



APS

Australian
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What does a school psychologist do?

Information for School Communities

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The school psychologist

Psychologists are experts in human behaviour. They have studied the brain, memory, learning, human development and the processes that determine how people think, feel, behave and react. The school psychologist is the leading mental health expert in the school. This means that they can assist children, young people, families and teachers to support a young person to get the best out of life at school. They help children and young people to achieve academic success, psychological health and wellbeing, and social and emotional wellbeing.

How do they do this?

School psychologists work at many levels in schools. For example, they support whole school practice by implementing programs to address bullying, violence, personal safety or behaviour. These programs are designed to help schools be safer places that support the wellbeing and resilience of all students.

School psychologists work indirectly with groups within the school and with specific school based issues, for example, they consult with teachers about general mental health issues which affect students (such as anxiety and depression), student learning and behaviour needs and child and adolescent development.

School psychologists also work directly with children or young people who are facing specific challenges. This can involve assessment of learning or behaviour, or assessment of a young person's coping skills. They offer counselling and support for problematic life events that can affect all students, for example, grief and loss, bullying, sexuality issues, substance abuse issues, trauma, family breakdown and relationship issues.



Why choose a psychologist?

Psychologists who are members of the Australian Psychological Society are regulated by the APS *Code of Ethics*. They have extensive training in ethical practice that is designed to protect both the integrity of the profession and the rights and safety of the public, including children in schools. Psychologists are registered with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulatory Authority which means that they have formal accredited qualifications, they have an obligation to have up to date continuing professional development and they are subject to a formal complaints process. Many school psychologists also have formal teaching qualifications. All of this means that school psychologists are specialists who can offer children and young people the best available support for difficulties they might be experiencing at school.

How can the school psychologist be contacted?

At the primary level a referral to the school psychologist will be discussed with the parents who will be required to sign a consent form agreeing to the service. In secondary schools, the requirement for parent consent varies between individual schools and state and territory education department guidelines. Often young people can self-refer to the psychologist.



How will information collected by the psychologist be used?

The school psychologist can only use information for the primary purpose for which it was collected. For example, if a child has been referred to the psychologist for learning difficulties, information from assessments will be used to assist teachers with planning and programming in the classroom. Any other family or personal information that a child or young person might have shared with the psychologist cannot be disclosed, unless it is directly relevant to the child's learning.

What happens in the sessions with the school psychologist?

That depends on the concerns about the child or the young person. If a child is having difficulty with school work there will probably be some formal assessment. If a child is having difficulty with friendships or with other relationships, the psychologist will explore the child's understanding of the situation and discuss coping strategies and practice alternative ways of behaving. Sessions with the psychologist are usually about 50 minutes long and can occur weekly. The psychologist can also refer to an outside agency if that is appropriate.

Will the information be confidential?

The school psychologist has an ethical and legal responsibility to protect the rights to confidentiality and privacy of children and young people. However, there are occasions when psychologists are legally obliged to disclose information, for example, if they believe that the child, or someone else in the community, is at risk of harm. All confidential psychology files are required to be securely stored either in password protected electronic files or locked filing cabinets. Only the psychologist can access these files.



Where can I get more information?

Talk to the school principal about your school psychologist and the work that they do.

More information about how an APS psychologist can help is available on the APS website at:

psychology.org.au/public/what-is-psychology/



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For more information about the APS please visit **psychology.org.au** or contact:

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