



Nurturing Progress

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST INVOLVEMENT



SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Educational Psychologists (EPs) work to support the learning and wellbeing of all CYP (children and young people). Sometimes our work focuses on individual CYP who may need some additional support in school to help them make progress. These needs can be described as 'Special Educational Needs' or SEN.

CYP can require extra help in school to support them with a broad range of skills. For example they may need help with; accessing the academic curriculum, developing social and communication skills, supporting their emotional needs, supporting physical or sensory needs.



UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION

EPs can help to support an understanding what a CYP needs support with, consider some desired outcomes and then support the development of next steps to support the CYP to make progress.

Whilst what we do might be different each time, overall we generally aim to:

- Support a joint understanding of the situation or 'problem' with the people we work with. This might mean listening to or combining different viewpoints. It can mean deciding to focus on one particular area of need/problem rather than another.
- Try to come up with some theories or "hypotheses" that might explain the current situation/problem, based on some psychological theory, and/or the information we have gathered. This can involve thinking about lots of different aspects (factors) of the child or young people's life, involving both themselves and their environment.
- Based on what we think is going on, we then try to identify some priority outcomes or next steps and some ways to get there.



AN 'ASSESSMENT'

Sometimes there is a view that an EP 'assessment' means one particular way of working, or doing one particular thing and so it can be a confusing term. Really, an EP assessment is anything that an EP does to try and make sense of the current situation.

We know that every child is different. They have their own needs, strengths, skills and aspirations. Also, every family, school, classroom and teacher is different. With all this difference it might be odd if an EP did the same thing with every case they worked on. Usually the situation is complex or confusing. Sometimes the child might have a range of different needs. Sometimes our work can be focused on thinking about one aspect or a small part of the situation in more detail, rather than all of the child's needs. Sometimes one person in the situation might need more support than another. Sometimes there might be restrictions on the work we can do due to time and cost. In each case we will try and think about the best thing to do with the time available.



WORKING TOGETHER TO FIND NEXT STEPS

Based on the information we have gathered and the theories/hypotheses we have developed about what is going on, we can then come up with some next steps. Since every child or young person's situation is unique, every solution needs to be carefully considered. Any suggestions need to be right for everyone involved. EPs will most often want to work with others in order to jointly think about next steps that will work for the CYP in their setting.

Our involvement can only reflect what we know and think about at the time we are involved. We are aware that new information might come to light, the situation might change, some strategies might not seem effective, or we might want to develop new theories about what is going on in order to develop new strategies or next steps. It is therefore important to continue to review the situation together over time.



WAYS TO GATHER INFORMATION

There are lots of different things that EPs can do to make sense of a situation (carry out their assessment). It's impossible to list all of them and you can always talk to your EP to ask them what they are doing and why.

Consultation

We usually try to start with a conversation with key adults who support the child. Quite often, this is the only type of information gathering that we do. Working together can often be the most useful way of trying to understand what is going on, from different perspectives. Parents, teachers (Young People are also welcome) will all have different views about 'the problem' and it's important to try to understand these views. EPs might call these conversations different things e.g. a consultation or a joint problem solving consultation. EPs might focus their work on supporting different people, ie teachers and/or parents. Consultations involve a great deal of psychology. EPs think carefully about the questions they ask, including when and how these questions are said. An EP's work is really helped by those involved allowing plenty of time in a safe space to really talk and think about the situation that is causing concern. We have written several other information sheets about consultation. Please ask us for more information or see the resources page of our website.

Gaining a child or young person's views

CYP are at the centre of our thinking and work and so it's important to try to understand what they think about what is going on, what the difficulties are and what they think is working well. EPs do have skills which mean that they might be the right person to gain a child or young person's views. There are a huge range of tools and techniques that an EP can use to gain views. It is also important to note that sometimes we might decide that we are not the right person to do this work, and someone who knows the CYP might be better to meet with them to gain their views.

Observation

Observation can sometimes help an EP understand what life might be like for the young person they're working with. It can provide opportunity to think about what a child or young person might be struggling with, but also what's already working well in a particular situation. A key focus of these observations is exploring environmental influences impacting a CYP. It can be difficult for school staff to have the time to carry out an in-depth, focused observation and so sometimes an EP might spot things that have previously been missed. EPs might carry out observations in lots of different ways e.g. at different times, in different places. This is because we know that CYP can behave in different ways in different environments.

Individual assessments

After all of these things have been done, sometimes we need to gather more information about a CYP using some tools that we do with the child or young person themselves, based on the things that have been raised. These assessments usually help look in more detail at a particular skill ie, cognitive skills/literacy/numeracy/language skills. As there are so many skills we could potentially look at, we will have decided on a specific focus for these assessments based on the information we have already gathered. There are also so many different ways to gain the information, we will also choose what we feel is the best way based on what we know about your CYP. We will ensure that your CYP is happy to work with us. If they don't want to, there are usually other ways to find out the information we need.



A 'REPORT'

In our experience it is usually the EP involvement i.e. what the EP does at the time that people value most. EPs do write records of their involvement, however since this can take time, we try and think carefully about the purpose of the record. We can then decide what type of product is going to be most useful e.g. a letter, a brief record of our conversation, or a lengthier more detailed record. Just like no two EP assessments are the same, no two EP reports are the same.

We try and write our records as soon after our involvement as possible. Every effort is made to ensure they are an accurate representation of the information gathered. The record also aims to reflect the main points, themes, and agreements as understood at the time. They may not include every detail or exact wording, and may be subject to clarification or correction later on. It is also important to note that the report/record of involvement is based on the situation at the time and things can quickly change. We can also continue to develop our understanding of the situation based on any new information. The content of the record should therefore be treated as a working summary rather which can then always be updated in the form of a review.

Sometimes there is a big focus on an 'EP report' because there can be an assumption that EPs are gatekeepers to something called Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), or places at a special school. This is not the case. The information provided by an EP is designed to identify a CYP's strengths and needs, and then describe the types of things that should be in place to make sure that a child's needs are met. An EP record can detail what was agreed during the EP's work, and it can help people to make decisions but it shouldn't say whether a child should receive an EHCP or what school they should go to.

Based on <https://edpsy.org.uk/about/educational-psychology/#ep-assessment>