

Chapter 9 - Putting It All Together: Feedback and the Report as a Therapeutic Intervention

Chapter 9 of *Integrating Neuropsychological and Psychological Evaluations: Assessing and Helping the Whole Child* reviews the process of discussing results with parents or the individual who completed the evaluation. It posits that the feedback session, and the report itself, can take the form of a therapeutic intervention.

The following vignette reviews an evaluation situation that resulted in recommendations for the teenager to be placed in a therapeutic residential school and that the report itself was useful in meeting the needs of this individual.

Anthony

Anthony, a sophomore in public school, had a history of suicide threats, aggression, oppositional and explosive behavior and escalating drug use. Testing revealed a specific reading disability as well as a significant discrepancy between his superior language skills and his low average visual spatial organizational abilities and social pragmatic skills, consistent with a nonverbal learning disability.

Anthony's self ratings on personality scales revealed concerns regarding his Attitude to School and his Relations with Parents. His parents and teacher expressed very significant concerns on a constellation of behaviors and measures of emotional functioning. Thus, considering the number of concerns expressed by both his parents and teacher, there was a significant discrepancy between their perspectives and Anthony's. In respect to measures of emotional functioning, Anthony's awareness of his weaknesses and need to compensate for them were in evidence. While he could think logically and coherently and possessed a strong orientation towards achievement, his considerable neurologically based weaknesses and lack of sufficient academic supports were continuing to negatively impact his school experience, contributing to a poor self image and damaging his relationships. His difficulty regulating his reactivity and affect due to underlying executive functioning weaknesses resulted in his feeling overwhelmed and tended to derail his perceptions and thought. He was making a great effort to manage himself through a process of intellectualization and a withdrawal into fantasy and self medication.

While he was valiantly trying to present a confident and self assured face to the world, findings indicated that he was suffering greatly regarding his self esteem. He continued to struggle within relationships, choosing friends with troubling common interests, and felt set upon by those in authority, expecting to be hurt in some way and needing to protect himself. It was very important for him to begin to appreciate his considerable strengths and more effectively deal with his weaknesses with the appropriate support. He needed to do so within the context of relationships that felt

supportive and non-threatening. Without a very concerted therapeutic intervention, he was at significant risk for causing serious harm to himself or others.

At the time of testing, it was recommended that, given the level of his explosive and violent behavioral problems in school, his continued issues related to dyslexia, poor academic performance, reliance on marijuana to self medicate, his history of potential self harm and his contentious and violent relationship with family members, Anthony could not reasonably be expected to make effective progress in either his academic or his social/behavioral/emotional goals without attending a residential school that focused on intensive therapeutic interventions but also provided a strong academic curriculum with supports for learning disabilities. It was further recommended that the school have the capacity to deal with substance abuse as well as a therapeutic curriculum to address explosive behavior, impulsivity and the development of healthy peer relationships.

Within a therapeutic residential school, Anthony required a full-time approach to managing his behavior as it related to his reactivity and explosiveness. Specific strategies in management of mood were critical. He needed to be taught skills within a highly structured, peer group counseling setting that was integrated into his twenty four hour a day social, emotional and behavioral curriculum. He required a full time social skills program that taught him to better interpret and respond to social communications both within structured and unstructured environments. He needed both didactic and experiential teaching within the context of a peer group into which he was integrated over the course of his day. And, within his program, Anthony needed to develop a much greater degree of self awareness as a means to have a more realistic sense of his strengths and weaknesses, boost his self esteem and as a further means to develop self advocacy skills that were based in an accurate understanding of his needs.

The initial findings from Anthony's evaluation were communicated to the school administration that responded with the contention that the minimal supports they provided in respect to Anthony's access to a counselor and reading remediation were sufficient. Following the feedback session and prior to receiving the report, Anthony had an incident of aggression at home that was quite serious. The parents enlisted the services of a lawyer who, with the report and recommendations in hand, was able to arrange a therapeutic, residential placement in record time over the objections of the school administration. Eventually, however, at hearing, the school capitulated and agreed to finance Anthony's placement.