

Psychoeducational vs. Neuropsychological Evaluations

What's the Difference—And Why It Matters?

The right evaluation at the right time can make a meaningful difference in a child's development. Yet many families and professionals aren't fully aware of how these two types of evaluations differ—or how they can complement each other.

Scope & Purpose

While both evaluations assess learning and cognitive functioning, they differ in focus and depth:

- **Psychoeducational Evaluations** focus primarily on academic performance and eligibility for school-based services.
- **Neuropsychological Evaluations** explore how a child's brain functions across multiple domains - not just academics—offering a deeper, more comprehensive understanding.

Psychoeducational Evaluations

- Conducted by school psychologists
- Designed to determine if a child qualifies for special education services or classroom accommodations (e.g., IEP or 504 Plan)
- Assesses:
 - IQ
 - Academic skills (reading, writing, math)
 - Occasionally other domains, but mainly in relation to school functioning
- Do not typically provide formal medical or psychological diagnoses (e.g., ADHD, autism spectrum disorder)

Neuropsychological Evaluations

- Conducted by licensed clinical neuropsychologists
- Designed to understand how a child's brain functions in academic, social, emotional, and daily life settings
- Assesses:
 - IQ and academic achievement
 - Language and communication
 - Verbal and nonverbal processing
 - Memory (short- and long-term, verbal and visual)
 - Executive functioning (planning, organization, attention, flexibility, impulse control)
 - Fine motor skills
 - Emotional, behavioral, and social functioning
 - Adaptive/daily living skills
- Can provide formal diagnoses such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, learning disorders, anxiety, and others

Who Might Refer for Each?

- **Psychoeducational Evaluations** often initiated by school staff (teachers, special education teams) when academic concerns arise
- **Neuropsychological Evaluations** often initiated by parents or medical/mental health professionals when concerns extend beyond academics

Collaboration Is Key

These evaluations are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they often work best together. A school may start with a psychoeducational evaluation to understand learning needs and guide instruction. Later, a family or physician may seek a neuropsychological evaluation for deeper insight into broader developmental or neurological concerns. Together, these tools offer a more complete picture of a child's needs and strengths.

Why This Matters

Understanding the difference helps families and professionals:

- Make informed decisions
- Advocate for appropriate services
- Coordinate care between school and clinical settings
- Support the whole child—not just their academic performance

Next Steps

- 1 **Review this guide** — Consider which evaluation type aligns with your child's needs
- 2 **Talk to your school** — Ask about psychoeducational evaluation options if academic concerns are primary
- 3 **Schedule a consultation** — Contact us to discuss whether a neuropsychological evaluation is appropriate
- 4 **Gather records** — Collect any existing evaluations, report cards, or medical records to share

Questions?

If you're unsure which type of evaluation is appropriate for your child or student, a consultation can help clarify next steps.