

Informed Consent for Psychoeducational Assessment

Informed Consent Discussion Guide

(Please use these notes to discuss **highlighted** phrases in the Consent Checklist with parents)

Informed Consent

Informed consent is the result of a process of reaching an agreement to work together collaboratively, rather than simply having a consent form signed. In obtaining informed consent, parents and guardians should be provided with as much information as a reasonable or prudent person would want to know before making a decision or consenting to a psychological process, procedure, or service. Reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that all the appropriate information is conveyed to the parent or guardian in a manner to ensure that they clearly understand what they are consenting to on behalf of their child.

The Purpose and Nature of a Psychoeducational Assessment

A psychoeducational assessment is the systematic investigation of a student's strengths and weaknesses in various domains (e.g., cognitive ability, achievement, psychological processing, language, and behaviour). Intelligence testing or "I.Q." tests are a common procedure. The assessment process can also include an analysis of instructional context and the classroom environment. Assessment is accomplished through the use of interviews, rating scales, observations, testing, curriculum based measurement, history taking and measurement of responsiveness to intervention. The assessment process may require the school psychologist to work, for a period of time, with the referred student in a one to one situation outside the regular classroom, but within regular school hours. At the end of the assessment a report is written which will be shared with the parent or guardian and with school personnel concerned about the student. Parents and guardians will be given an opportunity to ask questions and to make suggestions about the report at that time. The report will become part of the student's record. The goal of assessment is to gather specific and new information to better understand and improve the student's current functioning or learning.

The Benefits

Generally, assessment is organized to answer questions about a student's learning or behaviour. It may help develop insights into needed changes as well as develop new strategies, accommodations and adaptations that may be necessary to improve the student's learning. The assessment may help school personnel to gain a better understanding of a student's learning strengths and challenges. In addition, the assessment may help the School Based Team to develop educational programs to improve the level of success that a student will have in school. The assessment may also lead to a student being diagnosed as having special educational needs. Such a diagnosis can make it easier for school personnel to access some additional services that might benefit the student.

The Risks

Not all assessments lead to the benefits described above. An assessment may lead to the diagnosis of learning or language disabilities, developmental disorders and/or behavioural/emotional disorders that will require follow-up, treatment, or interventions outside of the classroom. These diagnoses may be upsetting. Assessment results may also contribute to a re-evaluation of school or life plans. If the diagnosis leads to a student being identified as a special needs student, then such identification may lead to limitations as to which classrooms may enroll the student. To minimize unexpected problems, it is important that any concerns or questions that develop over the assessment period be mentioned to the school psychologist promptly.

Mutual Responsibilities

The school psychologist will ensure that a written copy of the assessment is given to the school in a timely manner. The school will be responsible for setting up a meeting to discuss the report with the parents, the school psychologist, and the child's teachers. The parents and teachers will ensure that the child undergoing the assessment is prepared for any change of routine and is made to feel as comfortable as possible regarding the assessment.

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The Alternatives to Assessment

Students may receive a limited level of help in school without any additional assessment information. In some cases, the decision to assess could be postponed to another time, and the current educational program or placement maintained. Also, depending on the finances or services available to the parents or guardians, an assessment can be completed privately by individuals or agencies not connected to the school district.

The Consequences of Non-Action

In some cases, a wait-and-see strategy can be a reasonable choice as other alternatives to a full assessment are implemented and evaluated. Such a strategy might provide new and useful information about the student's needs and abilities. However, decisions about the educational program of a student should be made with adequate information, so the absence of psychoeducational information may limit the effectiveness of other actions or delay the implementation of appropriate interventions. Since the goal of assessment is to better understand and improve the student's current functioning or learning, then non-action can delay that aspect of the assessment.

The Ongoing Right to Refuse or Rescind Consent

Consent cannot be given under conditions of coercion, undue influence, misrepresentation, fraud or duress being implicated in the parent's decision-making process. Therefore, the right to refuse consent should always be a reasonable and a viable option for any parent or guardian. In addition, that right to refuse consent can also be invoked at anytime during the assessment process to effectively and immediately halt the testing procedures of the school psychologist. If a parent or guardian wants to rescind their consent, they should be able to simply contact the school psychologist or the school principal and ask that the assessment process be stopped.

Alternatively, should the school or the school psychologist wish to make any changes to the assessment process that might impact a parent or guardian's choice to consent, then the parent or guardian must be informed of those changes and their consent must be obtained again before those changes are implemented.

Time Limits

The consent for assessment is time limited. Typically, the time limit for consent lasts for only the duration of the school year when the consent was obtained. In some cases, a parent or guardian may agree to have their consent for assessment continue until the end of the calendar year rather than to the end of the school year.

The Limits to Confidentiality

All documents and the written report relating to the collection of this assessment information are the property of the Generic School Board while the information contained in them is considered as private, confidential, and protected by law. They may not be disclosed to any persons or agencies other than authorized employees of the Generic School Board without parent or guardian's specific and written consent. However, if the school psychologist perceives that there is a clear risk of harm such as the following situations then confidentiality will be revoked and the appropriate agency will be contacted:

- If the student presents an imminent danger to themselves or others
- If the student is in need of protection and a report must be filed with the appropriate agency
- If a court orders the disclosure of records

Multiple Uses

The diagnostic information provided by the school psychologists in the assessment report may be used to identify a student as having special educational needs. Teachers, administrators, or school based teams may use the diagnostic information to help them to make school placement, educational programming, or provincial funding decisions about the student. For example, class composition, provincial examination conditions, and special education support staff hiring are decisions that are made in conjunction with the recommendations of psychoeducational assessments.