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A Parent's Guide to Neuropsychological Evaluation

A REEL 2e Resource

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Author Bio

Dr. Jessica Snowden Patel, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and the founder of The Neurodevelopmental Collective (www.neurodevelopmentalcollective.com), a neurodiversity affirming practice specializing in gifted and twice exceptional (2E) learners. With more than 20 years of experience conducting evaluations, she helps families understand both the strengths and the challenges that shape a child's learning profile, especially when those strengths may mask needs or when needs may obscure a child's true potential.

Her background includes a PhD in Clinical Psychology and a Master of Jurisprudence in Child Law, early training in forensic and trauma informed work, and years spent building a multidisciplinary clinic in rural Illinois, where she collaborated closely with speech and occupational therapists to support children from infancy through young adulthood. She later joined Stanford's Lucile Packard Children's Hospital before starting a private practice in the Bay Area to offer the individualized, whole child evaluations families often struggle to find.

Dr. Patel is also a mom of four kids (including two 2E learners), a former roller derby player, and a lifelong child advocate. She brings both clinical expertise and lived experience to her work, offering families clarity, compassion, and practical insight into how their child thinks, learns, and thrives. She is especially passionate about helping parents navigate complex profiles, demystifying the evaluation process, and making sure every child is seen for who they truly are.

What neuropsychological evaluations actually are and why the terminology is so confusing

If you've ever Googled "neuropsychological evaluation," landed on a dozen different definitions, and then started doubting your ability to understand anything at all, please take a breath. The terminology is confusing. Not because parents are missing something, but because the field itself has evolved in overlapping ways.

I've been a neuropsychologist for over twenty years, and I still hear professionals mix up neuropsychological, psychoeducational, psychological, and developmental testing. So if you feel lost, you're in excellent company.

Here's the truth in the simplest form:

A **neuropsychological evaluation** is a comprehensive, integrated look at how your child's brain functions—cognitively, academically, socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and adaptively. It uses standardized measures, skilled observation, and a lot of developmental understanding to paint a picture of how your child learns, how they solve problems, how they experience the world, how they regulate, and what supports will help them thrive.

Parents often panic about choosing the "right" type of evaluation name, but in practice, the most important question is: **What questions will this evaluation actually answer for your child?**

The differences between psychologists, neuropsychologists, developmental behavioral pediatricians, psychiatrists, therapists, and school evaluators

Once parents understand what a neuropsychological evaluation is, the very next question is usually: ***So who actually does this kind of testing?***

If you have ever felt confused about the different titles, you are not alone. Even professionals mix them up. Training pathways differ, roles overlap, and the terminology has evolved in ways that make everything sound more complicated than it truly is.

Psychologists and neuropsychologists: All neuropsychologists are psychologists, but not all psychologists are neuropsychologists. Clear, right? Psychologists are trained in learning, emotions, behavior, and development. Neuropsychologists have additional training in how different brain systems develop and interact.

Both conduct evaluations. Some psychologists who are not formally trained in neuropsychology still offer very comprehensive assessments. Neuropsychologists often take a broader, more integrated approach, especially for questions involving attention, learning, autism, giftedness, or complex developmental presentations.

Titles matter far less than the evaluator's actual experience.

Neuropsychological evaluation: A neuropsychological evaluation is a comprehensive and integrated look at how your child's brain functions across many areas. This includes cognitive, academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and adaptive skills. It uses standardized measures, skilled observation, and deep developmental understanding to create a clear picture of how your child learns, how they solve problems, how they experience the world, how they regulate, and what supports will help them thrive.

Psychoeducational evaluations: These can happen privately or within schools. When done privately, they may be completed by psychologists or LEPs (licensed educational psychologists) and tend to focus more on the cognitive, academic, and attentional skills that impact learning.

School based psychoeducational evaluations are different. School psychologists assess whether a student qualifies for special education or accommodations based on *educational impact*. They cannot diagnose ADHD, autism, dyslexia, anxiety, or other clinical conditions. Their role is strictly educational, and their evaluations are designed with that purpose in mind.

Psychological evaluations: Psychological evaluations focus on emotional, social, and behavioral functioning. They explore mood, anxiety, trauma, behavior, and overall mental health. These evaluations help clarify the reasons behind emotional or behavioral challenges and guide recommendations for therapy, support at home and school, and any needed accommodations. While psychological evaluations provide important insight into mental health, they do not always assess the full range of learning, cognitive, or developmental skills that a neuropsychological evaluation includes.

Developmental evaluations: Most common for younger children, these look at early milestones, language, play, social engagement, and motor development. They can identify developmental delays and early signs of autism, but they are not as wide ranging as a full neuropsychological evaluation.

Developmental behavioral pediatricians: DBPs are pediatricians with additional training in development and behavior. They may do structured developmental assessments and can prescribe medication when needed or refer for more complex medical testing.

Psychiatrists: Psychiatrists diagnose mental health conditions and prescribe medication. Some provide therapy. They frequently make diagnoses, especially when the symptoms are very clear. Their focus is emotional and behavioral health and medication management.

Neurologists: Neurologists evaluate conditions involving the brain and nervous system. They see children for seizures, coordination issues, tics, motor concerns, and sudden developmental changes. Some diagnose neurodevelopmental conditions when the presentation is neurologically complex. Their assessments are medical and complement, rather than replace, psychological testing.

Therapists: Therapists include LMFTs, LCSWs, LPCCs, and psychologists who primarily provide treatment. They help with coping, behavior, emotional regulation, and family well being. Many can diagnose anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions. They do not typically provide comprehensive developmental evaluations.

Pediatricians: Pediatricians know your child well and are often the first people parents turn to when something feels different. They can diagnose straightforward ADHD or anxiety based on structured checklists from home and school. They do not conduct testing but can guide you toward the right evaluation.

What a “comprehensive” evaluation really means

I use the term comprehensive evaluation because it makes the most sense to me. A truly comprehensive evaluation looks at the full picture of a child’s development. That includes cognitive skills, academic skills, language, attention and executive functioning, memory, social communication, emotional functioning, adaptive skills, and real world behavior. It brings together developmental history, caregiver and teacher perspectives, standardized test results, and skilled observations of how a child approaches tasks, copes with challenge, regulates emotion, and expresses who they are.

Comprehensive is not just a long list of tests. It is the art and science of integrating all of this information so the final picture makes sense to you and to your child’s team.

This is where I always bring parents back to the two questions that matter more than any credential, label of the evaluation, or job title.

- 1. Will this person be able to answer the specific questions I have about my child?**
- 2. Are they actually evaluating all the areas I believe will be included?**

These questions prevent the most common mismatch I see. Parents often assume an evaluation will include autism, ADHD, learning differences, giftedness, executive functioning, memory, social communication, academics, anxiety, and emotional functioning. Sometimes it does. Sometimes it does not.

When no one clarifies the scope at the beginning, the family receives a report that may be technically correct but does not answer the questions they were trying to solve.

When families ask these questions up front, the entire process becomes calmer, clearer, and far more aligned with the reason you reached out in the first place.

How to choose the right evaluator and what questions matter most to ask

Once families understand who does what in the evaluation world, the next step is choosing the person who will actually walk through this process with them. An evaluation is not just a set of tests. It is a relationship and a shared curiosity about how your child thinks, learns, and experiences the world. You deserve someone who feels steady, warm, thoughtful, and aligned with what your child needs.

Parents often assume there must be one best type of evaluator, but it is far more personal than that. Some families prefer the structure and resources of a large hospital clinic. Others value the consistency of a private practice where the same person completes every step. Some children warm up instantly; others need humor, choice, or sensory breaks before they feel ready to engage. The right evaluator is not defined by their title. It is defined by how well they can understand your child and support your family.

This becomes much clearer when you ask the right questions. These questions are not about challenging the evaluator. They are about making sure the evaluation will actually answer what you are hoping to learn.

The first and most important question is: ***What specific questions can your evaluation answer about my child?*** A thoughtful evaluator should be able to tell you plainly whether their scope includes autism, ADHD, learning differences, executive functioning, social communication, giftedness, emotional functioning, or other areas you are wondering about. Never assume a domain is included simply because it seems related.

The next question is: ***What areas do you routinely include and what areas do you not assess?*** This simple clarification prevents one of the most common problems I see, which is when a family receives a technically accurate report that does not address the questions they were hoping to understand.

Because every child is different, you should also feel comfortable asking: ***Do you have experience with children like mine?*** This might involve 2E profiles, masking, stealth dyslexia, early autism features, subtle ADHD, PDA styled responses, selective mutism, or

homeschooling contexts. Children who look easy in structured settings often show their most important differences only when someone knows what to look for. Experience matters.

Understanding the flow of the evaluation is equally important. Rather than asking only about the waitlist, ask ***What does the full timeline look like from intake to testing to results to receiving the report?*** You want to know how long each step typically takes and whether your evaluator can meet any school or application deadlines. Clear timelines dramatically reduce stress.

Because connection is central to how children learn and regulate, it is also helpful to ask ***How do you help children feel comfortable and engaged during testing?*** If your child warms slowly or becomes overwhelmed easily, ask how the evaluator adapts. If your child thrives with humor, movement, or sensory breaks, ask whether those can be incorporated. The evaluation should meet your child where they are.

Another important question is: ***Do you provide child friendly feedback so my child understands their strengths and challenges?*** This is not standard everywhere, but it is one of the most powerful and affirming parts of the process. Children deserve clear, developmentally appropriate language about how their brain works. It reduces shame and increases confidence.

Finally, ask ***What follow up is available after the evaluation?*** Parents always have more questions. Some arise immediately and some appear weeks later. You deserve to know what support exists beyond the feedback session.

None of these questions are too much. They are simply the questions that help you choose someone who can truly understand your child and guide your family with clarity and compassion. When the fit is right, the evaluation stops feeling overwhelming and becomes a meaningful, collaborative process where you feel supported, informed, and genuinely understood.

What the full process looks like

The Starting Point: The process begins with your concerns and your child's story. A good evaluator listens first so they understand what you're hoping to learn.

Questions to consider asking:

- How do you gather background information about my child?
- Will you speak with teachers or therapists if I give permission?

Gathering the Story: You'll complete developmental forms, and others who know your child may contribute information as well. This helps the evaluator understand your child in daily life, not just during testing.

Questions to consider asking:

- What questionnaires or forms will I (and others) need to complete?

Scheduling the Evaluation: Testing usually happens *during the school day*, because children think and learn best when they are rested. Missing school is expected and appropriate.

Questions to consider asking:

- How many testing sessions will my child need?
- How long is each session?
- What happens if my child is tired, anxious, or needs movement breaks?

What Testing Is Like: Testing includes structured activities (puzzles, language tasks, problem solving, reading, writing, memory tests) balanced with natural breaks. It should feel relational, calm, and manageable. Children do not need to "perform." They just need to be themselves.

Questions to consider asking:

- How do you help children warm up and feel comfortable?
- How flexible are you if my child needs breaks, movement, or sensory supports?
- How do you adapt the process for PDA styled profiles, anxious kids, or very shy kids?

Making Sense of the Results: After testing, the evaluator analyzes scores, observes patterns, reviews developmental history, and incorporates feedback from parents and teachers. This is where the true integration happens.

The Feedback Conversation: You meet to go over results in clear, accessible language. You should leave with a grounded understanding of your child's strengths, needs, and next steps.

Questions to consider asking:

- When will the feedback meeting happen?
- Do you provide child friendly feedback as well?

The Written Report: A written report follows the feedback session or may be available before. It should be thorough, readable, and practical. It may also include a child friendly summary.

Questions to consider asking:

- When will we receive the written report?
- Do you provide a school friendly summary?
- What is included in the report?
- How detailed are the recommendations?

Note: Some schools may require a full evaluation report in order to provide supports for your child, while others may not. If you have concerns about any part of the report or would like to discuss what information is shared, please talk with your psychologist about creating a school-friendly version. This can help ensure the school receives all the necessary information to support your child while also protecting your child's confidentiality.

Follow Up: Questions always come up later, once you start sharing results with schools or beginning supports.

Questions to consider asking:

- Can I reach out if I have questions weeks or months later?
- Do you have a list of resources so that I can get started in supporting my child?
- Can you help me understand how to share results with school or medical providers?

What parents should tell their child before the evaluation

By the time families reach this point in the process, the next question almost always appears: *What do I tell my child?* And I want to say this clearly because parents carry so much worry here. Children are usually far less anxious about an evaluation than adults imagine. They are used to grownups asking them to try activities, answer questions, or meet someone new. They look to you for tone, and when you keep things calm and simple, the experience feels that way to them.

For younger kids, the simplest explanation is the best. “We are going to visit someone who helps kids understand how their brain works. You’ll get to do activities and puzzles and show them all the things your brain can do.” That really is enough. Children thrive with clear, short, upbeat information.

Older children who already sense that something feels harder deserve a bit of gentle honesty. You might say, “You know how reading or writing or paying attention feels tougher than it should even though you are trying so hard? We are going to meet someone who helps us understand why and what will make it easier.” Teens appreciate being spoken to directly. It helps them feel included rather than managed.

When I first meet a child, I always find a moment to share a little about my own brain. Nothing formal, just enough to signal that we are all wired differently. I might say, “My brain is great at remembering what people say and talking about it, which is probably why I talk so much, but if you hand me something to assemble, I have to work really hard.” Children light up with relief. They instantly recognize that everyone has strengths and things that take effort. It makes the room feel safer.

That is really the spirit of a good evaluation. It should feel like discovery rather than judgment. Kids explore tasks, try things, ask questions, take breaks, and settle into the rhythm at their own pace. When testing is done thoughtfully, it feels more like getting to know a new adult who is genuinely interested in how they think rather than someone “testing” them in the traditional sense.

Addressing the Fear of “Labels” — and Why Understanding Is Empowering

The *other* question that almost always follows is about labels. Parents worry that naming something will limit their child. Here is the gentle truth: children are already forming their own labels. They notice when something is harder, when they lose track of things, when school feels exhausting, or when friendships feel confusing. Without a framework, those labels tend to turn inward and become harsh ones like “I’m bad at this,” “I’m not trying hard enough,” or “Something is wrong with me.”

A clear, accurate label does the opposite. It replaces shame with understanding. It gives families language to explain what is happening, and it gives children a way to see themselves more compassionately. A label does not define who your child is. It simply helps everyone understand how their brain works, what supports will help, and why their strengths and struggles coexist the way they do.

Most importantly, it allows you to shape the narrative. You get to say, “Here is what makes your brain special, here is what takes more energy, and here is how we can help.” That is empowering and that is often the moment children begin to feel proud of their differences rather than confused by them.

When to consider an evaluation based on age, school timing, and instinct

Parents often ask whether it is too early or if they should wait and see. **In more than twenty years of doing this work, I have never had a parent say, “I wish we had waited longer.” What I consistently hear is, “I wish we had started sooner.”** If the question is already on your mind, it is usually the right time to begin exploring it.

Early evaluation is not about labeling a child. It is about understanding them. When families wait, children are more likely to be misunderstood by teachers, peers, or even themselves. Challenges may be interpreted as behavior problems, “not trying,” or emotional issues, when in reality the child simply needs clarity and support. Later evaluations often uncover patterns that have been present for years, and parents frequently share that they wish they had known sooner so they could have responded with the right tools instead of feeling confused, stressed, or unsure how to help.

Many families seek help only once something has become a crisis, but that crisis often could have been prevented or eased with earlier insight. For many areas including autism, ADHD, language differences, learning disabilities such as dyslexia, and other developmental profiles, earlier understanding truly does make a difference. Early insight helps caregivers and educators respond with strategies that work with a child’s nervous system and learning style instead of against them.

An evaluation may or may not lead to a diagnosis, but it always provides something valuable. It offers clarity, direction, a more compassionate understanding of your child’s experiences, and concrete steps you can take right now to help them thrive.

How the school calendar influences things

Here are a few things to consider when scheduling:

- The school year does impact logistics, but it does not determine whether an evaluation is “valid.”
- Teacher feedback is harder to obtain in early fall, but last year’s teacher can often provide invaluable perspective.

- Children will likely need to miss part of a school day for testing; that is normal and expected.

You can always ask your evaluator directly, **“Does timing matter for the questions we are exploring?”** The answer is often no, but sometimes timing does play a role.

When timing really does matter

There are a few points in the year when families choose to time an evaluation very intentionally:

- Insurance deductible
- Private school application deadlines
- ACT, SAT, AP, or IB accommodation deadlines
- School based re evaluation cycles

These are all completely reasonable considerations. An evaluator will help you plan around them.

There is no one-size-fits-all answer

An evaluation will always give you meaningful data about your child, but you may not always need to proceed right away.

Maybe your teen is doing well, self aware, and does not feel ready for formal testing.

Maybe your toddler’s biggest challenge right now is sensory regulation and starting with occupational therapy is more practical.

Maybe the concern is present but not urgent, and touching base in a few months will give a clearer picture.

All of these approaches can be appropriate. There is truly no single correct pathway.

The question underneath it all

There is no one-size-fits-all answer to the question of timing. An evaluation will always give you meaningful information about your child, but that does not mean you must move forward immediately. Some families realize that their teenager is doing well, self-aware, and not particularly interested in testing right now, and that is a perfectly reasonable place to pause. Other families recognize that their toddler clearly needs support but may benefit from starting with occupational therapy before committing to a full evaluation. Sometimes the concerns are

real but not urgent, and checking in again in a few months feels more appropriate than jumping in right away. All of these choices can be completely valid.

And importantly, you can always circle back. This is a part of the process I wish more families understood. Parents reach out to me all the time, talk through their concerns, and ultimately decide that now isn't the right moment for their family. Then months later, or sometimes years later, they write again and say, "We're ready." And truly, we just pick up where we left off. There is no closed door and no missed window. The pathway is still here when the timing feels right.

Through all of this, trust the instinct that led you to ask the question in the first place. Parents almost always sense the shift before anyone else does. Something feels harder than it should, or something isn't matching what you expected for your child. That instinct is not guesswork. It is grounded in every moment you have spent watching your child learn, play, struggle, adapt, and grow.

If the thought has landed in your mind — "Should we get an evaluation?" — it is worth exploring. Sometimes that exploration leads directly to testing. Other times it means having a conversation with a trusted evaluator and deciding together whether this is the right moment or whether it makes sense to wait. The goal is never to rush or label anything prematurely. The goal is to understand your child in a way that brings relief, clarity, and a plan, whether that plan starts today or sometime down the road.

Questions to consider asking an evaluator about timing:

To help you decide whether now is the right time, you can ask an evaluator directly:

- Do you think the timing matters for my child's specific concerns?
- What might we learn now versus what might be clearer later?
- Is there any reason to wait based on age, development, or current supports?
- How do you handle evaluations when teacher feedback is limited or we are between school years?
- What would you recommend if we choose to wait a little longer?
- If the issues are subtle, will the evaluation still be meaningful at this stage?
- If we start with another service like OT or speech, how will that inform future testing?

Why twice-exceptional children often mask and the key questions to consider asking your evaluator

I could write an entire blog series about [twice-exceptional profiles](#) and still barely scratch the surface. [Giftedness can hide ADHD](#). Strong reasoning skills can compensate for dyslexia. Social ease can coexist with subtle social communication differences. Many 2E kids perform beautifully in structured settings and then come home completely drained. Their strengths lift them up, but those same strengths can also hide challenges that deserve support. Conversely, the opposite can also be true: a child may have knowledge significantly above grade level but be unable to perform at that level in class, which can prevent them from showing their full potential in the school setting.

The good news is that parents do not need to become experts in every nuance of 2E. What matters most is knowing which questions reveal whether an evaluator truly understands twice-exceptionality and has the experience to see the full picture.

These are the questions that make the biggest difference:

- **How do you distinguish giftedness from ADHD, autism, dyslexia, or other learning differences when strengths may mask challenges and challenges may mask strengths?**
- **What do you look for beyond test scores?**
2E kids often test well. The process and the patterns between tasks tell the real story.
- **How do you evaluate for subtle or “stealth” learning differences that may not appear as low scores?**
- **What is your experience assessing 2E students?**
This is a specialty area, and experience matters.

- **How do you interpret big differences between home and school?**

Masking is common in 2E kids. Teachers may see ease while parents see the cost of that ease.

- **If my child compensates or masks during testing, how will you understand what is underneath?**

None of these questions are too direct. They do not make you a demanding parent. They help you understand whether an evaluator can see the nuance, complexity, and brilliance of a twice-exceptional child.

When results match what you thought and when they surprise you

Understanding the emotional experience of feedback

By the time families reach the feedback session, they have usually held many hopes and many fears. Even when parents are confident in what they are seeing at home, hearing it reflected back to them can bring a wave of relief, validation, or emotion they were not expecting.

There are generally two emotional paths during feedback, and both are completely normal.

Sometimes the evaluation confirms exactly what you sensed.

Parents almost always know the big picture. You may not have had the right vocabulary for it yet, but the pattern was clear. When the results align with what you have been observing, something inside you exhales. You finally have language and clarity. You can stop second-guessing yourself. You understand your child's experience more fully, and you can move forward with confidence and a plan.

Other times the results bring new information that catches you off guard.

This can be surprising, emotional, or even disorienting at first. Maybe the anxiety you thought was environmental turns out to be ADHD. Maybe the giftedness that made everything look "fine" at school was quietly masking autism or dyslexia. Maybe the frustration you saw at home suddenly makes sense in a completely new way.

Surprises do not mean something is wrong. They mean you finally have the right map. And while it can take a moment to adjust to a new understanding of your child, that understanding is what allows the right support, the right compassion, and the right trajectory to take shape.

It is also important to remember that your child has not changed. They are the same child you love, the same child with the same strengths, personality, and spark. What has changed is the clarity. You now have a more accurate picture of how their brain works and what they need in order to feel understood, confident, and supported. This clarity is a gift because it helps everyone move forward with more insight, more empathy, and a plan that truly fits who they are.

This emotional range is part of the process.

Feeling relief, sadness, validation, hope, confusion, or gratitude are all completely natural

responses. Families often tell me that even when the results are not what they expected, the clarity itself feels like a weight lifting. It provides meaning. It connects the dots. It allows everyone to work together instead of guessing in the dark.

What matters most is that you leave with understanding and direction.

Whether the evaluation validates what you already knew or teaches you something new, the outcome is the same: you walk away with a clearer picture of your child and a sense of what comes next. Here's a helpful [toolkit from REEL](#) designed to guide families through the next steps after receiving an evaluation.

The role of private testing in school supports

Once families begin thinking about an evaluation, the next question usually centers on school. *How will this help? Will the school use it? Should we start privately or start with the district?* And like everything else in this process, the “right” answer depends on your child, your goals, and the school setting.

Private and school based evaluations serve different purposes

A private evaluation explains *why* your child thinks, learns, or feels the way they do. It identifies diagnoses when present, highlights strengths, clarifies challenges, and provides individualized recommendations.

A **school evaluation** answers a different question: **Does the child qualify for special education or accommodations based on educational impact?**

It’s important to note **that schools cannot make a diagnosis. Their role is educational, not medical or clinical.**

This difference is especially important for twice-exceptional students. Many 2E children look fine at school because their strengths compensate for their struggles. Their masking is often so effective that teachers genuinely do not see what you see at home. A private evaluation uncovers what is happening beneath the surface so the school has a more accurate picture.

Public vs. private schools

Public schools must consider private evaluations, but they may still conduct their own assessment before determining eligibility. This is normal and expected. A well written private report can guide the school team, highlight areas to investigate, and strengthen your advocacy.

Private schools vary widely

Some are wonderfully flexible and already provide accommodations. Some offer informal supports but no formal plans. Some cannot provide accommodations at all. A private evaluation still helps teachers understand your child, but it is important to know each school’s structure.

Parents start from different places — and both paths are valid

Some families begin with the school. A district evaluation can offer useful baseline information, especially about how a child is functioning academically and what supports they may qualify for in the classroom. School based evaluations are free, and for many families this is the easiest and most accessible first step. A private neuropsychological evaluation later can build on that foundation, answer diagnostic questions, and provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of how your child learns, thinks, and experiences the world. Starting with the school is a completely valid choice, and many families take this route before seeking private evaluation when they want more detail, a clearer diagnostic picture, or individualized recommendations.

Others start privately. They want diagnostic clarity, a roadmap, and a cohesive explanation of their child before involving the school. Afterward, they take the report to the district to determine what supports can be put in place.

Both approaches are completely appropriate. What matters is that the path fits your child and gives you the information you need. It's important to note, however, that a private diagnosis doesn't mandate the creation of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). To learn more about options and navigating school support, [download our Parent's Guide to IEPs for 2e students](#).

Questions to consider asking as you plan next steps:

- What will this evaluation help the school understand about my child?
- Is my goal accommodations, specialized instruction, or simply clearer guidance for teachers?
- If my child is 2E, could their strengths be masking their needs at school?
- If we start with the school, will their evaluation be thorough enough for the questions we have?
- If we start privately, how will this information be used in school planning?
- If my child is in private school, what supports are they actually able to provide?

Cost, insurance, and what families should ask about billing, coverage, and superbills

By the time families reach this topic, everyone lets out the same sigh. The emotional parts of an evaluation feel big, but somehow the logistics of cost and insurance feel even bigger. I often

joke that this is the fun part of the process, because nothing brings people together like trying to decode an Explanation of Benefits.

Here is the simplest, clearest way to think about it: Neuropsychological evaluations take time. Not just the hours spent with your child, but the scoring, analysis, collateral calls, report writing, communication with schools, and the follow up afterward. Whether someone charges a flat fee or hourly, the cost reflects the full scope of that work. That said, families should *always* feel fully informed and never surprised.

Ask early and ask directly.

Questions to consider asking your evaluator:

- What is the total cost of the evaluation and what does that include?
- Are follow up conversations included or billed separately?
- If additional hours are needed, how will I be informed ahead of time?
- Do you provide a superbill for insurance reimbursement?
- Which CPT codes do you typically use?
- Do you have guidance on what I should ask my insurance plan?

A **superbill** is simply an itemized receipt with the medical codes insurance companies require. It does *not* guarantee reimbursement, but it gives you the documentation needed to request it.

When you call your insurance company, think of yourself as gathering data rather than pleading for coverage. You are trying to understand the rules of the game before you start playing it.

Questions to consider asking your insurance company:

- Do I have out-of-network benefits for psychological or neuropsychological testing?
- What percentage is reimbursed and based on what allowable rate?
- Are there limits on the number of testing hours or units covered?
- Are specific CPT codes excluded?
- Is preauthorization required?
- Do you offer single-case agreements or network exceptions when no in-network providers offer comprehensive testing?

One important note: some families think an evaluation is automatically covered because a provider's *name* appears in the insurance directory at a different location. Insurance companies are not always clear, and older addresses or former hospital affiliations can linger in their system for years. Always confirm whether the *specific service* at the *specific address* is considered in-network. It saves a great deal of confusion later.

Private evaluations can feel like an investment, and it is absolutely reasonable to ask every question you need. You are not being difficult or demanding. You are making sure that you understand the process and that the evaluation will give you the information you are seeking.

Some families start with their school district to understand what information the school can provide at no cost, and then use a private evaluation to build on that foundation. Others begin with a private evaluation and later invite the school to complete its own educational assessment. Both paths are valid. What matters is that you feel informed and clear about what each type of evaluation offers.

Should the cost of an evaluation present a barrier, alternate options exist. REEL has curated a helpful list of [low cost assessment options](#) as a starting point.

When re-evaluation Is — and is not — needed

At some point after an evaluation, every family eventually reaches this crossroads.

Do we ever need to do this again?

And the real answer is: *sometimes yes, sometimes no, and sometimes not for a very long time.*

There is no automatic schedule. There is no universal rule. What matters is your child's needs, upcoming transitions, and whether new questions have emerged.

Times when reevaluation *does* make sense

Some situations truly benefit from updated data:

- A major developmental shift is happening: Middle school, high school, and early college years often bring new academic and social demands that reveal more about executive functioning, attention, anxiety, or twice exceptional profiles.

- You need updated documentation for accommodations: Tests like the ACT, SAT, AP, IB, and many college disability offices require evaluations within specific time frames, usually about three to five years.
- Something has changed significantly: If your child suddenly seems to be struggling in ways that don't match what was previously understood — academically, emotionally, socially, or behaviorally — updated testing can help identify what shifted and why.
- A young child's first evaluation was too early to answer all the questions: This happens all the time. A toddler may show clear signs of developmental differences, but not all profiles (like ADHD or twice exceptionality) can be meaningfully clarified at age two. Reevaluation a year or two later may provide a far richer picture.

Times when reevaluation is *not* needed

Some families assume they must repeat testing every few years, but that is not true.

- If your child is doing well and nothing new is emerging: There is no reason to retest a child simply because time has passed. Many children do beautifully with the roadmap from one comprehensive evaluation.
- If the evaluation already answers the questions you have: A strong neuropsychological report often remains relevant for years. It can guide teachers, support providers, and families without needing to “renew” anything.
- If a follow up conversation is enough: Sometimes you just need help interpreting new behaviors or deciding whether an issue is developmental versus truly new. A consultation with the evaluator may give you exactly what you need.

The “check-in” approach: an underrated option

Many families do not realize they can reconnect with their evaluator without repeating the entire process. A quick conversation about what's changed can help you decide:

- whether new testing is warranted
- whether you should wait
- whether support can begin without formal reevaluation

Questions to consider asking your evaluator:

- Under what circumstances would a reevaluation be helpful?
- If concerns arise later, can we start with a consultation rather than full testing?
- Will the current report still support accommodations in a few years?
- If accommodations are needed for standardized testing, when should we update documentation?
- Are there developmental milestones or transitions when new testing might give us important information?

A final word: There is no single right path

If you have made it all the way through this guide, take one more breath. You are already doing the most important part of this entire process by paying attention, asking thoughtful questions, and trying to understand your child more clearly. There is no perfect moment to evaluate, no universally correct approach, and no single path families must follow. There is only the path that fits your child, your values, and your capacity right now.

I say this not just as a neuropsychologist but as a parent who has walked two very different roads. One of my 2E kids needed only a simple set of checklists from our pediatrician after gifted testing. The picture was clear, the supports were obvious, and everything lined up easily. Another one of my children needed something entirely different. He masked so effectively at school that the challenges were nearly invisible to teachers, while I was watching the fatigue and the quiet struggle at home. For him, a more focused evaluation was the key to understanding what was happening underneath the surface. Both paths were right. Both paths were loving. Both paths were chosen based on who that child was and what they needed.

An evaluation offers far more than a diagnosis. It helps you understand your child on a deeper level, including how they think, how they learn best, what energizes them, and what quietly drains them. Many families discover strengths they had not fully recognized, such as advanced reasoning, creativity, emotional intuition, problem solving, or deep curiosity. They also learn why certain tasks feel harder, whether it is slower processing speed, working memory demands, sensory needs, or difficulty staying regulated. This type of insight is often just as important as any diagnosis, because it shows you how to leverage your child's strengths to support the areas where they need more help.

A good evaluation becomes a roadmap. It highlights what makes your child shine, clarifies what challenges exist beyond any label, and outlines what environments, strategies, and supports will help them thrive. It is never about changing who your child is. It is about seeing them clearly so you can respond with compassion, reduce frustration, and help them grow with confidence and self-understanding.

That is really the heart of this work. There is no one size fits all answer. There is only noticing, wondering, and choosing the next step that feels honest and helpful for your family. Sometimes that means scheduling an evaluation now. Sometimes it means gathering

information and waiting a little. Sometimes it means starting with school. Sometimes it means starting privately. Sometimes it means circling back months or even years later.

You do not have to get it perfect. You only have to stay curious about your child and choose the step that brings more clarity than confusion. If you keep doing that, you are already on the right path.



REEL strives to ensure Silicon Valley twice-exceptional students thrive in school by raising parent and educator awareness and understanding of practical, research-based strategies to address their needs successfully. We support 2e kids by building bridges between educators and parents.

For educators, we create and curate resources, workshops, and programs to help them make school a place that 2e learners can be successful.

For parents, we organize and disseminate events and tools to help parents learn to advocate for and support their 2e kids.

Learn more at: www.reel2e.org