

How to Navigate an Assessment for your child

If it has been suggested that your child needs an assessment, such as a disability, autism or mental health assessment, it's usually because a professional has noticed that your child is struggling with things that most other children their age don't struggle with.

This does not mean that you have done anything wrong. Kids all learn at different speeds and times, and have different learning styles. Sometimes they need extra help and support to learn things that other kids seem to pick up easily. Other times, there might be something medical going on that it's worth checking out.

And you don't need to feel bad if you haven't noticed anything, because often as parents we don't get to recognise all the challenges our kids face. This might be because:

- we don't know any different or have other children to compare them to
- our lives are so busy and chaotic we ignore or tune out the quirky or unusual things they do
- we don't want to think about it as we are afraid of being judged unfairly
- our kids can behave differently when they are with us than when they are away from us

What difficulties have you noticed? Or what concerns do you have about your child?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Difficulties getting along with others</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Doesn't always understand what I'm asking</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Has lots of arguments with others</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Can be aggressive towards other children</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Difficulty paying attention</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Can be aggressive towards adults</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Difficulty following instructions</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Damages or breaks things</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Sensory sensitivities</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Threatens people</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Doesn't want to leave home</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Has problems sleeping</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Needs the same routine</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other _____</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Has obsessive interests, collects things</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other _____</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Doesn't seem able to manage big emotions</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other _____</i> |

It is also helpful to clarify with the person suggesting the assessment, what difficulties or struggles have they noticed or are they concerned about. This information is really helpful for the person doing the assessment, so you may want to use the checklist below with that person to find out what they are worried about.

What difficulties or concerns have been noticed?	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Difficulties with social interactions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Comprehension/understanding difficulties</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Conflict with peers</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Aggressive behaviours towards staff</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Difficulty paying attention</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Aggressive behaviours towards students</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Difficulty following instructions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Damage of school property</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Sensory sensitivities</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Threats to staff/students</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Attendance issues</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other _____</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Need for consistent routine</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other _____</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Fixated and obsessive interests</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other _____</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Difficulty with emotional regulation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other _____</i>

It is completely normal to be worried or a bit upset about the idea of getting your child assessed.

Some of the things parents worry about are:

- What is the process – is it going to be costly, time consuming and/or difficult?
- How to get a difficult child to attend and comply with assessment appointments
- What will other people think?
- Could I have done things differently to help them more?
- Will a diagnosis mean they have a label for life?
- Will a diagnosis mean they are judged and treated differently?

There are a number of good things that can come from having your child assessed:

- ✓ You can better understand why your child is having difficulties or struggling with certain things and help your child better understand themselves
- ✓ It can act as a guide to the most appropriate and best supports and services and you may be able to access free support services to help develop your child’s skills in the areas they need
- ✓ Your school may be able to access extra support to better help your child with their learning
- ✓ You and/or your child might be able to access some financial assistance from Centrelink

Different types of assessments have different referral pathways.

FASD Assessment	Cognitive IQ Assessment	Autism Assessment	Mental Health Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Paediatrician usually completes this but may refer you to some other specialists before completing their assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your School Psychologist may be able to do this, otherwise a Paediatrician or Psychiatrist may be able to help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your GP will usually refer you to one or more specialists to do the assessment or different parts of it. This could involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A paediatrician A speech pathologist A psychologist A psychiatrist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A GP or Paediatrician will refer you to a Psychiatrist

Once you decide to go ahead with the assessment, there is a process to follow and often quite a lengthy wait time before the assessment can happen. It can be helpful to have someone to help you who can be a support and help you. If you don't have family or friends who can provide help with this, you might like to consider if there is someone else in your support network you could ask for assistance, or a formal support service who could be helpful.

Steps to follow to organise an assessment:

- See your GP or Paediatrician to get a referral completed: if you are uncomfortable asking your GP for a referral, ask the person suggesting the assessment to write a letter to them.
- Get together copies of any earlier assessments or reports you might have on your child and consider asking the school if they have any reports, assessments or letters they can give about the difficulties they are noticing your child has.
- Complete any pre-assessment paperwork that you may be given as soon as you can: remember be honest in your answers, even if you feel bad about the information you are giving. It is okay to say you are struggling to cope or you don't know how to manage your child's behaviour.
- Talk to someone about what the assessment will be like beforehand, like the sorts of questions that may be asked, will your child have to be there, what if your child won't engage etc... so you can be better prepared for it.
- Talk to your child about why they are having the assessment. You may like to explain to them that everyone's brain learns and works differently and the assessment is going to help figure out how their brain works and what will work best or help them given they have been having some difficulties.

If you would like help with any of these things, who would you like to help you?

Friend/Family Support?	Carer Support Planners 1800 422 737	Kin Advocacy 9388 7455	Moorditj Koort 6174 700
	<i>Carer Support Planners can provide free consultation and advice for family carers and organise free counselling and coaching</i>	<i>Advocates can provide free support for multicultural families impacted by disability having difficulty accessing NDIS.</i>	<i>Community Connectors can help provide free guidance and advice around NDIS and help with applications and planning meetings.</i>