

UPDATE

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Psychological Testing Part 3: Uses of Psychological Testing

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Psychological testing can be applied to any situation where a more complete understanding of a person's psychological functioning can be helpful. For this reason, it has been applied to a great many issues, questions, problems, and groups of people. Testing is sometimes described by the kinds of people assessed, the kinds of problems that are the focus of assessment, or by the setting in which it takes place. Testing is often referred to as:

- Neuropsychological Testing – This is a term that is used very widely at the present time. Historically, it has referred to psychological testing to examine the functioning of individuals who have suffered brain injuries, are experiencing neurological illnesses, or are presumed to have some other problem in neurological functioning. However, at the present time this is often used as a global term for evaluations that focus primarily on cognitive processes.
- Educational/Psychoeducational Testing – This term is often used to describe testing done by psychologists within schools whose primary goal is to advise about the classification of students and their educational needs. Testing done under this rubric often focuses on the identification of intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, attention disorders, and other conditions that interfere with academic performance.
- Psycho-Diagnostic Testing – Is a term that is often used to refer to testing performed in mental health settings to assist in differential diagnosis of mental disorders, formulation of problems, and treatment

planning. This is often sought by psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and others who are involved in various forms of treatment.

While the foregoing distinctions are still in common use, the advances in psychiatry, neuroscience, and related fields have made them less relevant and meaningful. Increasingly, assessment psychologists have recognized that people with neurological disorders have personalities and non-cognitive problems, people in mental health settings often have significant cognitive problems, and the challenges that students face in school are typically the result of a complex interplay of intellectual, cognitive, personality, and emotional factors. That is why testing is most often defined by the primary questions of interest rather than the "kind" of testing sought. From this perspective, any test may be useful to the assessment psychologist if it helps to answer those questions, and that is often best achieved through a combination of measures of intellectual functioning, cognitive abilities, personality, and problems and symptoms.

For example, if a parent calls and requests testing 'for ADD' the assessment psychologist will often respond by asking: "What is your child doing that makes you think this might be an attention problem?" Once having reviewed the range of difficulties that the child is encountering in school, at home, and with his or her peers, the assessment is then designed to cover the range of psychological factors that might contribute to these problems. This often draws upon tests of all kinds to provide a more comprehensive picture and fuller understanding of the problems. This would include a picture of the child's strengths and weaknesses, and offer a basis for identifying the interventions – pharmacological, psychological, and educational – that are most likely to be effective.

About Four Winds . . . *Four Winds Hospitals are located on two serene campuses in New York State. Four Winds Westchester is 50 minutes north of midtown Manhattan. Four Winds Saratoga is located in Saratoga Springs, 30 minutes north of Albany. Four Winds Hospitals is a leading provider of specialized inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services for children, adolescents and adults.*