Pediatric Neuropsychological Testing - A Parent's Guide

<u>Diagnosis:</u> Neuropsychological testing is usually requested in order to assist with diagnosis. Testing can help to "rule in" certain common difficulties, such as learning and attention disorders (ADHD). Also, testing helps to "rule out" possible explanations. For example, a child who has trouble paying attention in school can have this problem for a variety of reasons, including learning disabilities, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, anxiety and family stress. Finally, testing helps to determine how <u>severe</u> the problems are.

<u>Treatment:</u> Neuropsychological testing is often useful for making treatment recommendations. For example, this type of evaluation can be useful to physicians to guide them in prescribing medications. In mental health, accurate diagnosis and the assessment of strengths and weaknesses help to focus counseling and consultation. Neuropsychological testing can guide therapists in the way they approach a child's problems (e.g., cognitive behavior therapy, family therapy, insight-oriented therapy). Finally, neuropsychological evaluation helps with the understanding of learning styles and problems, so it can be very valuable to teachers and special education professionals.

<u>Types of Tests:</u> (1) Educational testing. Neuropsychological evaluations of children and adolescents routinely screen for reading, spelling and basic math computation skills. The child's academic performance can then be compared to his/her performance in other respects (e.g., language skills and problem solving).

(2) Cognitive/neuropsychological tests. The basic battery looks at cognitive abilities that are needed for success in learning and in social interaction. These abilities include language, visual (nonverbal) problem solving, memory, attention/concentration, motor skills, and organizational skills (executive functions).

(3) Projective tests. Tests like the Rorschach Inkblot Test and the Children's Apperceptive Story-Telling Test offer ways to gain insight into worries and conflicts affecting the child's social and emotional development.

<u>What to Tell Your Child:</u> It is important to be reassuring. It is usually best to put the locus of the problem on adults, as in "these tests will help your teachers understand how to work with you better." Or, "I am trying to figure out how I can help you better with your school work at home."

<u>How to Determine the Quality of the Evaluation.</u> Good diagnostic work tries to weave together three important lines of information: (1) the child's past history; (2) the child's presentation at home and at school; (3) the child's performance in testing. Testing needs to make sense in the context of history and presentation. For example, a test may "show" poor attention, but this needs to be supported by the child's present behavior and the child's behavior in the past.

A competent evaluation directly addresses the referring questions. For example, "why is my child struggling to learn to read?" Or, "why does my child have so much trouble following directions?"