

SPOTLIGHT

on... educational psychologist



Q&A with Dr Olivia Kenneally, educational psychologist

Tourettes Action interviewed Dr Olivia Kenneally to find out how an educational psychologist can be of support to a young person with Tourette Syndrome.

What is an educational psychologist?

Educational psychologists provide specialized, evidence based psychological services for children, adolescents, young adults, families, schools, educational settings and organisations. In doing this the aim is to create positive change, support learning, and enhance wellbeing. We are focused on cutting edge applied psychology to support progression and development.

Educational psychologists can help young people aged between 0-25 who experience problems that hinder their learning and participation in school and other activities. These problems can include (but are not limited to) emotional and social problems, attention and memory difficulties or learning difficulties. Educational psychologists work across a range of educational settings including preschool, primary, secondary, and further education, and specialist provisions. We work with young people with a range of needs including (but not limited to) Autistic Spectrum

Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning disability, dyslexia and Tourette Syndrome (TS). We work collaboratively with families, schools and other professionals using psychological approaches to develop creative and manageable ways forward.

Educational psychologists carry out detailed psychological assessment, and provide consultation, feedback, advice and recommendations grounded in evidence-based practice in order to create positive change. We can also implement evidence-based interventions in schools and homes to support positive outcomes and progress for the client. Importantly, educational psychologists are required to be involved in the statutory assessment process required for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). An EHCP is a legal document which describes a child or young person's special needs from an educational, health and social care perspective. It describes the outcomes that child will be expected to achieve within a certain timeframe and what support will be given in

order to help them achieve these outcomes.

Educational psychologists are trained to a professional doctoral level in psychological theories and models, child development, assessment, intervention and research methods. They are also trained to deliver a variety of therapeutic approaches such as psychodynamic approaches or Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) among others. We are interested in children and young people's cognitive, (thinking) social and emotional functioning in different contexts

At what point would a child be referred to an educational psychologist?

Referral pathways for educational psychology involvement vary according to whether one refers to a private educational psychologist or an NHS/Local Authority (LA) educational psychologist. Educational psychologists are required to be involved in the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment process and therefore if an EHCP assessment has been agreed, an educational psychologist will see you and carry out some assessment work with your child. If your child has been referred to a LA educational psychologist, schools will make the decision in collaboration with parents. Usually, if a school has concerns about a child, they will initially put in place support or interventions from their own resources. They may place the child on a list called the 'Special Educational Needs (SEN) register'. There are two stages of support in schools – additional SEN support and an education health and care plan. If a school suspects that a child may have SEN, they may develop specific targets for that child in the form of an individual education plan, whereby they will put in place intervention and monitor and evaluate outcomes. If difficulties persist, without improvement, usually the school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) will in collaboration with parents refer to an educational psychologist.

Each school will differ as to when they will get an educational psychologist involved. Parents can also ask school staff to refer to the school

educational psychologist but this may or may not result in a referral being made, depending on need and that particular school's access to educational psychologists and levels of SEN in the school. Alternatively, parents can seek private or independent educational psychology involvement if they feel that it would be beneficial for their child. Occasionally, other professionals will suggest that an educational psychologist become involved. If a child is not making improvements, despite having had additional support and involvement from other professionals, a school or parent may make a request to the LA for an EHCP needs assessment.

Does every child with SEN get assessed by an educational psychologist at school?

The short answer to this is no. As per above, it depends on a number of factors including what level of need the child has, the thresholds in that particular school regarding when they feel children in their school need further support and advice and whether parents are asking for their child to be assessed. It also depends on whether a child's SEN has been recognized. If however a school or parent submits a request for an EHCP assessment that is accepted by the LA, then that child will be assessed by an educational psychologist. If a request for an EHCP assessment is turned down by the LA, the LA will often recommend that an educational psychologist becomes involved and assessment takes place.

How might an educational psychologist support a child with TS?

Children with TS do not always present with learning or intellectual difficulties, however the TS itself may impact on their learning – e.g. if a child has motor tics which impact on their writing, they may need to type or have a scribe. Children with TS may however have co-occurring difficulties – e.g. some children with TS have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) or ADHD and thus these may also impact on their learning.

Support

Educational psychology support could comprise of assessment which looks for any co-occurring learning, social or emotional needs. Assessment may consist of consultation whereby information is gathered from school, home, and observation of the child in different contexts – e.g. in the classroom for different lessons, different times of the day, in the playground and/or at home. Assessment may consist of specific tests, which looks at how the child learns and thinks, as well as assessing for any emotional or social needs they may have. Once a thorough assessment has been carried out, the educational psychologist will draw together all the information (formulation) and identify what their strengths are, how to build on those, what their difficulties are, and how to help manage difficulties and improve outcomes. They will usually provide a feedback session to school, parents and the young person themselves, whereby they explain the findings of the assessment and identify what recommendations or intervention needs to be put in place to support the student's development and make things better for them in respect of their learning, wellbeing and behaviour.

Training in schools

The educational psychologist may deliver training to school staff whereby they teach them about TS and how to support a child with TS in the classroom. They will provide school staff with classroom management strategies specific to supporting a child with TS. They may also provide strategies for parents, for use in the home. They may offer support for staff and the young person in respect of how to explain TS to their peers, along with providing ideas for support outside of the classroom, in the playground for example.

Educational psychologists may also support staff and parents and young people in relation to management of their tics, and can work with them either directly or indirectly through parents and staff. Some specially trained educational psychologists can work with children and young people with TS and can teach behavioral and cognitive methods to manage the tics. This might involve teaching a different behavior which replaces the tic, or teaching them how to think about tics differently in addition to taking a different action at a time when they have an urge to tic. There are specific behavioral approaches which can be used

including Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) and Comprehensive Behavioural intervention for Tics (CBIT).

Educational psychologists may also engage in psycho-education, which means learning about the condition, for those with TS and for those around them. The psychoeducation teaches about TS, what it is and how to manage it. Educational Psychologists can engage in functional analysis in order to identify which environments exacerbate tics or which environments maintain tics, as well as those environments which promote positive management of tics. They may also teach parents and school staff how to engage in a reward programmes in order to support the child with TS when they spot them trying to manage their tics.

Educational psychologists may also support children with TS with additional needs e.g. depression, anxiety or OCD through therapeutic approaches such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) which combines cognitive and behavioural approaches to promote wellbeing.

Is a school required to act on the support recommendations suggested by an Educational psychologist?

Schools are not always required by law to act on the support recommendations made by an educational psychologist. Every school is required however to have systems in place to identify children who need additional support and they need to take the appropriate steps to secure any additional support for SEN a child may have.

Schools have two stages to meet the needs of children with SEN – additional SEN support and an education, health and care plan. If a child fails to make progress at the additional SEN support stage, then a school or parent can make a request to the LA to carry out an EHCP needs assessment. If a child has an EHCP in which there are recommendations from an educational psychologist (and other professionals), they then have a responsibility to act on those recommendations as an EHCP is legally binding and the support detailed in the plan must be provided. Additionally. When a school is applying for an EHCP needs assessment, LA's will often check to see if the

if the child has had educational psychologist involvement, and if the school have followed the recommendations made by the educational psychologist. If an EHCP is made and parents have concerns with regards to the contents of the plan they can appeal to the first tier tribunal (special educational needs and disability).

Can parents request for their child to be assessed by an Educational psychologist?

Parents can ask their school to have their child referred to the LA educational psychologist. Schools may or may not refer on however depending on the level of need in their school and the amount of time they access from an educational psychologist. Sometimes children have to go on a waiting list which may result in a referral being made within weeks or it could sometimes be as long as 2 years. Parents however can make their own decision to consult with a private educational psychologist and can make contact with them themselves.

If a parent wants to organise a private or independent Education psychologist assessment, how would they organise this with the school?

In order to contact a private psychologist, parents do not need to do this through the school. It is recommended that both school and parents have good communication channels however and voicing concerns with school and letting them know that you will be contacting a private educational psychologist is recommended. Sometimes schools will have the contact details for private educational psychologists, which they can give to parents. Sometimes parents can ask their GP or paediatrician if they have contact details for an educational psychologist. Alternatively, a very good website whereby one can find a private educational psychologist is the Association of Child Psychologists in Private Practice (AChiPPP), or via achipp.org.uk.

About Dr Olivia Kenneally

Olivia Kenneally is a child and educational psychologist and CBT therapist working in paediatric neuropsychology and other child and educational psychology settings as well as private practice. Olivia has written a number of papers in the field of educational psychology and has a keen interest in working with children and young people with TS. Olivia is a senior honorary lecturer in the University of Manchester and also contributes to the initial training of child and educational psychologists on the professional doctoral child and educational psychology courses at the University of Bristol, University of Limerick and the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, University of Essex. Olivia. kenneally@gmail.com

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Association of Child Psychologists in Private Practice – a website which links parents with child psychologists who work in private practice

www.achipp.org.uk

Helpdesk phone: 0300 777 8427

Helpdesk email: help@tourettes-action.org.uk