

Registered psychologists are delivering services in our schools, our courts, our communities and in organizations across Nova Scotia. The Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia (APNS) and the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology (NSBEP) have worked together over the years to ensure the public receives professional services from psychologists. The Nova Scotia Psychology Act provides guidelines for the ethical conduct of psychologists but does not regulate the delivery of psychological related services by non-psychologists.

An on-going area of concern by both APNS and NSBEP is the use of psychological tests by unregulated users. This may include assessments in school settings, assessments for custody access and employment-related assessments. Individuals with various degrees and certificates -- not necessarily in psychology -- can be qualified by test manufacturers to purchase and use psychological tests. Individuals do not have to be registered psychologists to administer, score and interpret psychological tests and the Nova Scotia Psychology Act does not apply to these test users.

Registered psychologists who administer tests as part of their practice must follow very strict guidelines to protect the public from the misuse of psychological tests. This is especially important when tests results are used to help make important decisions concerning educational requirements, custody access decisions, type of therapy, or if an individual will receive a job offer or promotion.

Psychologists are obligated to ensure you fully understand the reasons you have been asked to take a test, what the test is designed to measure, the nature of the feedback you will receive, and how the test results might be used. Psychologists fully explain these issues to their clients and in doing so seek to obtain informed consent prior to administering any tests.

Questions to Ask about Giving Consent for your Child to undergo a Psychoeducational Assessment.

School psychologists use psychological tests to investigate children's learning strengths and weaknesses and to gain understanding of

cognitive and learning styles for the purpose of educational planning. They may also assess social and emotional functioning that might interfere with a child's school progress. The tests are chosen to be appropriate for the child's age, language abilities and problems. The psychologist responsible for choosing and administering tests in psychoeducational assessments will want you to understand the purpose of the test, the results that may be obtained from them, and how the results will be reported and recorded.

What is this test supposed to measure?

Each test chosen should measure specific skills, abilities or other attributes pertinent to the reason for assessment. The psychologist will be able to tell you what each test measures and why that information is important. Some tests compare your child to large samples of other children who have been given the same test. This comparison is intended to help you understand the extent to which your child has acquired or developed abilities compared to other children the same age.

How will the results be used?

Results of individual tests are combined with other information before an assessment is complete. The test results will be viewed in relationship to one another and in context of your child's development. No single test result can answer all important questions about your child's abilities. The psychologist will be able to tell you what kind of a decision can be based on the information from the assessment. This is an important consideration in determining the appropriateness of the test results. Be sure you understand the information the psychologist gives you in respect to what each test measures, how well your child matches the group to which he/she will be compared and how the results will be in context to other important information.

Who sees the test results?

Test results are generally considered to be private information, only viewed by those involved. The Department of Education requires a separate confidential folder.

Questions to Ask about Taking a Test as part of a Job Application.

Organizations and recruitment companies use psychological tests to help them find the right person for the right job. When well-developed tests are used in a professional manner it can result in a more productive and satisfied work force. Prior to giving your consent to have a test administered, you should ask the following questions about the process:

What kind of test do I have to take?

Tests can be used to measure specific knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (KSAOs) that are related to the job. The test administrator should be able to tell you in general terms what type of test they want you to take.

How will the results be used?

Your test results should be combined with other information to make the final decision. The test results might carry a certain amount of weight in the selection process. Ask how the test information will be used to make a final decision.

Who gets to see my test results?

You have a right to privacy and the results should only be seen by those involved in the selection process. You should inquire as to who will see your results, whether or not they will become a part of your personnel file if hired, and what will happen to them if you are not hired.

Will I receive feedback on my test results?

You should be told in advance what type of feedback, if any you will be receiving about your performance on the test.

Who is responsible for the testing process?

Test publishers have guidelines in place concerning who can buy, administer and interpret tests. You should ask who this is in case you have concerns or other questions about the process.

Questions about a Custody Access Assessment

If divorcing parents can't agree about their children's living arrangements then a judge may order, or a lawyer suggest that the parents go through a custody access assessment. Custody access assessments are used to help the judge decide the best living arrangement (joint, shared, sole) and schedule for access (frequency, duration, etc.) for the child. If a judge orders the assessment then both parents must comply; so it is in the interests of both parents to come to agreement about custody and access issues before being court ordered to participate in a time-consuming, intrusive, and costly assessment. However, should parents find themselves involved in such an assessment; the following are important questions to ask:

What does informed consent mean?

The psychologist doing the assessment will tell you about, and provide in written form the limitations of confidentiality; in the case of a custody access assessment, the information gathered will be contained in the report generated from the assessment and become part of the court record.

What is the purpose of the custody and access assessment?

The purpose is to find what is in the best interests for the child or children and how each parent can respond to those interests. In collecting information the psychologist will do an interview with each parent to gather a family history, have each parent complete tests, and observe each parent, if possible, with the child or children. This information is then used by the psychologist to write a report that describes what the child or children need and how each parent's abilities relate to those needs.

How will the Custody Access report be used?

The judge, lawyers, and parents will read the report which will then be used to resolve any disagreements between parents over the children's living arrangements and access visits.

Who has access to the test data, file information, and report?

The test data and file information is kept by the assessing psychologist; the file and its contents are considered confidential but if ordered by the judge the psychologist must release the file and its contents. The report becomes part of the court record and anyone involved in the case then has access to the report.

Q&A

Questions about Psychotherapy

Many people encounter circumstances in their lives that may be overwhelming. Taking the step of talking to someone who can help may be difficult. While friends and family can be willing to lend a hand, talking to someone who has the training and skills to help you solve the problem can be beneficial. Talking to a professional can also help to determine if there are any psychological problems, such as anxiety, that may also be adding to your distress.

Who should I see?

When you make the decision to talk to someone you should make sure that the person is a regulated professional. Many people are surprised to know that in Nova Scotia, as in other provinces, anyone can hold themselves out as a counsellor or psychotherapist. In Nova Scotia, the responsibility to regulate psychologists is given to the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology (NSBEP) by the provincial Government.

Many Nova Scotians also do not realize that the terms "psychologist" and "psychological" are restricted titles and can only be used by professionals who have met rigorous standards of training and who are able to

provide a high standard of care. If you choose to see a psychologist for therapy you are assured that they have met the standards required by the law. Seeing an unregulated person gives you no assurance that this person has met the level of training needed to help people with serious and important problems. If you receive bad advice by an unqualified person, you have no way to remedy the situation.

Why choose a regulated professional?

Before you see a therapist, you should ask the person if a regulatory body recognized by the Nova Scotia Government regulates his or her practice. For example, all psychologists practising in Nova Scotia must be registered and in good standing with the NSBEP. A list of all registered psychologists is available online at www.nsbep.org. Any person who calls themselves a psychologist in Nova Scotia without being registered is guilty of an offence. You should also be aware that many therapists belong to professional associations, but membership in such associations is voluntary and not the same as being registered. Remember, anyone can call himself or herself a "therapist", "psychotherapist", "life coach" or "counsellor".

How do I find a psychologist?

You may locate a psychologist by talking to a friend who may have seen one, asking your family doctor for a referral, speaking with your employee assistance program, or consulting the Yellow pages. Psychologists are employed in hospitals, clinics, schools and in private practices throughout Nova Scotia. APNS also provides an online directory of psychologists at www.apns.ca. Before choosing a psychologist be sure to ask questions about the type of problems they deal with, their experience, and fees. In most cases, fees for a private psychologist can be claimed through your private medical insurance. After you have determined the psychologist's credentials and have started the therapy process, the best way to decide if the psychologist is right for you is based on your feelings. You should ask yourself, is the psychologist kind, understanding and non-judgemental and do I feel my problem is being helped? If you don't feel the fit is right, talk to the psychologist or consider referring yourself to another psychologist.