

Having Your Child Tested for Learning Disabilities Outside of School

By: Reading Rockets (2008)

Children who struggle with reading often need extra help. This help usually comes from the school, but some parents choose to look outside of the school for professionals who can assess, diagnose, tutor, or provide other education services. The following article provides information on how to find the right person for your child.

Who you choose to work with your child is a key decision. A professional who provides a good diagnosis that reveals your child has a learning disability (LD) or ADHD, for example, can be a gateway to services that open doors to learning and a more fulfilling life for a student. A good tutor can help your child learn reading strategies or catch up in school.

You can find the names of professionals to choose from in local phone books, from a list provided by the school, or from people you know.

Although you definitely want to work with someone who makes you and your child feel comfortable, that's not enough. Here are some questions to ask and points to keep in mind when deciding which professional to choose.

Are you licensed or certified?

Many professionals can suspect LD and/or ADHD, but not all of them are licensed or certified to *diagnose* these disorders.

When you go to a person in private practice (i.e., someone who is not employed by the school system), it's important to determine if the professional has the needed license to be in private practice and to make the diagnosis of LD or ADHD. Most states require the license of psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and lawyers to be in clear view in their offices.

What areas do you specialize in?

Ask the person, "What is your area of expertise?" This could include learning disabilities, ADHD, speech and hearing, legal issues, behavior modification, education, emotional concerns, family counseling, and more. Consider which experience and expertise is most appropriate for your child's situation.

What age range do you specialize in?

The person could specialize in working with preschoolers, children, adolescents, or adults. It's important to choose a professional who is used to working with children of your son's or daughter's age.

What are your fees?

Ask the person what his or her hourly rate is and how an hour is defined. Some use a 45 or 50 minute hour (this is so they have time to write notes about the session). You may also want to ask whether appointments can be broken up into smaller

blocks, what happens if you miss a scheduled appointment, whether there is a sliding fee scale, and if a payment plan can be set up.

Will you accept my insurance or HMO coverage?

Not all professionals will take insurance and not all insurance will pay for the professional's fee. If money is an issue, you need to know upfront if your insurance or HMO will pay for the professional's fees and whether the professional will accept your insurance. Also ask if the office will submit bills to the insurance company or if you will need to do so.

Will I get a written report?

If you need a written report for an upcoming meeting with the school, make sure the person will be able to meet your deadline. Determine how long it usually takes to get a written report and whether the cost of the report is included in the estimated charge.

Will you coordinate with the school?

Ask if the person will go to the school for meetings if needed and how that time will be billed. Find out if the person will coordinate the work he or she is doing with your child with what your child's classroom teacher is doing in school.

What range of services do I need?

Think about whether you need someone to just do testing, whether you need someone who can also work with the school, and whether your child needs a few sessions or many.

What information can I gather to help with the diagnosis?

Look for your child's school records, work samples, past assessments, and teacher comments, all of which may help the professional gain information on how to assess or help your child.

How should I explain this to my child?

Ask the person for advice on how you can talk to your child about his or her need for testing, counseling, or educational intervention.

Do I want to interview more than one professional to determine the best one for my child's needs?

Yes. Unless you have a strong recommendation from a close friend or from the school, it is wise to interview more than one person before making a decision.