

The Importance of Behavioral Observations in a Neuropsychological Evaluation



One of the most important tasks for a child psychologist is to be an astute observer. Observation of a child takes place from the moment the psychologist meets a child in the waiting room and continues throughout the course of the testing. While some observations may be obvious, such as a child who absolutely cannot sit still for more than a minute or two, many other observations

require close attention to issues such as the child's use of language, subtle signs of anxiety, or difficulty in understanding directions. It is important to note that a child's behavior during the initial psychological interview as well as during the psychological testing may be very different from what is observed at home or in the classroom. Testing sessions provide a one-on-one setting, ongoing attention and feedback, and a novel situation in which children often want to perform at their best. As a result observations may help us to see a child performing at his optimum level. However, there may also be subtle behavior such as a child beginning to tire from the testing, demonstrating an inability to handle frustration, or displaying an uneasiness in relating to his family and the evaluator. Some of the major components of behavior observations include assessing a child's physical appearance, relatedness and interpersonal skills, and expressive and receptive language. We also assess a child's approach to the testing session and his capacity to sustain

focus and persistence to the testing. Observations of activity and motor skills and signs of atypical behavior are also crucial in behavioral observations. Behavioral observations are only one component of a full neuropsychological evaluation but are a very important tool for understanding a child as a unique individual. Psychological testing provides a normative-based opportunity to see a child, but observations of the child helps us to understand his personal characteristics in a broader context.

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