

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



What does a child psychologist do?

Psychologists are experts in human behaviour, having studied the brain, memory, learning, human development and the processes determining how people think, feel, behave and react. Psychologists apply their expertise using reliable and scientifically supported methods. Psychological therapies are widely used to treat individuals and families (Australian Psychological Society <http://www.psychology.org.au>)

Sometimes families may be recommended by their child's doctor, therapist or school to see a psychologist with their child. Child psychologists are specialists in learning, relationships and behaviour and can help families and children in a variety of ways to develop skills, function better and prevent ongoing problems.



Psychologists can help by:

- Assessing a child's overall development and learning ability
- Helping parents understand and learn strategies for managing their child's behaviour
- Assessing and developing social skills, anxiety and stress management
- Supporting families in managing relationship issues
- Providing counselling for children and parents
- Helping families identify, clarify and manage specific problems
- Diagnosing certain conditions such as dyslexia, specific learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, ASD, ADHD and others.

Families may benefit from help from a psychologist for:

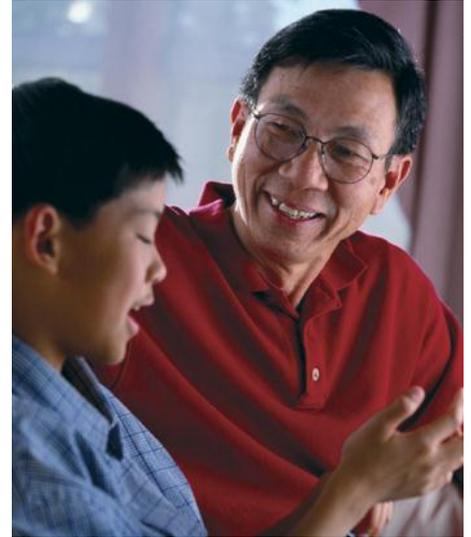
- Concerns about development or learning
- Concerns about difficult behaviour
- Help to support a child with a disability
- Help with relationships in the family either between parents, parents and children or siblings
- Helping a child with issues of self-esteem or peer relationships
- Helping children and adults deal with trauma or grief



What will a psychologist do?

Depending on need the psychologist may:

- Gather information from the family on their needs and concerns
- Assess the child through observations, discussion and sometimes use of standardised testing such as IQ or learning assessments
- Develop a program to teach skills or manage behaviours
- Support individuals or families through counselling
- Recommend other appropriate support services
- Offer suitable group programs
- Liaise with others such as teachers about supporting the child or family's needs

**Common questions****Where can I find a psychologist for my child?**

Psychologists work in health and education settings as well as in private practice. In public school settings in SA psychologists are called “guidance officers” and assessments are made through discussion and referral by school staff. Child psychologists are also available in hospital settings and some community health services such as CAMHS. Public services often have considerable waiting lists. Private child psychologists usually have less waiting time. Your GP or speech pathologist may be able to recommend one.

What is the difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist?

Psychiatrists are medical specialists (doctors) and have a medical degree. They specialize in mental illness and as doctors are able to prescribe medication. Psychologists are not doctors and do not prescribe medication. Their training is in using behavioural techniques and counseling to change behaviours, thoughts and feelings. Their training includes a university course and hands on experience in using these techniques which have been shown by research to be effective.

What about costs?

Services in public settings are usually free though there is a waiting time. There is a charge for private services which are covered by private health funds. You would need to check with your health fund to make sure you are covered and to find out how much they pay for each visit. Your GP may also be able to write you a "mental health plan" which allows you to claim some rebates through Medicare for visits to a private psychologist. You would need to discuss this option with your GP to see if you would be eligible.