

Educational Psychology

Overview Guide

Educational Psychology (EP) Assessments

Educational psychology assessment is a process of information gathering with the aim of identifying children and young people's current skills, needs and, by drawing on psychological knowledge, what might help them achieve positive outcomes in the future.

EP assessments are holistic. This means as well as exploring the leaning, social and emotional factors impacting on a CYP's progress, it will also consider environmental factors (for example, pupil group, approaches to teaching, school systems and family context, where appropriate).

What we do will depend on the purpose of the assessment and why we have been asked to become involved. We will always speak to parents/carers and the staff who know the child/young person best to find out more about them, decide what other information is needed and who else we might need to talk to (e.g., other professionals).

However, all EP assessments are informed by key principles and have some similar features.

Key principles of an EP assessment

- Collaborative: EP assessment will always include conversations with key people at home and in the education setting in order to try to establish a shared understanding of the child/young person and what the hopes are for the future.
- Strengths based: EPs will aim to identify what is already working well and will think in a solution-focused manner about what support might lead to further progress.
- It always adopts a 'least intrusive, most effective' approach. Choice of assessment methods are carefully considered to give the best understanding of a CYP's needs. Where information is available this will be used, unnecessary or repeated 'testing' is always avoided.

Key features of an EP assessment

- Parent/carer consent is always gained before any work by an EP begins. Over the age of 16, the young person themselves must also give their consent. Direct assessment will not take place if they do not want this to happen.
- Assessment will always build on existing knowledge.
- Assessment will always lead to the EP making some recommendations about how best to support the child/young person in education. Often this is in the form of identifying 'next steps' as part of an assess, plan, do and review (ADPR) cycle of support. Wherever possible, these actions or recommendations will be discussed and agreed collaboratively with the key adults in the child/young person's life.

Assessment Tools and Approaches

EPs will use their psychological knowledge to select the most appropriate ways to assess a child/young person in each individual situation. They will consider:

- The purpose and aims of the assessment, specifically what information is missing and what questions need answering.
- The age, interests and needs of the child/young person they are working with.
- The least intrusive and most effective approach to obtaining the information needed.

Consultation provides the framework for much, and in some cases, all of the assessment required by an EP. Consultation is a preventative and helping process where the psychologist facilitates a collaborative discussion about a particular concern and what has helped or hindered progress in the past. It supports participants to plan a way forward together. (See our separate guide to consultation for more information).

In some cases, it may be appropriate for the EP to work directly with a child or young person. This should be part of the contextual approach to assessment where the EP is clear about the purpose and aims of this. It may include:

- observation of the child/young person in a learning context,
- looking at the child/young person's school work,
- using questionnaires and rating scales to investigate how the child/young person thinks, feels, or reacts in different situations,
- using dynamic assessment methods to look at the child/young person's approach to learning, their response to different teaching approaches and their capacity to learn,
- curriculum-based and/or standardised assessment which looks at how the child/young person's skills, knowledge and development compares with other children and young people the same age. (see the separate guide on cognitive assessments for further information on this approach specifically).

These would not be a standalone piece of work and only completed following consultation to ensure it is purposeful, appropriate and accessible.

EPs will also always seek to understand the perspective of the child / young person and how they are making sense of their situation. They will use various psychological approaches and styles to achieve this.

EP assessment is most successful when it occurs over time so that response to support and progress can be observed.

Where ongoing involvement is not possible (e.g., a one-off assessment during the statutory process), the limitations to our recommendations are made clear. Any one-off assessment can only ever be a snapshot of the child/young person's needs at that moment in time and should be viewed as contributing to wider information collected over time by others.