

## Shownotes for Mental Health Explained Ep. 1 w/ Dr. Matthew Levison, PsyD

### Topic: What is Psychological and Neuropsychological testing?

#### **Part 1: What is psychological and neuropsychological testing?**

Psychological and Neuropsychological testing are assessments conducted by psychologists to determine a person's psychological profile and functioning. Typically, one seeks testing if they themselves, their family, or their provider has specific questions about their profile, functioning, and/or behavior.

Psychological testing typically consists of two to three main areas of assessment:

1. General intelligence testing (IQ testing).
2. Social/emotional testing, which helps assess how you process emotions and how emotions impact your functioning, as well as how you interact with other people and yourself. Anxiety and depression are two common diagnoses assessed with social/emotional testing.
3. Sometimes academic testing is included in psychological testing, especially if a person has questions about academic issues that arise in a school setting.

Neuropsychological testing:

1. Includes psychological testing (intelligence, social/emotional, sometimes academic testing).
2. Additionally, it assesses attention, impulse control, memory, social understanding, social knowledge, amongst other more detailed, nuanced, and complicated issues.
3. Diagnoses what are commonly assessed with neuropsychological testing include attentional deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and dementia.
4. In general, it is a more detailed, comprehensive level of assessment, and finds more information about functioning, as well as strengths and weaknesses about how a person learns and behaves.

#### **Part 2: How does one find their way to receiving psychological and neuropsychological testing? \***

Often, a person's medical or mental health provider is the first to suggest psychological or neuropsychological testing. When a provider suggests testing, it is frequently because they are questioning a particular mental health diagnosis, such as attentional deficit hyperactive disorder, depression, autism spectrum disorder, anxiety, and any other of the many mental health diagnoses that exist.

If you think that it would be helpful to receive testing, talk to your medical health provider or mental health provider (such as your Primary Care Physician or your therapist). Once you discuss the possibility of testing to your provider, see if they have a specific professional or agency that they recommend for testing. The testing must be conducted by a professional specifically trained to conduct these assessments and must be a psychologist. If your medical or mental health provider does not have a testing provider they can suggest, you can do a search on the internet for psychologists who do psychological and neuropsychological testing.

If you found a potential testing provider, call them, and whoever answers the call – either the testing provider or a member of their staff– can discuss with you what the provider specializes in, what diagnoses they assess, what insurances they take, and any other questions you have. Asking these questions is important: it will help determine if the provider is a good fit. Once you agree to meet a provider and go to your first appointment, you typically fill out intake forms that further helps determine how to address your needs. Once you and a provider start, it is their responsibility to choose the best procedures and assessments for you.

\*Of note, this path toward receiving testing is most applicable to those voluntarily seeking it. There are some situations in which it is mandated that certain individuals receive testing (such as if testing is court-mandated, if one is in prison, etc.), which might include different steps to receiving it.

### **Part 3: What occurs once you start psychological and neuropsychological testing?**

First, the testing provider conducts an interview with you. If the testing is for your child, the provider will let you know who they want to conduct the initial interview with.

On the testing day, you are administered the assessments that the psychologist has determined will best address the questions you have. The provider will guide you through all of the instructions for the assessments. Sometimes testing is all done in one day, sometimes it is spread out over a number of days. The nature of the testing is not different between psychological and neuropsychological testing, the biggest differences are that neuropsychological testing is typically longer and includes different assessments.

After you are done with the assessments, the psychologist will determine the results of all of the data and schedule a follow-up time with you to talk about the results. During this follow-up, the provider will discuss what the results mean, the diagnoses that are determined by the results, and recommendations of how to address the questions that you came in with.

Lastly, you (the client) will receive a physical report with information about the assessments, the results, the conclusions, and the recommendations. That report is yours to keep and use.

#### **Part 4: Frequently asked questions (FAQ) about psychological testing and neuropsychological testing.**

Q: How does one pay for psychological and neuropsychological testing?

A: Insurance typically covers all testing, except for academic testing. It is best to discuss with your insurance provider what testing is covered. It is best to do this prior to receiving the testing, as there are sometimes intricacies that are important to keep in mind beforehand. For example, some insurances will only cover your testing if you are already involved in therapy.

As mentioned before, it is best to double check if the testing provider is paneled with your insurance (in other words, if they take your insurance). The provider and their staff should be able to answer if the provider takes your insurance plan or not. Of note, hospital settings often take a very wide range of insurances.

You can also pay privately. Sometimes testing providers have shorter waitlists for those who are willing to pay privately, and you might be seen earlier in this case.

Q: Who can receive psychology testing?

A: Anyone, even infants who are not verbal yet.

Q: Can only psychologists who are trained in psychological testing provide it?

A: Yes. Again, it is best to check the test provider's prior training and areas of specialty. For example, if you need neuropsychological testing, double check that the psychologist is trained in neuropsychological testing.

Q: How do parents discuss testing with children and adolescents?

A: According to Dr. Levison, parents could explain that testing is like going to a school class - the psychologist finds out how a kid learns best, and uses that info to help a kid's teacher best teach them.

There are many other ways to approach discussing testing with a child or adolescent, and feel free to ask for guidance from any of your providers, whether it is with the testing provider, or with your Primary Care Provider or with your child's therapist if they have one. Similarly, the testing provider should be able to guide you through the process of sensitively communicating the results of the testing to your child, and coach you through different strategies for discussing the results between you and your child.