

## What Is a School Psychologist?

### Who Are School Psychologists?

School psychologists have specialized training in both psychology and education. They use their training and skills to team with educators, parents, and other mental health professionals to ensure that every child learns in a safe, healthy and supportive environment. School psychologists understand school systems, effective teaching and successful learning. Today's children face more challenges than ever before. School psychologists can provide solutions for tomorrow's problems through thoughtful and positive actions today.

The training requirements to become a school psychologist are a minimum of 60 graduate semester hours including a year-long internship. This training emphasizes preparation in mental health, child development, school organization, learning, behavior and motivation. To work as a school psychologist, one must be certified and/or licensed by the state in which services are provided. School psychologists also may be nationally certified by the National School Psychology Certification Board (NSPCB).

### What Do School Psychologists Do?

School psychologists tailor their services to the particular needs of each child and each situation. School psychologists use many different approaches, but most provide these core services:

#### **Consultation**

- give healthy and effective alternatives to teachers, parents, and administrators about problems in learning and behavior
- help others understand child development and how it affects learning and behavior
- strengthen working relationships between educators, parents and community services

#### **Assessment — use a wide variety of techniques at an individual, group, and systems level to evaluate:**

- academic skills
- learning aptitudes
- personality and emotional development
- social skills
- learning environments and school climate
- eligibility for special education

#### **Intervention**

- work face-to-face with children and families
- help solve conflicts and problems in learning and adjustment
- provide psychological counseling for children and families
- provide social skills training, behavior management, and other strategies
- help families and schools deal with crises, such as separation and loss

## **Prevention**

- identify potential learning difficulties
- design programs for children at risk of failure
- provide parents and teachers with the skills to cope with disruptive behavior
- help foster tolerance, understanding, and appreciation of diversity in the school community
- develop school-wide initiatives to make schools safer and more effective

## **Education**

develop programs on topics such as:

- teaching and learning strategies
- classroom management techniques
- working with students who have disabilities or unusual talents
- substance abuse
- crisis management

## **Research and Planning**

- evaluate the effectiveness of academic programs, behavior management systems, and other services
- generate new knowledge about learning and behavior
- contribute to planning and evaluating school-wide reform and restructuring

## **Health Care Provision**

- collaborate with school and community-based personnel to provide a comprehensive model of school-linked health services
- work with children and families to provide integrated community services focusing on psychosocial wellness and health-related issues
- developing partnerships with parents and teachers to create healthy school environments

## **Where Do School Psychologists Work?**

The majority of school psychologists are employed in public and private school systems. However, school psychologists practice in a variety of settings including:

- public and private schools
- school-based health centers
- clinics and hospitals
- private practice
- university, community and state agencies, and other institutions

## **Growing Up Isn't Easy**

All children and adolescents face problems from time to time. They may:

- have fears about starting school
- manage their time poorly
- fall behind in school work
- be upset about family events such as divorce and death

- feel depressed
- lack self-discipline
- experiment with drugs or alcohol
- think about suicide
- lack study skills
- worry about their sexuality
- face a tough decision about college or work
- consider dropping out of school
- not be aware of their aptitudes and abilities

School psychologists are there to help parents, educators, and the community understand and solve these problems.

### **School psychologists:**

- understand how schools work and how children learn
- provide easily accessible, cost-effective mental health services to children
- promote positive mental health and a safe and effective learning environment

**The following example situations show you how school psychologists typically approach a problem so you will know what to expect.**

#### **A Slow Reader**

Tommy's parents were concerned about his slow reading. They worried he might fall behind and lose confidence.

At school the teacher noticed that Tommy understood the work when it was presented orally but he relied on classmates to help him do written work. The school psychologist worked with Tommy's parents and teachers to develop a plan to improve his reading and writing. The plan worked and Tommy's reading and confidence improved.

By dealing with learning problems early on, school psychologists can help prevent further difficulties.

#### **A Family Problem**

The teacher noticed that Cara, an able student, stopped participating in class discussions and had trouble paying attention.

The school psychologist was asked to explore why Cara's behavior had changed so much. After learning that her parents were getting a divorce, the school psychologist provided counseling for Cara and offered recommendations to her parents during this difficult period. Cara's behavior and self-esteem improved, and she felt more confident about her continuing relationship with her parents.

School psychologists can be trusted to deal in confidence with sensitive personal and family matters.