



APS Australian Psychological Society

What does a school psychologist do?

Information for Parents

November 2015



The school psychologist

The school psychologist is the leading mental health expert in your child's school. This means that they can assist children, young people, families and teachers to support a young person to get the best out of life at school. Psychologists are experts in human behaviour. They have studied the brain, memory, learning, human development and the processes that determine how people think, feel, behave and react. They help children and young people to achieve academic success, psychological health and wellbeing, and social and emotional wellbeing.

How do they do this?

School psychologists work at many levels in schools. They support whole school practice by implementing programs to address bullying, violence, personal safety or behaviour. They work indirectly with groups within the school and with specific school based issues, and they work directly with children or young people who are facing specific challenges. School psychologists also work in early childhood settings and support early intervention for children with disabilities. This can involve assessment of learning or behaviour, or assessment of a child or young person's coping skills. They offer counselling and support for problematic life events that can affect all students, such as:

- grief and loss
- bullying
- sexuality issues
- substance abuse issues
- trauma
- family breakdown, and
- relationship issues.

How do I know that the school psychologist is the right person to help my child?

Psychologists who are members of the Australian Psychological Society (APS) are regulated by the APS *Code of Ethics*. They have extensive training in ethical practice that is designed to protect both the integrity of the profession and the rights and safety of the public, including children in schools. Psychologists are registered with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulatory Authority which means that they have formal accredited qualifications, they have an obligation to have up to date learning and they are subject to a formal complaints process. Many school psychologists also have formal teaching qualifications. All of this means that school psychologists are specialists who can offer your child the best available support for difficulties they might be experiencing at school.

How can my child see the school psychologist?

If your child is in primary school a referral to the school psychologist will be discussed with you and you must sign a consent form agreeing to the service. In secondary schools, the requirement for parent consent varies between individual schools and state and territory education department guidelines. Often young people can self-refer to the psychologist.





What happens in the sessions with the school psychologist?

That depends on the concerns you or the school have about your child. If your child is having difficulty with school work there will probably be some formal assessment. If your child is having difficulty with friendships or with other relationships, the psychologist will explore your child's understanding of the situation and discuss coping strategies and practice alternative ways of behaving. Sessions with the psychologist are usually about 50 minutes long and can occur weekly. The psychologist will discuss with you if a referral to an outside agency would be helpful for your child.

Will the information be confidential?

The school psychologist has an ethical and legal responsibility to protect the rights to confidentiality and privacy of your child. However, there are occasions when psychologists are legally obliged to disclose information, for example, if they believe that the child, or someone else in the community, is at risk of harm.

All confidential psychology files are required to be securely stored either in password protected electronic files or locked filing cabinets. Only the psychologist can access these files.



For more information about the APS please visit psychology.org.au or contact:

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How will information about my child be used?

The school psychologist can only use information about your child for the primary purpose for which it was collected. For example, if your child has been referred to the psychologist for learning difficulties, information from assessments will be used to assist teachers with planning and programming in the classroom. Any other family or personal information that your child might have shared with the psychologist cannot be disclosed, unless it is directly relevant to the child's learning.

Can I withdraw my consent?

If you think that your child no longer requires the support of the school psychologist you can withdraw consent by writing to the principal of the school. It is recommended that you discuss this, and any concerns you might have, with the psychologist.



Where can I get more information?

Talk to your child's teacher about any problems your child might be facing at school.

More information about how an APS psychologist can help your child is available on the APS website at:

psychology.org.au/public/what-is-psychology/

Contact information: