



SARAH SMITH
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

What to Expect in a Potential to Drive Assessment

A parent and carer guide for learner and pre-learner drivers with disability

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to learn more about the Potential to Drive assessment. As a parent or carer, you play a vital role in supporting your young person's independence and future choices.

This assessment helps us understand whether your young person is ready to learn to drive now, may become ready with targeted support, or would be better supported through a non-driving community mobility pathway at this time.

Our goal is to provide clear information, practical recommendations and a plan that supports safety, confidence and participation in everyday life.



Who is this assessment for?

This assessment is for young people who may benefit from extra support to determine their driving readiness, including those with:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Intellectual disability
- Psychosocial disability (e.g. mental health conditions)
- Anxiety
- Learning difficulties
- Executive function difficulties
- Visual processing differences
- Developmental conditions affecting planning, attention, behaviour or motor learning



What this assessment can and cannot do



It provides a structured occupational therapy opinion about your young person's driving readiness and support needs.



It offers practical recommendations to build skills, manage risks and support safe decision-making.



It does not guarantee that driving lessons, a licence or NDIS funding will be approved.



Supporting independence. Building confidence. Creating choices.

Adapted from Driving Well Occupational Therapy



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Before the assessment

A little preparation helps the assessment run safely and smoothly.



1. When is this assessment helpful?

- When the young person has a genuine goal to learn to drive, or wants to understand if driving could be a realistic future goal.
- When there are concerns about attention, visual search, processing speed, executive function, anxiety, maturity, behaviour, motor coordination, road-rule understanding or safety in the community.
- When the family or treating team would like a structured clinical opinion before committing to lessons or specialised driver training.
- When the person is a pre-learner wanting guidance about whether to pursue a learner permit, or a learner who needs a more tailored approach.



2. Important things to understand

- The assessment is about readiness and potential. It is not a guarantee of lessons, a licence or funding.
- The young person needs to have some interest or motivation in the goal.
- There may be times when it is better to pause, such as during acute mental health instability, unsafe behaviour, severe fatigue, substance use concerns or medical instability.
- Medical clearance may be needed before the assessment can go ahead.
- If specialised driving lessons are recommended, NDIS approval is still a separate process.



3. Documents and information to gather

- Referral letter or medical clearance from the treating doctor.
- Licensing or medical forms required by the state authority, if relevant.
- Vision information if there are known visual concerns.
- Relevant reports from allied health, psychology, school or other supports.
- NDIS plan pages and funding details, if NDIS is involved.
- Completed life skills / readiness checklist.
- Consent forms and service agreement.



Family tip

Parents and carers can help by encouraging honest information sharing and bringing questions to the assessment.



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What happens during the assessment?

The Potential to Drive assessment is a multi-step process. It usually includes preparation, an off-road session, an on-road observation session, and a discussion about next steps.

1



Enquiry and preparation

We clarify the referral reason, licence status, motivation, medical clearance, gather background information, and confirm carer completion of the life skills checklist.

2



Session 1: Off-road / clinical assessment

- Interview and history
- Physical and vision screening
- Review of life skills checklist
- Cognitive and road-law tasks
- Discussion about motivation, anxiety, learning style and supports

3



Session 2: On-road / passenger activities

- About 2 hours in total
- The young person is usually a passenger first
- We observe visual search, lane awareness, gap judgement, problem solving, coachability and stamina
- A behind-the-wheel component is only included if it is clinically appropriate, legally permitted and safe

4



Clinical decision and report

Results from both sessions are brought together to identify strengths, risks, support needs and the most suitable pathway.

5



Follow-up pathway

This may include specialised driving lessons, therapy, life skills work, community mobility goals, or re-assessment after a period of skill building.



Who may be in the vehicle?

- OT Driver Assessor
- Specialised Driving Instructor
- Client
- Parent or support person, often in the rear seat

The exact arrangement will be decided case by case.



The life skills review

Everyday skills such as routines, planning, safety, time management, community mobility and responsibility provide important information about driving readiness.





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Possible outcomes and next steps

This assessment aims to give clear guidance about the safest and most appropriate pathway for your young person.

1 Potential to drive – ready now

The young person shows enough foundation skills to begin learning with disability-informed support.

Typical next steps:

- Specialised driving lesson program
- Clear lesson goals
- Practice strategies and OT review points

2 Potential to drive – but needs readiness first

There are encouraging signs, but some skills need to be stronger before lessons are likely to be safe and effective.

Typical next steps:

- Pre-driving therapy
- Life skills work
- Passenger practice and review after progress

3 Not showing potential to drive at this time

Current difficulties or safety risks are too significant for driving to be a realistic goal right now.

Typical next steps:

- Focus on community mobility
- Independence, pedestrian or public transport skills
- Everyday life skills

4 Further information needed

Sometimes a decision cannot be made straight away because more medical information, reports, or observation is needed.

Typical next steps:

- Obtain missing information or complete another component before deciding

What families need to know

- ✓ NDIS approval is not guaranteed, even if specialised driving lessons are recommended.
- ✓ Ordinary licensing costs, tests and logbook requirements will still need to be self-funded.
- ✓ Specialised lesson programs should have clear goals and review points.
- ✓ If progress stalls, lessons may be paused while other skills are developed.
- ✓ A recommendation of potential does not guarantee a future licence.

Supporting your young person

- ♥ Acknowledge their feelings – it's normal to feel excited, worried or disappointed.
- ♥ Focus on safety and realistic next steps, not just the end goal.
- ♥ Support practice and activities at home where recommended.
- ♥ Ask questions if anything is unclear – we're here to help.



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sarah@ssoccupationaltherapy.com



0422 716 720



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