

FSL FAQs

POPARD Family - School Liaison Newsletter



FAQ: WHAT CAN A STUDENT AND FAMILY EXPECT DURING A PSYCH-ED?

A psych-ed (psychoeducational assessment) is a journey that contains at least 6 steps. Discussions with school staff or psychologists in private practice as to whether or not a psych-ed is appropriate, length of waiting times, nature of the assessment, etc. might precede these steps. But, once you decide to pursue an assessment, the steps below are common.

The [POPARD FAQ: What is a Psych-ed?](#) describes the function of the assessment.

Before you begin

Virtual (telehealth) vs. Inperson. Many psychological services are now online (“telehealth”); such services increased substantially because of the advent of COVID. There are pros and cons to telehealth: online services may compromise confidentiality and may affect the quality of communication, but, because they are convenient, some clients are content to accept these compromises.

Several steps below can be online, rather than inperson, and whether portions of this journey are performed via telehealth or inperson might be included in your discussions.

Ethical Conduct. You should expect a psychologist to conduct an assessment ethically. Psychologists are registrants with the College of Psychologists of British Columbia and governed by legislation that includes the Psychologists' Act and the Health Professions and Occupations Act and are responsible for acting in compliance with the Code of Conduct and the bylaws of the College of Psychologists.

Step 1: Consent

If you are the parent(s)/guardian(s) of a minor or another individual who is not considered competent to provide their own consent, the very beginning of the process of assessment is providing informed consent. All psychologists who provide any psychological service must obtain informed consent from the client or those responsible for the welfare of the client.

To perform informed consent:

a) The psychologist will discuss the nature of the assessment with you, including:

- how long it might take
- what the content might include
- who will be the personnel involved
- the limits of confidentiality, and
- approximate cost (if performed privately)

b) You will be asked to provide signatures on a consent document (or to give oral consent that will be documented by the psychologist). **With specific legal exceptions, informed consent always includes both parents.**

c) You might be asked to give additional consents for the psychologist to contact specific informants for information on your child.

Sometimes informed consent takes a few minutes; sometimes it might take a half hour or longer. Often it is included in Step 2 but should occur before the psychologist interviews you; sometimes it might require two sessions if two individuals should consent but only one at a time can attend.

Step 2: Parent Interview

After consent, the psychologist will interview you. The interview is to:

- review your child's history
 - o developmental
 - o social
 - o scholastic
 - o vocational (for an older client)
- review purpose(s) of the assessment
- assist the psychologist in planning the assessment

The interview might include administration of rating scales of social/emotional development or screening for conditions related to the purpose(s) of the assessment. If you don't want to answer all the questions, don't feel that you must, though it might make the psychologist's task harder.

As well, you might decide during the interview that you do not wish to continue with the assessment. That is perfectly all right, though you might have to compensate the psychologist for their time if this is a private assessment (this would be clarified during *Step 1*).

Your interview is likely to take at least an hour but might well take an hour and a half or longer (especially if the purpose of the assessment includes screening for autism spectrum disorder). If you need an interpreter, plan on at least two, and, possibly three, hours.

Occasionally, depending on family structure and custodial arrangements, two parent interviews might be necessary.

Step 3: File Review

After the Parent Interview, the psychologist performs a file review. This includes review of documents provided by you, documents from schools or universities, medical records authorized by you, etc. This step does not require time from you, but you should know that it might take several hours of the psychologist's time. The more information, including records, provided during the interview(s) at Step 2, the more quickly the psychologist is able to understand and plan the direct assessment of your child.

Step 4: Direct Assessment

This step is usually just for your child. The psychologist will schedule one, two, three, or more sessions of direct assessment. This step cannot be online; it requires inperson contact. A minimum of 4 hours, more commonly 5 or 6 hours, is required for this step.

Occasionally, especially when an unexpected level of performance occurs during a large battery of tests, the psychologist might need more than 6 hours to explore the unexpected performance.

For children in intermediate grades, expecting close engagement for more than 2 hours at a time is unrealistic, even with breaks, and for some children, especially younger children, shorter sessions and more of them are necessary. In some instances, several more sessions may be required. If the assessment is at school, this usually does not require time from you, as parent, unless you and the psychologist decide you should be present during any portion of the assessment.

If the assessment is performed privately, you will have to bring your child to the psychologist's office.

In either instance, unless it is a private assessment performed only on weekends, your child will miss some class time. Some children might welcome missing class, but others might not. Expect to discuss this with your child and prepare them for that. Weekends might seem an attractive alternative, if it is a private assessment, but your child might not embrace spending time with a psychologist that interrupts customary weekend activities.

The content of Direct Assessment is usually interesting to a child. Each portion (e. g., a vocabulary subtest) usually does not require more than 15-20 minutes (and may be as brief as 5 minutes), and the materials are attractive. Nevertheless, some children will be anxious for their first session of Direct Assessment, and you might wish to discuss this with the psychologist.

Step 5: Report Writing

After completing Direct Assessment, the psychologist will write a report that summarizes results. In a school district, parents/guardians of a client receive a copy of the report, and the district keeps another copy. In private practice, the psychologist gives a copy to the client or their parents/guardians and keeps a copy for at least 7 years (for a minor, 7 years past the age of adulthood).

A report might take 4 – 8 hours, and sometimes longer for a practitioner to write. Many psychologists try to schedule report meetings within two weeks of completing direct assessment, but sometimes this takes longer, especially if they encounter difficulty in interviewing additional informants or obtaining documents. Don't hesitate to ask, at some point, when you should hear about scheduling a report-out (Step 6).



Step 6: Reporting Out

The psychologist will offer to meet with you to report out the results of the assessment to you. A copy of the report is either provided to you at the meeting or shortly thereafter.

Some psychologists might present the report as finished document; some might present you with a “draft” and a final copy later.



Regardless, if you find a substantive error (e. g., an incorrect birth date or name or omission of an important fact), do not hesitate to inform the psychologist so that they can correct it and provide you with a revision. Errors in spelling or grammar do not diminish the value of the report, and correcting these is not likely useful.

Practice varies as to including your child in the meeting. Including a child who is a client in a meeting with their parent(s) to discuss results can be awkward and requires

considerable care. Young children are not likely to benefit conceptually from such meetings, but a psychologist might offer to meet separately with students in intermediate grades or older students (if students wish).

Each report out is usually about an hour but may be longer. Whether you receive the report at the meeting or shortly after, do not hesitate to request another meeting after you have had an opportunity to read the results and consider recommendations in the report.

Optional Steps

In addition to the steps above, psychologists may request additional steps to assist them in understanding their client.

Other Informant Interviews

Following the Parent Interview, the psychologist may contact a teacher or others for a separate interview. Those informants may be asked to complete rating scales or provide examples of your child's schoolwork.



The psychologist will ask you for permission to contact them, but they may ask you, despite your signature on a consent form you gave to the psychologist, for permission to speak with the psychologist. Occasionally, the psychologist might determine that an additional interview with a parent or the completion of another rating scale by a parent might be helpful in understanding the needs of a child. The psychologist might not determine this until a portion of the Direct Assessment is completed. Be prepared for an additional hour or so, if needed.

Observation

Depending upon the purpose(s) of the assessment and information that the psychologist obtains from interviews, the file review,

rating scales, or from your child's behaviour in their office, the psychologist may wish to observe your child in class or in the gym or on the playground at recess or lunchtime. An observation might occur before Direct Assessment or during or after. If it occurs before Direct Assessment, the psychologist may or may not introduce themselves to your child. Depending on the purpose of the observation, more than one observation might be performed.

Psychologists who are employed by the school perform classroom observations more often than do psychologists in private practice. Because observing in class requires agreement from the teacher and principal, if this is a private assessment, you may need to request permission for the psychologist to visit the classroom.

**IF YOU HAVE
QUESTIONS OR
WOULD LIKE FURTHER
INFORMATION,
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