Three

REFERRAL AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This chapter discusses the initial part of the assessment report: the identifying information, the referral questions, and background information.

TITLE AND IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

Most reports begin with a title that is followed by important identifying information. The title of the report is typically centered across the top of the first page (e.g., “Psychological Evaluation,” “Neuropsychological Evaluation,” “Psychoeducational Assessment,” or “Speech and Language Evaluation”). At times, a disclaimer is included to protect the individual’s privacy, such as “for confidential use only.” Under the title, standard identifying information is recorded, typically including:

- name of examinee
- date of birth
- chronological age
- grade (if testing a student) or occupation (if relevant)
- date(s) of testing
- date of report
- examiner’s name
- supervisor’s name (if relevant)

Depending on the setting and the purpose of the evaluation, other information may be included, such as parents’ names, teacher’s name, or the name of the school.

REASON FOR REFERRAL

The next heading, Reason for Referral, sets the stage for the rest of the report. The reason for referral is your reason for testing. This section is usually no more than one or two paragraphs long, and its central purpose is to express concisely and clearly the questions and concerns of the person or people requesting the evaluation (the referral source). The referral section includes the names and po-
sitions (e.g., third-grade teacher) of the referral source as well as the specific reasons for referral. If specific questions have not been posed, then contact the referral source to clarify the nature and scope of the concerns. The following illustrates the reason for referral for Jonas, a fourth-grade student:

The multidisciplinary team at his school referred Jonas for his three-year review of special education services. For the past three years, he has been receiving occupational therapy and learning disability services in a resource setting. In addition, both his fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Mantell, and his parents have expressed concern about his overall motor development, particularly his poor handwriting, and want to know ways to help Jonas.

For some evaluations, the referral question is not about problems. For example, a student may be referred to help determine eligibility for certain types of special programs, such as placement in a program for gifted and talented students. Or an adolescent may be referred with the purpose of providing ideas for vocational planning. Also, some school districts mandate periodic testing to ensure that a student's services are appropriate or still needed. In general, however, unless you work at a specialized clinic or hospital, most referrals stem from concerns regarding a client’s academic, linguistic, cognitive, behavioral, or social development.

Rapid Reference 3.1 presents several examples of questions that can help you formulate the referral section, and Rapid Reference 3.2 provides illustrations of

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**DON’T FORGET**

**Important Information to Gather About the Referral Question**

- When did the child's problems start?
- How old was she when the problems were noted?
- How old was she when her parents first became concerned?
- If person is a child, do the parents agree about the problem? Do others who regularly see the child agree (e.g., grandparents, babysitters, teachers)?
- How long have these concerns been present?
- If concerns have existed for a while, why are the parents coming in now?
- How frequent is the problem?
- What is its duration?
- How intense is it?
- Ask: “What are some specific examples of the problem?”
- Ask: “What do you hope to gain from this evaluation?”
Sample Referral Questions

**Psychoeducational/school psychology assessment:**
- Does Juanita have a reading disability? If so, what methods of instruction would be most effective?
- Is Graham socially and intellectually ready to begin kindergarten?
- Does Gavin have a diagnosable disability that warrants having extra time to take the SAT or other standardized tests?
- Should Haley be retained in second grade?
- Would Jenna benefit from participating in the school’s gifted and talented program?
- Do Sixto’s behavioral problems at home and at school warrant a diagnosis (and, therefore, treatment) of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder?
- Is Delia at risk for engaging in violent behavior at school?
- What modifications need to be made to accommodate Lydia when she returns to school after surgery?
- Is Ana (a 15-year-old) at risk for dropping out of school?
- Does Nicole (a kindergarten child) have a school phobia?

**Vocational/developmental disabilities assessment:**
- Is Caroline capable of living independently?
- Will Alan, who has developmental disabilities, be able to transition to a group home or a supervised apartment setting rather than remaining at home?
- Which areas of vocational study will Mr. Jackson be able to benefit from given his interests and abilities?

**Neuropsychological functioning:**
- Is the memory impairment Elinor experiences indicative of early dementia such as Alzheimer’s-Type Dementia?
- Have Charles’s years of alcohol abuse caused any impairment in cognitive functioning?
- What are the neuropsychological effects of Bryan’s head injury?
- Are attention or memory problems impacting Andrea’s school performance?
- Has Lily’s high exposure to lead affected her cognitive abilities?

**Assessment of emotional functioning:**
- Is Charlene suicidal?
- Is Noel suffering from a mood or anxiety disorder?
- Does Michael appear to have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

**Forensic assessment:**
- What will be the best custody arrangement for Todd?
- Did Elmer meet the legal definition for insanity when he committed the murder?
- Is Esther competent to stand trial?
Rapid Reference 3.2

Sample Reason for Referral Sections

- His foster parents, Jim and Arlene Mueller, and the teachers at Project First Step, a special needs preschool program, referred Tariq. Tariq’s foster parents are pursuing adoption and wanted information on cognitive development as relative to his age-peers. The Muellers also wondered if Tariq has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

- Her mother, Ms. Jaffe, a kindergarten teacher, referred Anna, a 4-year-old preschool student. Ms. Jaffe expressed concerns in regard to Anna’s social, emotional, and linguistic development. She described Anna as not showing much interest in people but showing considerable interest in the wheels on toy cars. She also noted that Anna rarely makes eye contact, engages in imaginative play, or talks. She wondered if Anna would benefit from occupational therapy, speech therapy, family counseling, or some type of social skills training.

- Rebecca was referred for an evaluation by her social worker at the Department of Economic Security, Amelia Forrester. Ms. Forrester reported that Rebecca’s preschool teacher felt she was immature and slow in developing pre-academic skills. Ms. Forrester requested a brief assessment to help establish appropriate pre-academic educational goals for Rebecca.

- Her father, Pierre Whitman, referred Maria. Mr. Whitman wondered if Maria has a learning disability that is impeding her math development. Specifically, he noted that Maria appears to be far behind her classmates in math despite several years of tutoring. In contrast, she has had little difficulty learning other school-related subjects.

- Michael was referred for evaluation to see if learning disabilities, in addition to his psychiatric diagnoses, are contributing factors in his difficulty learning and retaining academic skills. Additionally, the results of this evaluation are expected to provide information to aid in determining effective instructional techniques, as well as the best educational placement for Michael in his next Individualized Educational Plan meeting.

- Amy Reid was seen for a neuropsychological evaluation at the request of her parents, Michael and Nancy Reid, who were concerned about her lack of progress in school. Mrs. Reid stated, “Amy cannot read, does not know her numbers, and takes lots of time to recall the letters.” Amy’s parents requested the evaluation to help determine the cause of her learning difficulties and to determine appropriate instructional strategies.

- His itinerant teacher of the Hearing Impaired, Pat Adler, referred Tony to this clinic. Ms. Adler expressed concerns regarding his ongoing difficulties in written language, which is affecting his success in middle school. She requested more information about the reasons for these difficulties as well as specific recommendations for intervention.

- Although he is an intellectually capable student, Paul currently is failing several classes at Westchester Preparatory Academy. His father and stepmother re-
qested this evaluation. Teachers from Westminster Preparatory reported that Paul’s father and stepmother are concerned about his weak academic performance and question whether there is a “processing deficit” of some kind. Paul’s stepmother specifically mentioned the possibility of a weakness in memory. Paul’s cognitive profile, general adjustment, and academic skills will be investigated as one source of information for educational planning in conjunction with teacher and parent observations, educational history, and present levels of academic performance.

• The purpose of the present evaluation was to determine Jen’s eligibility for a gifted and talented education program and, depending on the outcome, to consider ways to adapt and enrich the curriculum to challenge her.

• His grandmother, Mrs. Gwen Stevens, referred Tyler to this academic tutoring center for an evaluation. Mrs. Stevens was concerned about Tyler’s poor school grades and lack of motivation. Tyler has failed most of his seventh-grade classes, and retention has been recommended. Mrs. Stevens wanted an estimate of how far behind Tyler was in school, an opinion regarding whether he should be referred for a comprehensive evaluation in his school, and an opinion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of his repeating seventh grade.

• Tania Martin, his sixth-grade teacher, referred Gregory for evaluation due to his poor attention in class and extreme difficulty getting along with peers. She further noted that he talks nonstop during class and often interrupts conversations to say something completely unrelated. Ms. Martin wondered if Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is the cause of Gregory’s behavioral and social difficulties.

• Donald is currently incarcerated in a maximum-security setting for juvenile offenders. Eleanor Earle, his case manager, referred him for an evaluation. Results from the assessment will be used to develop goals and objectives for his new Individualized Education Program as part of the Kilmore County Jail’s Education Assessment program.

• Noelle, a sophomore in pre-medicine, referred herself for an evaluation because of difficulties with spelling. Many of her teachers over the years have suggested that she be tested, but she never pursued an evaluation. Recently, a college English professor spoke to her about her many mistakes in writing and strongly recommended that she contact the University Learning Disabilities clinic for dyslexia testing. Noelle would like a better understanding of why she has such difficulty spelling, as well as suggestions for how she can improve her skill.

• Gavin was referred by his parents for an evaluation because of concerns regarding his present performance in law school. Although he understands the concepts of the presented material, he finds that he often does not have enough time to complete examinations. Consequently, he is unable to demonstrate his mastery of the information. He also finds that he spends an inordinate amount of time completing assigned readings. The purposes of the present evaluation were to determine Gavin’s present levels of performance, consider eligibility and need for services, and propose appropriate accommodations.
how the “Reason for Referral” section may appear when written in a report. The
Don’t Forget box lists types of questions to ask the referral source that can help
clarify the purpose of the evaluation and the nature of the problem. In the report,
in addition to stating the referral questions succinctly and directly, you may also
include in this section a short summary of the specific behaviors or symptoms
that led to the referral. You may provide examples and brief anecdotes to illustrate
the reasons for concern.

There are many ways to collect information from a referral source. You may
have contact primarily over the phone, in person, or from a written form. Figures
3.1 and 3.2 provide samples of forms for collecting information about the referral
questions. The type of referral information requested on a written form will vary
according to the setting. For example, a medical setting such as a hospital
will probably request more information about specific medically related issues,
whereas a form used in a school setting will request information that pertains
mainly to academic issues and behavior. If you choose to use written forms for
gathering referral information, tailor them to make them most useful for your
specific situation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sources for information for the background section include the person, a parent,
a teacher, a boss, a supervisor, a physician, a therapist, or other specialists. You
may also obtain information from anyone who has regular contact with the person,
such as a coach, babysitter, primary day care provider, or nurse. In addition,
it is good practice to gather information from previously written records, such
as psychological and educational evaluations, medical records, and academic
records based upon the nature of the referral. As an example, Jonas was referred
for an evaluation in regard to concerns about motor development. His relevant
background information is presented in Rapid Reference 3.3.

As illustrated in Rapid Reference 3.3, the background section contains inform-
ation that is pertinent to test interpretation or to issues related to the referral
concern. Often you will collect more information than you will actually report.
Do not include information that is personal in nature and not pertinent to the
evaluation itself (Kamphaus & Frick, 1996). For example, Ted was referred for an
evaluation because concerns were noted in regard to his math computational
skills. During the course of the evaluation, you learned that Ted’s mother is re-
covering from bulimia. Because this finding does not appear to be related to the
### MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL'S REQUEST FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

To: ____________________________

Name of patient: ____________________________

Date of birth: ________________ Age: __________

Diagnosis (if one has been made): ________________

Medical problems: ____________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Reason for referral: ____________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Behaviors or symptoms that led to this referral: ____________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

**Special Testing Concerns:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Y/N</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>Limitation of movement that might interfere with testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>Hearing Loss (specify severity and if corrected)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>Poor Vision (specify severity and if corrected)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>Speech impediment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>English is second language (how English proficient is client?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>Poor understanding of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>Poor cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>Medication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name ____________________________ Dose ____________________________

Side effects ____________________________

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**Figure 3.1 Sample Referral Request used by Personnel in a Medical Setting**

Source: Adapted from Tallent (1993).

Note: Although an initial request may be made from a physician with such a written form, you must follow up the written request by gathering more detailed information from the referral source.