitive skills (yielding various IQ scores), achievement levels or academic functioning such as Reading, Spelling, and Arithmetic, and general information processing such as memory skills, auditory and visual perception, motor skills, and processing speed. In addition, qualified clinicians often provide computerized CPT (continuous performance testing) to objectively assess attention, impulse control skills, and hyperactivity. The advantage of having this computerized CPT assessment included as part of an evaluation is that it is highly accurate, objective and cost-effective. It can also be used to provide the client or his/her physician with assistance regarding medication management, where required, using both pre- and post-testing. Following the testing stage, a feedback session is scheduled so that all results can be shared. This should include an explanation of all scores, the client's individual profile, basic interpretation, and most importantly, general recommendations. This is also the perfect opportunity to have any questions answered. It is this final part of the process that provides the necessary information for personal skills development by focusing on specific

strategies and goals for home, school and/or work.

The most important part of the Psychoeducational Assessment process is for the clinician to provide the client with detailed recommendations for change. This might involve follow-up treatment with the clinician and possibly other professionals along with the development and implementation of personal strategies. Unfortunately, at the end of the testing process, many clinicians only offer a diagnosis or “label” along with a few very simple and predictable suggestions. Take the time to find out in advance how the clinician intends to provide you with feedback (i.e. one-to-one direct feedback or a written report) and whether or not they will be offering you numerous concrete strategies that can be easily implemented along with the type of assistance or treatment you can expect.

Follow-up services that are often provided by the clinician can include family, career or individual counselling/therapeutic coaching using a number of possible approaches (i.e. cognitive-behavioural therapy), computerized cognitive skills, social skills enrichment or parenting skills training, and behaviour, anger, mood or stress management. Consultation with other professionals may also prove beneficial. Typical referral sources can include academic tutors, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Pathologists, or hearing and vision specialists.

Immediate benefits that can be realized from the evaluation process include the identification of:

- < **specific academic goals along with an individual’s best learning styles (to increase the retention of new information)**
- < **types of intervention that will prove most beneficial (i.e. counselling/coaching or specific therapy, medication, tutorial or skills training)**
- < **detailed accommodations and considerations for school or work environments (i.e. access to technology, extra time, physical room arrangements, presentation of subject matter and organizational/support strategies)**
- < **methods for increasing motivation and interest in affected areas as required**
- < **various compensatory and coping strategies that facilitate change**

Obtaining a comprehensive Psychoeducational Assessment that determines personal strengths and needs will enable an individual to improve efficiency, performance and overall success. So, “Test for Success” by contacting a qualified professional in your area.

Editor’s Note: Richard Glatt is a provincially Certified Psychoeducational Consultant in private practice and has been providing comprehensive and confidential services for children, adolescents, and adults in the Ottawa Region since 1985, is an expert in his field, and is widely published. He can be contacted at Tel. (613)836-8357, Psychoeducational Services, 1115 Carp Road, Stittsville (Ottawa), ON, Canada, K2S 1B9, Fax (613)831-8128 or e-mail attention@rogers.com.