

# FAQs about Testing/Evaluations

*Written by Jennifer L Horn, PhD, HSPP*

## **Why should my child be tested?**

Your child might not need testing; no clinical practice should require testing for all children that are seen. Even with our specialization in testing and assessment, less than 40% of the youth seen at Beacon Psychology Services require testing.

Testing should ONLY be conducted when questions regarding diagnosis or treatment directions cannot be answered without the type of information that testing can provide. Many diagnoses can be made without needing testing, such as diagnoses related to anxiety issues.

There are some diagnoses that need testing to make or confirm the diagnosis, such as Dyslexia and other learning disabilities or intellectual disability.

Other times, testing is necessary because the symptoms you are observing in your child could be related to one of several issues; for example, problems with focus and concentration can be caused by not only ADHD but also anxiety, depression, autism spectrum disorders, sleep disorders, etc. Thus, testing may be needed to confidently sort out the root reason for the symptoms.

Sometimes, the diagnostic process requires testing because there is a question regarding the possibility of a second issue impacting your child; for example, ADHD often co-occurs with other diagnoses and it is crucial for effective treatment planning to know whether or not ADHD is co-occurring with another issue (e.g., anxiety, depression, learning disability, etc.).

Periodically, testing is necessary to provide documentation for school-based support, such as special education services during elementary, middle school, and high school years or accommodations at the college level.

## **What is included in a testing/evaluation?**

Beacon Psychology Services believes that every child is unique, and for this reason we do not have a 'standard battery' of tests that are used for every child. Rather, we determine the questions that need to be answered with testing, and select the testing measures that research has shown can best help in answering those questions.

Because there is not a 'standard battery', the length of testing varies from child to child. Some testing sessions last 2 to 3 hours, and some may take 5 hours. Most commonly, testing sessions last about 4 hours. It is desired to keep the testing to one day to minimize the amount of school your child will miss, yet if it is felt that the best results will be obtained across two testing days, this will be arranged with you.

The testing session is usually perceived as enjoyable by most youth. The testing measures are varied to keep your child's interest and motivation high. For example, a reading measure may be followed by a measure that allows your child to work a puzzle or to move about the room. Breaks are taken during the testing session as your child seems to need them; to use the restroom, to re-energize, to say hello to mom or dad in the waiting room, or to have a snack to refuel his/her energy.

Testing always includes a written report that lists information relevant to your concerns for your child, the results and interpretation of each measure given, and the responses to the questions that the testing was designed to answer. Detailed recommendations are also listed that are specific to your child, rather than using 'canned' lists copied for any child with that same diagnosis. Reports are usually between 10 and 15 pages. The report is written in a way that parents can understand the information, and also so that other professionals, such as school personnel and family physicians, can use the information when helping your child.

### **What is different about testing through the school system and testing at Beacon Psychology Services?**

State law allows schools to take up to 50 instructional days to complete the evaluation, which translates to almost 2 months (i.e., 10 weeks of 5 school days per week). At Beacon Psychology Services, testing—including the written report given to you—can be usually completed within 2 to 3 weeks of the appointment when it was decided that testing was necessary.

Also, school-based evaluations do not provide a diagnosis; they can determine whether or not your child is eligible for special education services, but because schools in Indiana are not mandated to give a diagnosis, the evaluation is not designed to answer diagnostic questions. Thus, schools do not conduct evaluations to tell you if your child is diagnosed with ADHD or even a specific learning disability such as Dyslexia. This can be frustrating to parents, especially when a diagnosis may be present but the impact on learning is not sufficient to warrant special education services; oftentimes, parents may be told their child is 'fine'.

### **What if my child has already had some testing completed?**

No testing measures will be repeated that have been completed recently; most testing measures are considered invalid if repeated within a year's time. We will look at the testing results you already have to determine what measures, if any, may need to be given in order to answer the questions we have about either diagnosis or treatment.

### **Why does testing cost so much?**

Testing is a highly specialized skill that requires both specific training and direct experience. Also, testing costs include not just the face-to-face time with your child, but the time needed to score and interpret the testing results. Because our reports are not 'canned' or computer-generated, effort is taken to ensure that your child's report is specific only to him/her.

Beacon Psychology Services strives to keep costs down for families and only tests when necessary, as well as using only those testing measures necessary for the questions needing to be answered.

Psychological testing may be covered by your insurance (both in and out of network). Our office manager will assist you in filing for reimbursement for the testing.

### **What should I tell my child about the testing?**

Your child will have already received an explanation from the psychologist in the appointment prior to the testing session, and this information will be again reviewed with your child at the start of the testing session. On the day before the testing, remind your child that s/he will be coming for an appointment, and do the same on the morning of the testing. Emphasize with your child that this is different from school; s/he cannot 'fail' and just needs to do their best. If it will ease your child, let him/her know where you will be during the testing; in the waiting room, running errands, at work, at home, etc. Also, let your child know what will happen after the appointment, if you have something special planned like going out to lunch or for ice cream.

### **What if I have other questions about testing?**

Please call us, and we will be happy to answer any further questions you may have about testing at Beacon Psychology Services.