

# One Hand On The Door

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

## The Stigma of Mental Illness

Individuals with mental illness continue to feel stigmatized despite all of the changes that have taken place in our increasingly liberal and accepting culture. Stigma attached to mental illness does not appear to be exclusive to western culture, and remains a worldwide problem. In one survey, conducted globally by AstraZeneca, 88 percent of people with bipolar disorder said they felt stigmatized and socially isolated on account of their condition. The stigma of mental illness can have catastrophic consequences, contributing to the avoidance of treatment and to chronic suffering, and even suicide. Stigma is not just associated with severe mental illness such as schizophrenia or psychosis. Professionals are often reluctant to seek treatment for depression or anxiety for fear that they will be ostracized or judged incompetent. Parents are frequently reluctant to acknowledge their child is suffering from a mental illness because of it embarrasses them and makes them feel incompetent. Adolescents are not immune to feeling stigmatized, and may reject treatment because they don't want to acknowledge something is "wrong" with them. Physicians are in an ideal position to combat stigmatization of mental illness. Pointing out that mental illness is common, occurs in individuals of all ages, and is typically not the result of bad parenting or a failure of will power, can begin the process of seeking treatment. Further information can be found on the *National Alliance on Mental Illness* website: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).

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## Children and Divorce

When parents separate and subsequently divorce their children are confronted with events that they cannot control. For children, divorce marks a period of time that is stressful, confusing, and sad. Children can also become very angry at one or both of their parents following a divorce and marked changes in behavior may occur. It is important for parents to be aware that the divorce may be more difficult for the child than it is for them. As difficult as it is, there are many things a parent can do to assist their child during this difficult time. Paramount to assisting the child is ensuring that each parent takes care of themselves, resolve the divorce as amicably as possible, and keep the conflict away from their children. It is not unusual for children and adolescents to "regress" following a separation.

Children may need more attention and support than what they previously required. Here are some ways to provide support:

- Stay involved. Ask questions (even if you don't get an answer) about what is going on. Utilize the phone, text, email, Skype and social media to stay involved with your child. Both parents need to maintain contact.
- Parents usually separate because they don't get along. I have heard children observe that their parents are fighting even more, now that they are separated. Do not fight around the children. Avoid hostile comments about the other parent. Be courteous and considerate when interacting with the other parent.
- Support your child's relationship with the other parent.
- Never, ever, use the child as a messenger.
- Do not speak ill of the other parent. Be honest, to a point. If a parent has abandoned a child, it's not realistic to say that parent loves the child. But that doesn't mean you have to provide a catalog of faults or a detailed history of failures.

## What to tell your children before you separate

Coordinate with your partner before talking to the children. Make a list of tough questions and generate possible responses. Your child will be upset; be empathic, loving and kind. Make sure the child understands that the divorce is not their fault. Answers should be honest and brief. "We don't get along anymore. We both love you and will continue to take care of you. But, we won't be living together any longer." Make sure you emphasize your love for the child and that you will continue to take care of them. Address changes, but keep responses brief and straightforward. Parents, regardless of their depth of anger with their partner, need to be on the same page and present a united front. Do not blame. Make sure the child is not blaming themselves for the separation/divorce: - listen, reflect and empathize. Do not attempt to talk your child out of their feelings. Let your child know that all feelings are OK, and encourage them to talk with you and share these feelings. Be factual, and address any misinformation.

## Resources for parents and children

[Let's Talk About Separation and Divorce](#), a card game for parents and their children

[Divorced Together for the Sake of the Children](#), By Kristi Schwartz.

[My Parents Are Divorced, Too: A Book For Kids by Kids \(2nd Edition\)](#), By Melanie, Annie, and Steven Ford, as told to Jan Blackstone-Ford. Illustrations by Charles Beryl.

[My Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore: A DRAWING BOOK For Children of Separated or Divorced Parents](#), By Judith Aaron Rubin, Ph.D.

[What Can I Do? A Book for Children of Divorce](#), By Danielle Lowry, Illustrated by Bonnie Mathews.

[The Guide for Separated Parents, Putting Your Children First](#), Karen Woodhall and Nick Woodhall.

[Was It the Chocolate Pudding? A Story for Little Kids About Divorce](#), By Sandra Levins, Illustrated by Bryan Langdo

## Frequently Asked Questions about Psychological Evaluations

### Who do you evaluate?

We evaluate children beginning at age two through adult.

### What do psychological tests measure?

Psychological tests measure many things and specific tests are chosen depending on the referral question. For example, a learning disability evaluation will include a complete history, school records, parent and teacher questionnaires, and tests of intelligence, achievement, processing abilities, and if needed tests for attention and emotional functioning.

Psychological tests offer a formal way to measure traits, feelings, beliefs and abilities. Some tests assess the presence of certain conditions, such as depression, anxiety, anger control issues, or susceptibility to stress. Other tests measure general well being and provide an overall picture of a person's personality. Upon a referral for psychological testing, one should recognize that the intent is to gain a deeper, more complete understanding of the problem than can be gained from a brief office visit. Such a referral does not mean that the problem is particularly serious, difficult to understand or complex. It just means that additional information is needed before designing the best approach to address the problem.

### How are the results of a psychological evaluation shared with the referring doctor or the patient?

After an evaluation the results are scored and interpreted and a formal report is written. Clients and their parents (if they are children) will meet for a session to review all of the results and findings. This report is then sent to the referring physician. We make sure that the information is understood completely and we will consult with any other professionals following receipt of a signed Release of Information.

### Who has access to assessment report?

In most cases, the report is sent to the referring doctor requesting the evaluation. If an insurance company pays for a Psychological Evaluation a reviewer (doctor, nurse, licensed mental health professional) working for the company may also request a copy of the report. The report is only released to third parties with written permission, and there are strict rules of confidentiality that must be followed.

### How much do psychological assessments cost?

The cost depends upon what type of assessment is required (Psychoeducational, Psychological, Career Testing, etc.). The range is generally between eight hundred and twelve hundred dollars.

### Will insurance pay for psychological assessment?

It depends. Some insurance policies have mental health benefits that will pay for a limited amount of psychological testing. Medical insurance policies may cover all or part of psychological testing if it can be shown to be "medically necessary." Each insurance company has their own way of determining what is medically necessary and they usually do not share that information. Insurance companies typically do not pay for psychological evaluations that focus on educational concerns, learning disabilities, or are court ordered. Our practice does not accept insurance but we will provide clients with a bill that has all of the information for them to submit to their insurance company.