

Talking to Your Child about Testing

How to help your child prepare for our work together

I'm looking forward to working with your family! Here are some ways to talk to your child about the work we will do together.

Starting the Conversation

In a nutshell, the purpose of an assessment is to “learn about how you learn,” so that:

- Teachers know how to teach you
- Parents know how to support you
- You know how to advocate for yourself

Introducing the idea of an assessment to your child may sound something like:

- *I've noticed you're working really hard at _____ this year, but it still seems pretty tough, and I'm not sure why. I've been thinking that if we knew more about how you learn best, your teachers and I could do a better job teaching you. Last week, we met with a person who can help us find a way to make school easier for you and figure out what we can do differently.*

Describing the Process

When your child comes in, we will do different activities to help me better understand how they work with different types of information. We will do puzzles, play word games, chat about what they like to do, and try to figure out why hard things are hard.

For young children, it may be important to let them know that I am a “different kind of doctor” who helps them learn about their brain. They are not sick and there is nothing wrong with them - also, no shots!

Older children may need a reminder that this is a confidential process, focused on finding solutions. Their input is extremely important to figuring out what will be most helpful for them.

Explaining the process may sound something like:

- *Dr. Karen will do different activities with you to figure out how you learn best, where your strengths are, and why some things are hard right now. Some will be fun, some will be easy, and some will challenge you. Your job is just to do your best, and if something is tricky, let Dr. Karen know so you can work together to figure out why!*

Getting Their Input

Helping your child to articulate their own assessment questions will not only help me help them, but will get them more invested in the process itself.

Kids may need a little time to mull it over and get their thoughts together, so don't be afraid to ask a few times. This may sound something like:

- *There are things I'd like to know to help me support you better, but I'm wondering what you'd like to know about how you learn, or why certain things are easy and others are hard? If you can't think of anything right now, that's ok. I'll ask you again tomorrow and we can try to write down a list together. That will make sure that the work you do with Dr. Karen is as helpful as possible.*

What if my child doesn't want to be assessed?

If you are worried your child will resist coming in for an assessment, you are not alone! Here are some tips for setting it up for success.

Tip #1: Use your child's words to describe the problem

Many children resist testing because it feels like adults don't get it. For this reason, it can be helpful to think about how your child is describing the problem.

For example, instead of "writing is hard," they may say, "writing is boring" or "my teacher is unfair." By using their language, you are assuring them that we will help them solve their problem, not just ours. This might sound like:

- *I've noticed that you really don't like your math teacher this year. I'm wondering if there's a way we could make that class better for you.*
- *I've noticed that we are in a bad nagging cycle around homework. I know you don't like it and I don't like it either. I wonder if there's a way we can break out of it.*
- *I've noticed you're getting in trouble a lot this year and it doesn't seem to make sense. I wonder if there's a way we can figure it out together.*
- *I heard you say that you hate school, and I can totally see why! Let's see if there's a way to change that.*

Tip #2: Talk over ice cream

Some children may be worried they've done something wrong, or that there is something wrong with them. For this reason, I recommend talking to your child in a place where it is obvious that there is nothing wrong and they are not in trouble. Having a bowl of ice cream, taking the dog for a walk, or playing catch are all good ways to have a conversation without it feeling too "serious".

Tip #3: Let them know it's not mandatory

If your child is having a really hard time, we will work together to figure it out. The first step is letting them know it's not mandatory. Keep in mind that we can get a lot of information about what might help your child in other ways, and if your child is resisting, the actual tests we do are unlikely to be valid.

Besides, giving a child the choice often makes them more likely to participate because it:

- Shows them respect
- Establishes trust
- Gives them choice and control over the situation
- Gives space for the child to voice their concerns without a contingency
- Allows us as adults to figure out ways to address those concerns so they can be an active participant in the future

Your child is welcome to come in for a “non-committal” first session just to check me out. While 99% of the time we end up moving forward, if for some reason we are not able to at this time, we have established a relationship so that your child can come back when they are ready.

This may sound like:

- *It makes sense that you do not want to do the testing. I can imagine I would be skeptical as well! I will respect your decision if you decide you really do not want to do it. At the same time, I want to make sure you have all the information before you make your final decision. Would you be willing to meet with Dr. Karen once just to see what it's all about?*

While your child may not agree on the problem that brought you in as a parent, we can often find something the child *does* want to work on, and that gives us a way to move forward.

See you soon!

Please let me know if you have any additional questions or concerns. I'm excited to start our work together and learn more about your child's amazing brain!