

Northside Pediatrics' Evaluation and Management of Patients with School Difficulties

Learning difficulties can occur due to a wide variety of reasons, including distinct learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, test anxiety, executive functioning disorders and attention difficulties such as ADHD. Evaluation for attention problems must therefore evaluate all the above causes to ensure a proper diagnosis for your child.

To begin the evaluation process, parents should start by talking with their child's teacher or school counselor to gather information on how school is going. If school difficulties are confirmed, we then recommend submitting a written/mailed request to the teacher and administration for further evaluation by the school. The following script may be helpful:

*"My child has had significant problems with ***. I request that the Student Support Team meet to discuss my child's progress and interventions that are needed. I would also like to discuss whether a 504 Plan or evaluation for special education is needed and the next steps to creating one of those plans. Please invite (***general education teacher, special education teacher, speech and language pathologist, occupational therapist, school psychologist, administrator, behavior specialist, ESOL teacher) to the meeting to provide input and expertise.*

Thank you for your care for my child and their education. Please call me at XXXX to set-up a meeting time."

In Georgia public schools, often the first step of the evaluation is the RTI (response to intervention) screen. The school psychologist and/or administrator will review grades and standardized tests, observe the child in the classroom, and enact modifications to help your child succeed in class. They will follow your child's progress to determine if interventions are helping. Additionally, an independent educational evaluation (IEE) may be requested from the school if you disagree with the results of the school's initial evaluation or find that it was not thorough enough. You can find more information on IEEs at understood.org and childmind.org. Once these school screenings are complete, a report should be sent to Northside Pediatrics.

The **ADHD Vanderbilt Survey** (available on our website) is a second option to evaluate attention concerns. The Vanderbilt Survey is a general screening tool for learning and behavioral difficulties, and it should be filled out by both parents as well as teachers of core classes. Once complete, these forms should be returned to our office. We will also need copies of the last two years' grades as well as any recent standardized test scores. A letter or note from a teacher should also be included stating there is no sole specific learning difficulty suspected (such as dyslexia).

Psychoeducational testing is another option to evaluate school concerns. We offer the "Pedia IQ" testing in our office which is a computerized test interpreted off-site by a psychologist. This 3-part psychological assessment tests for learning disabilities, other mental health issues such as anxiety and depression as well as ADHD. Results are interpreted by a pediatric psychologist and returned to your provider. Alternatively, you may consider a full psychoeducational evaluation via a private psychologist. This testing may or may not be covered by insurance and can cost upwards of \$2,000. Psychologists use standardized assessment tools and include information from interviews with the child, parents, and teachers. Full psychoeducational testing can be

very helpful in understanding your child's behaviors, emotions, social skills, learning strengths and weaknesses and is viewed as the diagnostic gold standard for ADHD.

After the necessary evaluation is gathered, you will share it with our office and your primary care provider will review the information to determine if further evaluation is indicated. A current physical exam by one of our providers is also required. If no further information is needed, a consultation appointment will be made with your provider.

We know this is a long process! Diagnosing your child's learning difficulty correctly is our top priority and can only be done with a thorough evaluation.

In summary, items required for review:

- Report cards/grades from the last two-three years
- Standardized testing (e.g. COGAT, CRTC, ITBS, STANFORD) from last few years
- Vanderbilt surveys from parents and teachers
- School observation process for ADHD/learning difficulty should be started
- Note from teacher stating no specific learning disability is seen
- Current physical exam

-OR-

- Psychoeducational evaluation or PediaIQ testing done by a psychologist
- Current physical exam

If there are any questions about this process or which evaluation pathway is right for your child, please schedule a telemedicine visit with your child's provider so we can discuss in detail each of these options. To schedule call us at our Sandy Springs office: 404-256-2688; or at our Woodstock office: 770-928-0016.

Further information regarding public school evaluations and services can be found under the "Special Education Services and Supports" section at www.gadoe.org