

# What are Tests Testing?

## Understanding Assessment

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## Reasons NOT to do an assessment

- Evals are EXPENSIVE
- Evals are TIME CONSUMING
- Evals are not always effective and can potentially go off the rails, leading to confusion and conflict around a mis-diagnosis, or to pathologizing and trying to treat normal child behavior.

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# How CAN evals be helpful?

- Making clinical diagnoses
- Informing eligibility decisions
- Shaping goals, accommodations, and services
- Assessing progress over time
- Making prognoses

## Conducting a child eval – what could possibly go wrong?

- Evals that are done without a clear sense of direction
- Evals that are done without an overall context
- Evals that are done with the wrong tools

**DIRECTION...**  
To get the right  
answer, ask the  
right question

- Is there a problem?
- What is the problem?
- What do we do about the problem?
- Is what we're doing working?

## Example 1

Kate is a six year old girl with a challenging temperament. She has always had irregular sleep patterns and has trouble with change. She can be “bossy” in play with other kids and has intense tantrums. She is very physically active and loves sports, but as a 1<sup>st</sup> grader she has been struggling to sit at her desk and complete schoolwork. Everyone agrees that she seems “bright”, but she is lagging toward the low end of expectations for reading.

## Example 2

Gus is a 4<sup>th</sup> grader who hates school. He is very popular and has lots of friends, and seems to be a natural athlete and musician. However, his reading is painfully dysfluent and he is regularly triggered by writing demands, with pencils flying across the room. He is starting to refer to himself as “stupid”, and although his parents call him sweet-natured he is increasingly defiant with his teacher.

## Example 3

Amy is a nine year old with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), diagnosed at age three. She has a 1:1 aide in school with ancillary services including speech and OT. She lacks independence with activities of daily living and her team agrees that she is making very slow progress. She is distractible, can become agitated and exhibit self injurious behaviors, and while the students in her class are supportive she has limited reciprocity in her interactions with them.



## Example 4

Dawn is a 15 year old with Down Syndrome. She began to struggle with inclusionary instruction in middle school, and as a high schooler she shifted to a life-skills program with supported inclusion for social times of the day. Her parents also worked with her developmental pediatrician to start medication to help with focus and self-regulation. She has now been in her specialized program for a year and her parents are starting to think about adult transition.

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## CONTEXT... Assessment, not testing

- A test is a tool. A hammer doesn't build a house; the builder also needs to understand the plan and make on-the-spot decisions and observations.
- A good assessment is the same...you need solid tools (tests), but also an overall context and plan (from the history) and in-the-moment observation and management (clinical observation).

# Choose the right tool for the job

- Example: IQ testing
- Each test has its own unique demands, and these demands can shape the results. Choosing the tool needs to come within the context of an overall understanding of the case.
  - Wechsler Intelligence Scales (WPPSI, WISC, WAIS)
  - Stanford-Binet Scales
  - Leiter International Performance Scales
  - Test of Nonverbal Intelligence

# Test Parameters

- Is a test timed?
- Language/expressive demands
- Literacy demands
- Are test demands open-ended or structured (forced choice)?
- 1:1 or independent?

*Are there test interactions with a child's disability that are leading us to measure something other than what we think we are measuring?*

## Finally... Choosing an Evaluator

- Experience with children, including with the age and issues of your child.
- Participating in the special education process.
- Costs – do they accept your health insurance? Do they contract with school systems? Are there additional, uncovered costs?
- How long will it take...not only to get in for the evaluation, but to receive the written report?

# Discussion

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