



Practice Guidelines Psychological Evaluations

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Explaining the purpose of the psychological assessment can reduce anxiety.

Explain to the parent:

- the exact purpose of the evaluation (such as, to identify mental health services or to inform a decision about whether the child can return home);
- the evaluation is an opportunity for the parent to tell his/her story and have input about needs, strengths, and goals;
- the evaluator is independent and does not always agree with DCS;
- evaluation results will be shared with the court, attorneys, and other parties in the case.

Tell the parent what to expect.

The evaluation will take 4-6 hours. Expect some written testing in addition to an interview. It is important to be on time and not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If necessary, transportation can be provided.

Psychological testing provides clinical information when there are gaps in the information needed to ensure child safety and move the case to permanency.

- Psychological evaluations assess the psychological and developmental status and needs of the child or parent(s), as relevant to child safety and well-being.
- Use psychological evaluations only in cases when other assessment tools have not provided the clinical information needed to plan for child safety and permanency. Psychological evaluations are not necessary in all cases.
- Psychological evaluations do not replace mental health assessments and treatment provided through the RBHA or private insurance. They supplement these by identifying services or supports to bring about behavioral changes, and providing guidance on safety-related issues.
- Determine if a psychological evaluation is the only avenue available to obtain an unbiased professional opinion to assess a child participant's health or well-being. If the needed information can be obtained through behavioral health, medical, or school records, it is not necessary to refer the child for a psychological evaluation.

Psychological evaluations are performed when needed information is not available from other sources.

- Ask yourself – Are there any safety threats that are or may be related to a mental health issue? What questions or concerns do I have about mental health or substance abuse? What information already exists? What information is needed and what is the best way to get it?
- Consult with the DCS Psychological Consultant on the need for and type of evaluation needed, and referral questions. Prepare packets in advance so the consultant is able to sign off at the consult.
- Pose questions that ask the evaluator to identify the underlying clinical causes of existing safety threats, interventions most likely to succeed in achieving desired behavior changes, and the time needed to achieve the desired behavior changes. Treat all participants as unique individuals with specific needs.

Co-occurring disorders are common in child welfare.

- Many individuals with a substance use/abuse disorder have a co-occurring mental illness.
- Mental health services will be the most effective after the parent stops using alcohol or drugs, but individuals with a mental health disorder should be referred for appropriate services, regardless of sobriety.
- Work with service providers to ensure that parents with a dual diagnosis are receiving services to effectively treat both conditions. Whenever possible, refer to service providers with expertise in substance abuse and mental health treatment.
- Decisions about when to get a psychological evaluation of an individual is using drugs/alcohol are made on a case by case basis. Talk with a psychological consultant about when to request an evaluation.

Use clinical supervision to discuss the following questions:

- When should a psychological consult be scheduled to discuss the parent's possible need for an evaluation?
- What do we know about the client?
- What do we want to find out?
- Is a psychological evaluation going to provide the answers we need?
- If the parent has a co-occurring disorder, when is the optimum time to request the evaluation so that results are valid and useful?
- Should the parent also be referred for a psychiatric evaluation? Or should we wait for recommendations from the psychological evaluation to make that referral?
- Refer to the *Readiness for Change Practice Guidelines* when determining the appropriate services for parents with co-occurring disorders.

Psychological Consultants are there to guide you and provide support. Be sure to meet with them to assist you in answering each of these questions as needed.

Consider the following to determine when a psychological evaluation may be needed.

A psychological evaluation is required when:

- ordered by the Juvenile Court; or
- per statute, a particular diagnosis can only be confirmed by a medical professional (i.e., factitious disorder, emotional abuse).

A psychological evaluations may be needed in the following circumstances:

- There is reason to believe the parent has a mental health diagnosis and a psychiatric evaluation is not recommended.
- Needed clinical information is not available from other sources.
- The individual exhibits bizarre, dangerous, or contradictory behavior.
- There is an unexplained decline in the individual's social, emotional, or cognitive behavior for no apparent reason, and it is not related to alcohol/drug use or current emotional stressors.
- There are conflicting opinions with no agreement about the safety threat or about the likelihood that continuing current services will be successful.
- A cognitive delay is suspected (i.e. a full scale IQ below 70) so that parenting and information processing is significantly impaired.
- Services have been provided for 90 to 120 days, but the services have not been effective despite the parent's active participation.
- The case involves multiple removals, complex issues, and/or a previous psychological evaluation and the DCS Specialist believes no services will achieve reunification.
- A second opinion is requested or needed because of contested or inconclusive results from a previous evaluation.
- A prior assessment recommended a re-assessment, or a current mental health provider requests a formal psychological evaluation.

Psychological evaluations are not needed in the following circumstances:

- A psychological consultation can adequately address the issue, for example, when psychological testing is not required and a clinical interview by the unit consultant can provide the needed answers and recommendations to move the case forward.
- The participant is school-aged with academic problems only (refer to the school district for academic testing).

The results of the evaluation are back - now what?

- Review the evaluation to ensure understanding of the person's condition and clinical issues, and the recommendations. Ask for clarification from the psychologist or a unit psychological consultant, if necessary. Highlight the recommendations. This is a good time to use clinical supervision to determine the need to offer additional services, or hold a case plan staffing to update the case plan.
- Follow up on all recommendations, unless it has been determined through supervision, service team consultation, or court order that the recommended service or action is not needed. If a recommendation is not followed, document the team members consulted and the reason for the decision.
- Determine who will provide the parent or caregiver with the results of the evaluation and the recommendations. For example, this may be done by the parent's attorney, the unit's psychological consultant, or the parent's therapist.
- In most cases, the DCS Specialist should not provide and explain the results of the evaluation to the parent, but should work with the service team members and the unit psychological consultant to determine who will do this.