

## Psychological Assessment: Frequently Asked Questions

What are the indicators that an adolescent or adult with a developmental disability (DD) should be considered for psychological testing? When and why would a psychological assessment be important?

Reasons to consider referring an individual for psychological testing include:

- **The person is not well understood by his/her support system:** He/she is not learning well, having difficulties coping, and/or caregivers need information on how to better understand and support him/her.
- **Change from an earlier assessment:** A reassessment is recommended if there has been a long interval since the last testing, or no testing in adulthood, as early results may be less stable and factors influencing the earlier testing may have changed.
- **Future planning needs:** Includes vocational, education, and housing directions. For example: Can the person live independently? What are his/her current abilities and challenges? What are his/her support needs?
- **Before a psychiatric diagnosis:** It may be important to know the person's level of functioning in order to put presenting symptoms in context. Some aspects of DD (e.g., a low functioning person talking to him/herself may be developmentally appropriate for his/her level of function, but it may be interpreted as a symptom of psychosis to those who do not understand the effects of the functional level).
- **Significant, unexplained change in the individual's behaviour** (e.g., new onset withdrawal or aggression).
- **A specific diagnosis may be needed for income support services** (e.g., for federal or provincial disability supports or tax credits).

What types of psychological testing can be done?

- **Cognitive:** To identify level of intellectual ability, strengths, and vulnerabilities.
- **Adaptive behaviour:** To determine and describe how a person functions in day-to-day life.
- **Neuropsychological:** For issues such as dementia, stroke, head injury, and genetic disorders associated with cognitive decline (e.g., Down syndrome).
- **Personality and psychiatric type:** As an adjunct to psychiatric care (e.g., testing for depression, anxiety, or hyperactivity).

Is psychological testing of people with DD a specialty area of psychology? Do I need to find a psychologist with special training or expertise in DD?

- For those who are *borderline to mildly impaired*, any qualified psychologist can provide testing.
- For those who are *moderately or severely impaired*, ideally, a psychologist should be experienced and skilled in testing such individuals.

<p><b>How do I go about finding a psychologist to do testing on my patient with DD?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For patients under the age of 21 who are still in school, the best route is often through the school board.</li> <li>• In Ontario, DSO is the single access point for all adults with DD needing services. Website: <a href="http://www.dsontario.ca/agencies">www.dsontario.ca/agencies</a></li> <li>• In other provinces, local developmental sector services (e.g., Services for Persons with Disabilities in Manitoba) may be able to connect to resources.</li> <li>• Alternatively, contact the provincial regulatory body (e.g., Colleges of Psychologists) who may know of referral services.</li> </ul>
<p><b>How long is the usual wait time, before my patient will be seen?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services provided through school boards vary, but the wait can be up to a few years.</li> <li>• Developmental service providers also vary in wait times between one to two months up to about one year depending on the type of assessment and priority given to the case.</li> <li>• Private testing can be arranged within a few weeks if the patient or their family has the financial resources to pay for it.</li> </ul>
<p><b>How much will this testing cost?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>School Board:</b> No cost. It is important to consider obtaining an assessment while the individual is in school when the cost is covered. Records of past assessments can be requested from the school.</li> <li>• <b>Developmental Centre</b> (e.g., Surrey Place Centre in Toronto): No cost.</li> <li>• <b>Private:</b> The typical cost for a full developmental assessment is from \$1,500 - \$2,500. This can be paid for privately or through employer-extended health care benefits, if available.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Are there any other resources available that do not charge, or any government or other funds to help a patient pay for this testing?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rehabilitation, vocational placement or developmental services programs sometimes offer assessment services.</li> <li>• Many extended health care insurance plans (e.g., some provided by one's employer) cover psychological testing under a co-pay or partial payment basis.</li> <li>• A portion of payments for psychological assessment or treatment can be deducted in the individual's income tax return under health care expenses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What information does the psychologist need in the referral?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Developmental history:</b> Especially early development – when he/she walked, talked, and toileted.</li> <li>• <b>Medical disorders:</b> Particularly those that can affect or interfere with cognition, including epilepsy, psychiatric diagnoses (e.g., depression, schizophrenia), and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).</li> <li>• <b>Medications:</b> Particularly those that may affect or interfere with cognition.</li> <li>• <b>Relevant past assessments:</b> Psychological, psychiatric, previous brain scans (CT or MRI) or occupational therapy.</li> <li>• <b>History of exposure or injury:</b> Includes history of alcohol exposure in utero or past traumatic brain injuries.</li> </ul>

**What can my patient and his/her caregiver(s) expect during the appointment for psychological testing?**

- The individual and caregiver will be interviewed. This typically takes one to two hours.
- Testing will be done with the individual one-on-one. There may be one or more sessions of one-on-one testing that will last between one and four hours each, depending on the type of testing.
- Testing will be followed by a feedback session for the individual and caregiver where the results of the testing, an explanation of what they mean, and any recommendations will be provided. This generally takes about an hour.
- The patient can identify to whom he/she would like the report to be sent.

**What information am I likely to receive back from the psychologist to help me in managing my patient?**

- **Level of functioning:** Will include how the individual compares cognitively to others in his/her age group as well as his/her relative strengths and vulnerabilities. The information may be expressed in various ways, including standard scores (e.g., IQ range) and/or Age Equivalence (AE) scores.
- **Education/placement:** Recommendations regarding education and skill development abilities and capacities, and strategies to use to help the individual learn.
- **Emotional disorders, personality:** How the individual compares with others (e.g., those with a similar level of DD or with average intelligence) on various scales (e.g., depression or anxiety scales).
- **Behavioural management:** May include recommendations or strategies for dealing with challenging behaviours.
- **Other services:** May include recommendations regarding such services as counseling, occupational therapy, Adult Protective Services Worker and local programs.

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