Psychological Assessment: A collaborative approach

*Jacob’s parents feel like they have tried everything, but he keeps falling further behind in school. Lily struggles to make friends, and her parents don’t understand why. Maddie doesn’t know why she gets so angry, and her parents aren’t sure what they can do to help.*

Psychological assessment is a valuable tool for answering such questions and for helping parents (and providers) better understand a child’s strengths and challenges. The results of a psychological assessment also provide insight into children’s functioning, identify appropriate diagnoses, and inform treatment planning. My approach, which borrows from Therapeutic Assessment(<http://www.therapeuticassessment.com/> ), engages parents and children in the assessment process from the outset. We collaborate with parents and providers to identify “assessment questions,” and these questions guide the assessment process. Parent may wonder why their child has a hard time sitting still or struggles to adjust to changes in routine. Often, parents want to know what diagnosis best captures their child’s functioning and what treatment strategies will be most effective. Children and adolescents are also engaged in the evaluation process and encouraged to generate their own assessment questions. They may ask questions such as “why am I so worried” or “why can’t I remember what I hear in school.” In my practice, we create an individualized assessment plan for each child and family.

Parents have the opportunity to provide information about their child through an interview with the psychologist and via specific rating scales. Information is also gathered from teachers and, when relevant, other treatment providers. During assessment sessions, children are asked to complete different tasks that allow the psychologist to learn more about them. I integrate results of testing and information from parents and teachers in order to answer assessment questions and provide tailored recommendations. As a psychologist trained in trauma-informed practices, **I am sensitive to the impact of trauma on children’s functioning and am well-equipped to consider how trauma may impact behavior, learning, emotional regulation, and development.** Continuing my collaborative approach to assessment, feedback meetings with parents (and older children/adolescents) are conversations between the parent and psychologist—rather than a presentation of findings. As the feedback process unfolds, I refine my understanding of the child based on input from the family. Following the feedback meeting, parents receive a report which summarizes the assessment results, provides written answers to each of the assessment questions, and includes individualized recommendations.

*-Adapted from article written by Julia Hoke, Ph.D. for Austin Child Guidance Center newsletter*