What Makes Your Child Special?

(During the initial interview with Dr. Randy Kulman you will be asked questions about the difficulties your child is experiencing. In order to put these problems into perspective, Dr. Randy Kulman will also ask you and your child questions about the strengths, interests, and traits that make your child special to help affirm your child's capabilities.)



One of the most troubling concerns that parents have about taking their child for a psychological evaluation is their worry about their child's "problem." Many parents are uncomfortable talking about their child's perceived deficiencies or weaknesses in front of them and are legitimately concerned about their self-esteem and reactions to hearing about "all of their problems."

This issue also presents a dilemma for psychologists and other clinicians who assess children for "what is wrong with them." An important part of what psychologists do is to reframe these problems as concerns and skills that we want to improve. Our knowledge of brain plasticity informs us that we can enhance all types of skills, including attention, memory, intelligence, language, communication, organization, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility.

An excellent way to have these conversations with children is to discuss that everyone has different strengths and

weaknesses and that the evaluation is designed to help us understand their unique set of skills and help them in areas that might cause them problems. With the exception of very young children, most who come for a psychological evaluation already recognize where they might be struggling such as in reading, paying attention in school, getting along with their peers, or being disorganized. Being direct and upfront with children helps them to understand why they are being evaluated and that the intention is to help them, not to be punitive.

Even more important is to discuss the child's strengths and interests as a large part of the initial evaluation. At South County Child and Family Consultants we ask parents, "What Makes Your Child Special?"as part of our evaluation. This approach was derived from Dr. Robert Brooks, who specializes in how to help children be resilient and adapt to difficult situations. Parents have a chance to tell their children about the personal attributes that makes them amazing and wonderful. This opportunity could also be extended beyond the evaluation session to help a child who is struggling improve his self-esteem and overcome some of his difficulties.

Prior to the evaluation we ask parents to complete a "Strengths Questionnaire" so that they can be prepared to articulate these issues and we can actively bring them up in the initial session. Parents can use this listing to remind themselves about a child's positive characteristics and interests.

Thinking about your child's special gifts is important for all kids and particularly those who struggle with school, social, behavioral, attentional, or emotional issues. Letting kids know that they have positive qualities is helpful for improving self esteem. Keep in mind, that the best long-term methods be boost a child's self esteem and success is to praise effort and behavior. So, rather than telling a child that they are so creative, tell them about how you liked their effort and thoughtfulness in their latest artistic endeavor.

For a sample evaluation click here.