



# Getting Quality Educational Consultation for Your Child

Many children experience some learning difficulties during their school years – struggles in learning to read, problems in math, poor spelling or writing skills, or not being able to stay on task to complete the work. Often it is difficult for parents to determine if the problem is serious, or just a normal challenge the student is experiencing. And it can be equally confusing to determine the real nature of the problem.

## Getting a Referral

Frequently, parents do not know where to turn to get help. Sometimes the public school system is able to help, other times they are not. And there are times when the student is enrolled in a private school or is home-schooled. Knowing how to find appropriate educational assistance can be difficult for parents.

When your child needs help, there are multiple sources to find a quality service provider. The school principal or teacher often has had prior experience with educational evaluators. Your family physician or pediatrician also frequently utilizes these professionals. And a friend or relative who has received similar help may also provide valuable information. (If the same professional is mentioned by all three, you are in luck!)

## Verify Qualifications

Find a professional who is properly trained to assess your child and who is able to recommend (or provide) the services needed. Generally, this means the individual should be certified or licensed by the state in the appropriate category (each state does it differently). Depending on your state's laws, these individuals would normally be either a psychologist, psychometrist, or school psychologist.

## *Look for Shared Perspectives*

There are numerous ways to view a situation and you need to try to find a professional who has comparable values and looks at life, family, and education in ways similar to you. Generally, it is helpful to ask the professional some questions about how he views issues which are important to you and relevant to the situation.

## *Practical Issues*

Professionals who are qualified to help children are typically scarce and in great demand. You may be placed on a waiting list. However, you should expect the professional to return your phone call within 24 to 48 hours.

The training necessary for these professionals is usually a doctorate, so you are getting assistance from a highly trained individual. Additionally, evaluations and reports take time—anywhere from two to ten hours, depending on the complexity of the tests. Therefore, evaluations are usually costly. The cost of services should be discussed during your initial appointment with the examiner. The examiner is trained to evaluate all aspects of a problem. Although they may be warm and emphatic, don't expect someone who will tell you it will be all right tomorrow. It is their job to give you accurate information and a realistic appraisal of the situation.

## *Concrete Suggestions*

You should come away from the evaluation experience with more than just “feeling better about the situation.” Evaluations generally should include: an information-gathering contact, the actual testing, a written report, recommendations for intervention, and a follow-up contact during which the examiner will go over the report and answer any questions you might have.

The most important issue is getting the help you need. There are some ways you can help the professional do this:

- **First, know what you want.** The job of the professional is to determine what the primary problem is and to recommend the appropriate intervention. However, most problem situations are multifaceted, so you must determine which problem is most important to you. It will make a difference on how the professional examines the problem and on what he will spend his time and energy.
- **Tell the professional what you want.** People have their children tested for all sorts of reasons. The examiner cannot read your mind. The clearer you are in describing exactly what you want, the greater the chances are that you will receive the help you need.

- **Provide a clear description of the problem.** It is best to prepare a list ahead of time with the most important information you want to communicate to the examiner. This prevents your forgetting something important, as well as wasting time with insignificant details. Include specific behaviors, the context in which the problem occurs, patterns you've observed, and other key background information.
- **Supply pertinent background information.** Generally it is important to know if there were any complications with the pregnancy and birth, any health problems while the child was young (or recently), unusual developmental signs, copies of past medical, educational or psychological test reports, and other significant events in the child's life such as an accident or emotional scare.
- **Ask questions.** Often, parents seem to be intimidated by the professional's credentials or vocabulary. As a result, they are afraid of "looking dumb" or asking a "stupid question." Don't be. Keep asking questions until you have an answer you understand and can implement.
- **Get a second opinion if necessary.** Sometimes the issues are complex and the implications so dramatic that it is wise to make sure of the diagnosis before investing time and money in the recommended treatment.

Remember, if you encounter a problem in your family or with your children, there is help available. Don't let the maze of finding appropriate help deter you from getting the service you need. With a little effort, investigation, and planning you can get the quality professional help you need.

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