

AUSTIN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CENTER  
GARY YORKE, PH.D. & JANE YORKE, M.A.

# One Hand On The Door

(Answers to questions patients like to ask as they are leaving, with one hand on the door!)

## Comorbidity and Psychiatric Diagnoses

A Comprehensive Assessment is necessary to identify co-existing conditions. For example, up to 50% of children with ADHD are suspected of having a learning disability. Many children with ADHD develop Oppositional-Defiant Disorder, and Major Depression.

Children who suffer from Anxiety, may also be depressed. Children with an Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder frequently manifest attentional problems and generalized anxiety. A variety of cognitive deficits are often a concern for children with Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (Bipolar Disorder) and High Functioning Autism (Asperger's Disorder).

A Comprehensive Assessment will have sufficient variety and breadth of tests that educational, emotional, and cognitive issues will be identified.

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## The Key Components of a Comprehensive Psychological and Neuropsychological Assessment

The most significant component of a Comprehensive Assessment, and sometimes the most overlooked, is the initial clinical interview, sometimes referred to as a Diagnostic Assessment. The Diagnostic Assessment involves interviewing parents and child, and reviewing intake questionnaires and relevant records. Standardized questionnaires are used to include teachers in the process. Information gathered during the clinical interview allows the Psychologist to determine if they are dealing primarily with learning, behavioral, developmental, or psychological issues, or in many cases, there may be concerns in more than one of these domains. Until a complete clinical picture is obtained, data from psychological and neuropsychological tests cannot be accurately interpreted. The Diagnostic Assessment assists the Psychologist in determining if testing is even appropriate, what tests should be administered, in what order, and the duration of any one testing session.

Once the Diagnostic interview is completed the clinician can move to the next stage of assessment, gathering data using standardized tests and questionnaires. Diagnostic questions and treatment concerns, identified during the Diagnostic Assessment, will determine which tests and questionnaires are used. Tests may evaluate attention, emotional functioning, academic skills, executive functioning, developmental levels, language, intellectual ability, memory, and a variety of other cognitive skills.

The selection of tests is critical. For children, almost every battery will need to include an assessment of intellectual functioning, academic ability, and screening for emotional problems. This "basic battery" will be augmented by a variety of other tests based on the child's needs and diagnoses under consideration. A "one size fits all" battery does not exist, and the use of a standard battery with each client is very problematic.

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## Marijuana and Alcohol Use Still Common Among Teens

High rates of regular alcohol and illicit and prescription drug use in tenth graders is still quite common, reports a recent study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Marijuana remains the most commonly tried drug among the students surveyed. The researchers also found that teens who use multiple substances such as marijuana and alcohol, report more high-risk behaviors and physical and emotional problems. The study used data from the NEXT Generation Health study, which surveyed 2,524 10th grade students in 80 schools and 9 U.S. school districts in the spring of 2010.

Of the teens surveyed, twenty-six percent reported using marijuana, making it the most common illicit drug used in the previous 12-month period. Thirty-Five percent of the teens had used alcohol, while 27 percent had engaged in binge drinking, and 19 percent had smoked cigarettes. Teens using multiple substances reported more physical ailments and symptoms of depression, anxiety or hopelessness and having difficulty sleeping. In addition, these adolescents reported more high-risk behaviors. Two-thirds of the poly-substance users in the study abused medications and nine out of ten of those students engaged in binge drinking.

It is our clinical experience that many parents continue to minimize and underestimate their teen's drug use. Signs of substance use include declining grades, change in mood, increased complaints about boredom, significant changes in behavior, change in peer group, suddenly beginning to use scented body sprays or chewing gum, or increased need for money.

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# One Hand On The Door Newsletter

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### **Key Components of a Comprehensive Assessment ... continued**

The Comprehensive Assessment is more than an evaluation. It is also an intervention that contributes to the child and parents coming to a new, or clearer, understanding of the presenting issues, and provides recommendations based on the conclusions drawn from the Assessment. Recommendations should address all aspects of the child's environment, including home, school, and recreational. Children with disabilities often need services and accommodations from their school district, and this should be covered in the Comprehensive Assessment as well.

To summarize, the Key Components of a Comprehensive Assessment are:

- Intake Questionnaire
- Diagnostic Assessment interview with child and parents
- Teacher Questionnaires
- Review of relevant records and prior assessments
- Standardized tests and standardized questionnaires
- Feedback appointment
- Report summarizing results, diagnosis, and recommendations

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### **Marijuana and Alcohol Use Still Common Among Teens ... continued**

Surveys of adolescent drug use suggest that it continues to be very important for primary care physicians to screen their clients for substance use. Often time it is simply a matter of asking, "What types of drugs or alcohol have you tried," followed by a discussion of frequency. Teens that have used a variety of drugs have a high risk profile that indicates a need for mental health and substance use screening and referral.

Information is available online for professionals, teens, and parents. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has three websites:

- [drugabuse.gov/nidamed](http://drugabuse.gov/nidamed) provides an interactive mobile screening tool for healthcare professionals ([www.ceasar-boston.org/clinicians/crafft.php](http://www.ceasar-boston.org/clinicians/crafft.php) provides an adolescent screening instrument specifically for providers)
- [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov) provides online information for parents and educators
- [www.teens.drugabuse.gov](http://www.teens.drugabuse.gov) provides information on a teen-oriented website

**[www.myparentingpage.com](http://www.myparentingpage.com) and [www.myspecialled-504page.com](http://www.myspecialled-504page.com) are two informational websites for parents and are maintained by Austin Behavioral Health Center.**