

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

### The inside skinny on Psychoeducational Assessment

By Dr. Linda Reinstein

By early November you will receive the sometimes welcome and sometimes dreaded “Progress Report” from your child’s school.

Perhaps teachers have been letting you know of their concerns about your youngster’s learning, behaviour, or adjustment back to school. Maybe you have noticed that your child is not doing the “COVID-catch-up” in learning as quickly as other kids seem to be doing, is not connecting with peers in the same way, or is not coping with the demands of school after 2 years of bouncing back-and-forth from home to school learning, and after having had their social lives put on hold. You are now wondering about the value and pitfalls of getting an Assessment done for your child.

**Here is the skinny on a Psycho-Educational Assessment, also called a Psychological Assessment.**

Essentially, an Assessment is one way of collecting information about your child’s:

- Thinking and reasoning skills, which I like to refer to as “natural resources.”
- Executive functioning, or “resource management” skills, including attention, working

memory, processing speed and efficiency.

- Academic skills (the 3 Rs).
- Behind-the-scenes-skills needed for reading, writing, and arithmetic, such as phonological processing, visual and verbal memory, visual motor integration, to name a few.

Another important part of the Assessment is the information that is collected:

- By observing your child or teen as they are completing assessment activities (e.g., problem solving style, social engagement, reactions to things they find difficult or easy).
- By interviewing parents, teachers, and your child.
- By having parents, teachers, and your child fill out questionnaires about your child’s behaviour, relationships, and coping.

This information will serve as the backdrop for understanding the more formal assessment information.

The process is really good at identifying things like:

- Learning difficulties such as learning disabilities, learning style, processing difficulties.
- High intellectual achievers/Gifted student profiles.

- Attention problems such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- Developmental differences such as Autism Spectrum Disorder and Developmental/Intellectual Disabilities.
- Behavioural and social-emotional regulation concerns such as Perfectionism, persistent tantrums, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Mood and Anxiety Disorders, and others, that may contribute to, look like, or be impacted by learning challenges.

It is the job of the psychologist to see how these pieces fit together to tell a story that makes the most sense to understand your child’s strengths and challenges. From here, the end game of the assessment is to create a roadmap of resources, strategies, and supports to move forward, to promote skill development, and to develop more adaptive responses to stress and social situations.

You may have heard that without an Assessment or a Diagnosis, the school’s hands are tied. They cannot help your child. They cannot write an Individual Education Plan (IEP). They cannot provide accommodations. This is understandably unnerving for a parent to hear and is not

accurate. The Assessment IS NOT a prerequisite to access support, accommodations, or an IEP at school but can offer invaluable insights into your child’s learning and behaviour to guide the writing of an IEP, develop accommodations, and support your child. A Diagnosis can be helpful in pointing the way to some well-established ways of helping.

Sometimes the pieces come together into recognizable patterns or Diagnoses, sometimes they don’t. Maybe that is not important to you as a parent. Either way, the Assessment process should feel like a collaborative venture of detective work to better understand your child and a process that leads to doable, helpful, and individualized recommendations that improve your child’s life at school and home.

*Dr. Linda Reinstein is a Child Clinical and School Psychologist who lives in OOS with her husband and two teenagers. She has a thriving private practice in Centretown providing assessment, consultation, and coaching to children, parents, and schools.*



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