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Overview of Neuropsychological Evaluations for Youth

The Goal of Neuropsychological Evaluations

A neuropsychological evaluation with Dr. Judy and her staff looks at a wide range of brain functions and skills to see what might be affecting learning or behavior. The goal is to find the reason why youth are struggling emotionally, behaviorally, and/or cognitively.

The list below outlines some areas of concern that may lead to making a referral for a neuropsychological evaluation:

- Learning disorders and learning differences
- Inattentiveness, hyperactivity, impulsivity
- Executive-functioning weaknesses, such as difficulty planning and organizing
- Processing-speed deficits
- Language disorders or delays
- Visual-spatial, visual-motor, fine motor deficits
- Intellectual disability
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Anxiety Disorders
- Depression and Mania/Hypomania
- Behavior difficulties in the home or at school
- Academic struggles and underperformance at school
- Deficits in learning and functioning secondary to neurological and/or birth conditions (e.g., seizure disorders, epilepsy, traumatic brain injury, brain tumors, acquired or congenital hydrocephalus, premature birth)
- Giftedness combined with difficulties in learning or other areas

A thoughtful neuropsychological evaluation with Dr. Judy and her staff that is carried out with the latest scientific developments is extremely helpful in establishing accurate diagnoses, from which an evidence-based, comprehensive treatment plan can then be developed by the clinical neuropsychologist in conjunction with the client's treating providers when available.

It is important to keep in mind that not all evaluations end with a diagnosis. But the findings are still likely to specify which kind of teaching and support can help youth make progress and function better in a number of life domains including academic, social, and family relationships.

What Happens in a Neuropsychological Evaluation?

Tests and assessments are two separate but related components of a comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation. Dr. Judy and her staff use both types of tools to help them arrive at a diagnosis and a treatment plan that is specific to the client's needs and consistent with evidence-based practice.

Neuropsychological testing can pinpoint problem areas. It also looks at strengths and recommends ways to help youth thrive.

The testing takes place in a doctor's office. It is done one on one and is usually very low tech. Kids answer out loud or use a pencil and paper or in some cases a computer.

The evaluation can take up to 9-10 hours total but is usually spread out over a couple of days. It measures a lot of different variables. Dr. Judy and her psychometrician must first begin with a thorough understanding of the child and this requires careful review of medical history; school history and performance; child behavioral rating scales; results of any tests performed (e.g., ability assessments, achievement tests, and assessment of the major neurocognitive domains including language, perceptual motor, learning and memory, attention and processing speed, executive functions, and social cognition); and interviews with the child, parents, and teachers. To determine the child's behavior in more than one setting, Dr. Judy and her psychometrician will ask about classroom behavior, relationships with other students, and behavior in a multitude of school situations (e.g., waiting in line, working independently, and group situations). Gathering information on family background is also crucial to making a diagnosis. Inquiries should include parental background, history of education and employment, substance abuse, or other medical or mental health problems in the child's family. Any other information related to the child's home life will also be useful in determining a treatment plan and the family's ability to follow through on recommendations.

In addition, a neuropsychological evaluation will typically include assessment of intellectual functioning (IQ) and cognitive ability, academic achievement, attention and executive functioning (like planning and organizing), and emotional and behavioral functioning. The evaluation may also include more in-depth assessment of visual-spatial (like predicting what a square would look like if you folded it in half) and visual-perceptual skills, visual-motor and fine motor coordination (like drawing and handwriting), verbal and visual memory, aspects of language, and adaptive functioning.

Overall, Dr. Judy and her psychometrician will make use of semi-structured diagnostic interviews, cognitive testing, psychological inventories, and rating scales in the preliminary assessment of client functioning. A semi-structured interview guide for making DSM-5 diagnoses. It is administered by trained individuals that are familiar with the DSM-5 classification and diagnostic criteria to ensure that the major DSM-5 diagnoses are systematically evaluated. Psychological inventories and personality tests are incorporated in the evaluation which helps to evaluate attitudes, emotions, thoughts, and behavioral traits contributing to the youth's personality. These tests can help determine a child's strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to make informed life choices based on their

personality traits. Some evaluations will include personality factors testing which can help identify these emotional problems and start the treatment process. During a psychological projective test, the child looks at ambiguous stimuli such as pictures, inkblots, or incomplete sentences and shares an interpretation. The child's responses give insight into thoughts, feelings, and themes consciously or unconsciously projected into the material.

No single instrument fits all situations, and Dr. Judy must determine what best suits the client's needs and which tools best answer the referral questions. The assessment and intervention should be conducted at the earliest age possible, so that successful treatment can begin.

What should I bring to my youth's evaluation?

If your child needs any visual or hearing aids, you should let Dr. Judy and her staff know and bring them with you to the evaluation. It is also helpful to provide Dr. Judy with any previous evaluations (even if completed at a young age), as well as school records, including assessments, report cards, and Individual Education Programs (IEPs). If your child takes medication, it is helpful to let Dr. Judy and her staff know in advance, and to make sure your child takes their medication as prescribed on the day of testing unless otherwise directed.

Feedback Session

Results of the evaluation and associated recommendations will be reviewed during the feedback session with the parent(s) and/or guardian(s). The results are often shared with a referral source (if not the parent) or school, with the parents' consent. The youth is sometimes included in part of the feedback session, if appropriate given the youth's age and level of functioning. The family will receive a detailed report outlining the results, diagnostic impression, and recommendations. Dr. Judy and her staff will also facilitate referrals and connect the family with specialty providers as appropriate.

Comprehensive Evaluation Written Report

Results of the evaluation will be documented in a very detailed report that summarizes the history of the youth, reviews the cognitive, psychological, and personality tests administered and the results, discusses the clinical formulation and rationale for making specific diagnoses, and recommendations for follow-up that can include interventions, self-study strategies, school accommodations and modifications, and other helpful tools to support the youth in making practical use of their findings to improve their functioning.

What is the fee for a neuropsychological evaluation?

Fees are determined based on the type of neuropsychological evaluation needed and can vary widely depending on the type of clinical practice and the needs of the child.

References:

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