“We’re Going to Learn More About You”

How to Talk to Your Child About Their Neuropsychological Evaluation

Start with a clear, honest explanation

Your child does not need the entire referral history over breakfast. They need to know where they are going, what they might do, and why the adults think it could help.

> **“We want to understand what comes easily to you, what feels hard, and what support would help.”**

First, what is the evaluation?

A neuropsychological evaluation helps a specialist understand a child’s thinking, learning, and daily functioning. Depending on the referral question, it may examine attention, memory, language, problem-solving, academic skills, emotions, or behavior. [1, 2]

It commonly combines individual testing with interviews, questionnaires, and information from home, school, or other providers. Activities may include puzzles, questions, computer tasks, and paper-and-pencil work. Some feel like games; others feel more like schoolwork. [1, 2]

It is information, not a verdict

The aim is to describe strengths and needs and guide next steps. Results may help clarify a diagnosis, but an evaluation is not a promise of a particular label or answer to every question. The tasks and schedule depend on your child and the team. [2]

Some tasks have right and wrong answers. Explain that mistakes are expected and the appointment is not something they pass or fail. Avoid promising that it will all be easy or fun. [1]

Use the scripts that fit your child’s understanding and communication needs. Ages are a starting point, not a rule. Follow the evaluation team’s preparation instructions.

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What to Say Before the Visit

Younger children, roughly ages 5–8

> **“We’re going to meet someone who learns about how kids think and learn. You’ll answer questions and try different activities, like puzzles or remembering things. Some parts may feel easy and some may feel hard. You don’t have to know every answer.”**

Keep it concrete. Tell them who will take them, where you will be, and what the next part of the day looks like. Confirm those details with the office first.

School-age children, roughly ages 8–12

> **“We’ve noticed that [specific task or situation] has been hard. This evaluation helps us understand why, along with the things you do well. You’ll do different activities and talk with the team. It isn’t for a school grade. We want useful ideas for helping you.”**

Invite their questions: “What would you like them to understand about you?” Listen without correcting their answer or turning it into a speech.

Teens who are skeptical or sensitive

> **“I know another appointment may not be your first choice. We want a clearer picture of what’s making [specific concern] difficult and which supports could help. Your perspective matters. What would you want to get out of this, and what are you worried about?”**

Use straightforward language. Explain what is already decided, where they have choices, and how they can ask questions. Avoid making them responsible for proving a diagnosis or performing well enough to earn support.

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Answer the Question They Actually Ask

If your child asks…	You can say…
“Is something wrong with me?”	“You’re not bad or broken. We’ve noticed some things are hard, and we want to understand them and help.”
“What if I get things wrong?”	“Some activities get harder as you go. You aren’t expected to know everything. Try honestly, and tell the person if you’re stuck.”
“Will it be easy?”	“Some parts may be easy, some tricky, and some boring. We’ll ask the team what to expect.”
“Can I take a break?”	“You can tell the team you need a break. They’ll explain when and how breaks work.”
“Will you be with me?”	“Some testing may happen without me in the room. I’ll check the plan so you know where I’ll be.”
“Who will hear what I say?”	“Let’s ask the psychologist what stays private, what they share with us, and what goes in the report.”

Reassure without scripting their answers

It is fine to explain the visit, practice asking for help, or look at ordinary photos of the office. Do not search for actual test questions, rehearse test content, or coach your child to appear more or less capable. The goal is an accurate picture, not a polished performance.

> **“You don’t need to practice being a certain kind of kid. Be honest about what you know and what feels hard.”**

If your child is very anxious, share that with the team before the appointment. Ask for a preparation plan rather than promising details you have not confirmed.

If conversation itself is overwhelming

Try a short written explanation, a simple visual schedule, or one question at a time. Ask the team about communication needs, language access, sensory concerns, and ways to make arrival more predictable.

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Prepare the Day.
Skip the Debrief Exam.

Before you leave

• Confirm the schedule, approximate length, breaks, meals, and caregiver arrangements. Evaluations may span one or more appointments. [2]

• Aim for their usual sleep and eating routine. Ask the team how to handle illness, poor sleep, or other changes that could affect testing.

• Follow the clinic's medication instructions. Do not skip, start, or change medication for testing without directions from the appropriate clinician.

• Bring prescribed glasses or hearing aids and requested records. Ask about snacks, water, fidgets, and comfort items; some may be used during breaks rather than particular tasks. [1]

Keep the message simple

> **"Try the activities, tell the truth, and let the person know if you're confused or need help. You don't have to impress anyone."**

Afterward, offer connection

Ask, "Would you like to tell me about it, or take a break?" Avoid quizzing them about test items, scores, or how they think they performed. A quiet meal or favorite low-pressure activity can be enough.

> **"Thanks for giving it a try. I know that took time and effort."**

Include them in the next steps

Ask the evaluator how and when results will be explained to your child. Keep that conversation focused on understanding, useful support, and questions they care about. A testing report describes findings; it does not define their worth.

Sources & further reading

[1] Johns Hopkins All Children's: Neuropsychological Evaluation FAQs.
[2] Children's Minnesota: Pediatric Neuropsychology Program.
General parent education. Procedures vary; confirm details with your child's evaluation team.

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