

4 Mental Health Evaluations

Mental healthcare providers use different tools to evaluate your child's mental health.

The information on the following pages explains some of the common tools that providers use. For each specific evaluation, the chart gives a general description of the evaluation so you will know what to expect. In addition, the chart lets you know how to get this type of evaluation for your child (**ACCESS**), what type of providers perform the evaluation (**PROVIDERS**), and where the evaluation may take place (**LOCATION**). For specific information about the evaluation for and diagnosis of specific mental illnesses, turn to **MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES (p47)**.

This guide uses the term "evaluation" to describe a tool that a mental healthcare provider uses to look at your child's mental health. Providers and organizations in the mental healthcare system may also use the term "assessment." These two terms mean the same thing.

Many of the evaluations listed here, as well as other types of evaluations, are available through the school system. For more information about the evaluations available through school, turn to page 120 in **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**.

TIP

When considering a mental health evaluation for your child, make sure to call your health insurance company. They can help you find a mental health specialist to perform the evaluation. They can tell you if your health insurance plan covers the actual evaluation itself. Some may have certain conditions that you must meet to get the evaluation covered, such as only covering evaluations if the school system cannot do it or only covering evaluations performed by mental healthcare providers in their network. They also may only cover part of the cost of the evaluation. In other cases, the evaluation may not be covered.

ADHD Evaluation

In this evaluation, your child is tested for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). You and your child's teachers answer questions about your child's symptoms using standard forms (also called parent and teacher ADHD scales). The provider gives you and the teachers the forms beforehand. You and the teachers fill the forms out and then bring them to the evaluation. The provider then "scores" the forms to figure out whether your child has ADHD.

As part of the evaluation, the provider will also evaluate your child for other mental health illnesses that may have similar symptoms (for example, depression or anxiety). To do this, the provider will talk to you and your child about your child's behavior. For more information on ADHD, turn to page 52 in **COMMON MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES**.

ACCESS

Contact your child's pediatrician to see if he or she does ADHD evaluations. If not, get a referral from your child's pediatrician. You can also get a recommendation from your child's school, childcare provider, or other parents or friends. In some cases, an evaluation may be done through the school system or Early Intervention.

PROVIDERS

- Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist (p106)
- Developmental Behavioral Pediatrician (p106)
- Neurologist (p107)
- Pediatrician (p33)
- Psychologist (p107)

LOCATION

Evaluations are done in a provider's office at a hospital, community mental health center, or private practice.

Comprehensive Psychiatric Evaluation

During this evaluation, the provider talks with you and your child about:

- The current issue and related symptoms
- Your child's medical history, including any past or current medications, health status, illnesses, and prior mental health evaluations and treatments
- Family medical history, including any history of mental illness
- Your child's development
- Your child's social interactions, including relationships with family, peers, and school professionals

The provider has an interview with your child and may meet individually with you or other caregivers. The provider may also speak with your child's teachers or other healthcare providers. In some cases, blood tests, x-rays, or additional evaluations are needed. This evaluation can take 2–5 hours to complete and is likely to take place over multiple office visits. Based on this evaluation, the provider makes a diagnosis and develops a treatment plan. As part of developing the treatment plan, the provider does a medication evaluation. Based on the information the provider has gathered, he or she determines if the child would benefit from medication. If the child would benefit, the provider determines what types of medication the child should be taking as part of treatment.

ACCESS

Get a referral from your child's pediatrician. You can also get a recommendation from your child's school, childcare provider, or other parents or friends. In some cases, an evaluation may be done through the school system or Early Intervention.

PROVIDERS

- Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist (p106)

LOCATION

Evaluations are done in a provider's office at a hospital, community mental health center, or private practice.

Developmental Evaluation

Although your child's pediatrician monitors your child's development at each visit, you can also request a special developmental evaluation to take a closer look at your child's development. A provider evaluates your child's development based on your child's age. A provider looks at your child's:

- Fine motor skills (for example, writing or working with his or her hands)
- Gross motor skills (for example, running or jumping)
- Expressive language skills (what your child can say)
- Receptive language skills (what your child can understand)
- Activities of daily living (for example, tying his or her shoes)
- Perceptual organizational skills (for example, identifying shapes)

The provider compares your child's skill level with typical developmental milestones for children who are your child's age. For more information on early childhood development, turn to page 10 in **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**.

ACCESS

If your child is between ages 3 and 5, ask for an evaluation from your child's school (p118). If your child is under age 3, ask for an evaluation from Early Intervention (p115). You can also get a referral from your child's pediatrician or a recommendation from your child's school, childcare provider, or other parents or friends.

PROVIDERS

- Developmental Behavioral Pediatrician (p106)

LOCATION

Evaluations are done at your child's school, in Early Intervention, or in a provider's office at a hospital, community health center, or private practice.

Educational Evaluation

In this evaluation, your child takes paper-based achievement tests to test for learning disorders. An achievement test determines your child's skill level in different areas, such as reading, math, and comprehension. The provider looks at the results and determines your child's grade equivalent in each area. For example, a child in 5th grade may read at a 3rd grade level. Another child in 5th grade may do math at a 7th grade level. The provider also gathers information from you and your child's teachers. Depending on your child's situation, you may want your child's evaluation to take place before or after school so he or she does not miss valuable class time. For more information on learning disorders, turn to page 75 in **COMMON MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES**.

ACCESS

Ask for an evaluation from your child's school (p118). If you want testing done privately, get a referral from your child's pediatrician. You can also get a recommendation from your child's school, childcare provider, or other parents or friends.

PROVIDERS

- Diagnostic Prescription Teacher (p120)
- Neuropsychologist (p107)
- Psychologist (p107)
- Special Education Teacher (p120)

LOCATION

Evaluations are done at your child's school or in a provider's office at a hospital, community mental health center, or private practice.

Feeding Evaluation

This evaluation requires both a medical and a mental health evaluation. During the evaluation, the provider evaluates:

- Your child's general medical and developmental functioning
- Your child's food intake, including the types of food and liquids offered, accepted, or refused
- Feeding patterns and approaches
- Overall social environment, including family conditions and stressors and the number of caregivers and their relationship to your child

For more information on feeding disorders, turn to page 72 in **COMMON MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES**.

ACCESS

Your child's pediatrician can evaluate your child for a feeding disorder. In some cases, the pediatrician will refer to other providers. In some cases, an evaluation can be done through Early Intervention.

PROVIDERS

- Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist (p106)
- Gastroenterologist (p107)
- Pediatrician (p33)
- Psychologist (p107)
- Speech-Language Pathologist (p108)

LOCATION

Evaluations are done in a provider's office at a hospital, community mental health center, or private practice.

Medication Evaluation

A medication evaluation is part of comprehensive psychiatric evaluation (p41).

Neuro-psychological Evaluation

This evaluation tests how the brain works. It can show strengths and weaknesses in how the brain is working. It is similar to cognitive testing, but more in-depth. Weaknesses found by the evaluation can be related to:

- Learning problems
- Medical brain problems
- Memory problems
- Attention problems

ACCESS

Get a referral from your child's pediatrician. You can also get a recommendation from your child's school, childcare provider, or other parents or friends. In some cases, an evaluation may be done through the school system or Early Intervention.

PROVIDERS

- Neuropsychologist (p107)

LOCATION

Evaluations are done in a provider's office at a hospital, community mental health center, or private practice.

Psychological Evaluation

In this evaluation, your child can take two different kinds of tests:

- Cognitive tests check how the brain is working using many different types of tests, such as IQ tests and achievement tests. An IQ test shows the strengths and weaknesses of your child's thinking, based on his or her age. An achievement test shows your child's skill level in different areas, such as reading, math, and comprehension. Other types of cognitive tests include memory tests, abstract reasoning tests, and visual processing tests.
- Personality tests are used to determine your child's personality style, traits, and emotional reactions.

These two different types of tests may be done separately or in combination. When done in combination, this is referred to as a "full battery." This type of evaluation can only be done once a year.

ACCESS

If your child is over age 3, ask for an evaluation from your child's school (p118). If your child is under age 3, ask for an evaluation from Early Intervention (p115). You can also get a referral from your child's pediatrician or a recommendation from your child's school, childcare provider, or other parents or friends.

PROVIDERS

- Neuropsychologist (p107)
- Psychologist (p107)

LOCATION

Evaluations are done at your child's school, in Early Intervention, or in a provider's office at a hospital, community mental health center, or private practice.

Psychotherapy Evaluation

This evaluation is also called an Intake Evaluation. During this evaluation, the provider talks with you and your child about:

- The current issue and related symptoms
- Your child's medical history, including any past or current medications, health status, illnesses, and prior mental health evaluations and treatments
- Family medical history, including any history of mental illness
- Your child's development
- Your child's social interactions, including relationships with family, peers, and school professionals

The provider has an interview with your child and may meet individually with you or other caregivers. The provider may also speak with your child's teachers or other healthcare providers. Based on this evaluation, the provider determines the goals of psychotherapy and develops a treatment plan. In some cases, the provider may recommend additional evaluations, including a comprehensive psychiatric evaluation.

ACCESS

Get a referral from your child's pediatrician. You can also get a recommendation from your child's school, childcare provider, or other parents or friends. In some cases, an evaluation may be done through the school system or Early Intervention.

PROVIDERS

- Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) (p106)
- Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist (p106)
- Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) (p106)
- Psychologist (p107)
- Social Worker (p107)

LOCATION

Evaluations are done in a provider's office at a hospital, community mental health center, or private practice.

Speech-Language Evaluation

During this evaluation, a provider looks at your child's speech and language skills within the context of his or her total development. The provider watches your child, interacts with him or her through play, and uses standardized tests and scales. The provider evaluates:

- What your child understands (receptive language skills)
- What your child can say (expressive language skills)
- If your child is attempting to communicate in other ways (for example, pointing, head shaking, or gesturing)
- How a child's mouth, tongue, and palate all work together for speech, as well as eating and swallowing (oral-motor status)

During the evaluation, the provider also gets a detailed history of your child's symptoms. A hearing screening may also be completed. A tape recording or video recording may be made to assist with the evaluation. If the communication problem relates to the voice, an evaluation of breathing patterns and vocal cord movement will be done. The evaluation usually takes 1–2 hours. The provider lets you know if additional testing time is needed. For more information on speech and language disorders, turn to page 90 in **COMMON MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES**.

ACCESS

If your child is over age 3, ask for an evaluation from your child's school (p118). If your child is under age 3, ask for an evaluation from Early Intervention (p115). You can also get a referral from your child's pediatrician or a recommendation from your child's school, childcare provider, or other parents or friends.

PROVIDERS

- Speech-Language Pathologist (p108)

LOCATION

Evaluations are done through an outpatient speech-language program at a hospital or community mental health center.

