Developing a Clearer Picture: Understanding Parenting Capacity Assessments, Psychological Evaluations, and Trauma Assessments

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Navigating Research and Practice in Child Trauma

MN National Child Traumatic Stress Network Treatment and Services Center


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- Purpose: to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families, and their communities.
Parental Competency

Psychological Evaluation

Diagnostic Assessment

Trauma Assessment
Diagnostic Assessment

• Adult or Child

• When to refer:
  – To determine the presence of a mental health diagnosis
  – To determine which services are medically necessary to treat the mental health diagnosis

• Process:
  – Face-to-face interview (main source of information)
  – Review of records/collateral information
  – Written report
Diagnostic Assessment

• A brief assessment
• Does not typically include norm-referenced tests
• Can be completed by any licensed MH professional
• Outlined in MN Statute 9505.0370 to 9505.0372 & DHS Administrative Rule 47
DA Components

• **Reason for the assessment**
  – Who referred and why
  – Client’s perception of his or her condition
  – Sources of collateral information

• **Current life situation**
  – Basic needs
  – Education
  – Employment
DA Components

• Life History and Current Circumstances

  What is the context of their life?
  – Developmental
  – Relationships
  – Education
  – Employment
  – Medical Issues
  – Mental Health Treatment
  – Legal Involvement and History
DA Components

• Current Substance Use
  – Past Substance use and treatment
• Mental Status Exam
• Cultural Practices
• Strengths and Available Resources
• Risk Assessment—harm to self and others
DA Components

• **Description of symptoms**
  – Symptoms endorsed
  – Symptoms denied
  – Frequency, intensity, and duration
  – Functional Impairment
  – Level of distress caused
  – How do symptoms interfere with life
DA Components

• DSM 5 Diagnosis
  – Symptoms to meet diagnosis
  – Explain rule outs/Other diagnosis considered
  – Thought process to reach diagnostic conclusion
  – Why alternative diagnoses that were considered and ruled out

*This should make sense to a non-clinician!*
DA Components

**Clinical Summary**

- Clinical formulation of cause of client’s mental health symptoms, prognosis, and likely consequences of the symptoms
- Analysis of how the diagnosis interacts/impacts with client’s life
- Should give you a snapshot of the available information.
DA Components

• **Recommendations**
  – Treatment that is medically necessary
  – What such treatment should address
  – Factors that may inhibit participation
  – Recommendations for referrals
  – Identification of the potential consequences of not following through
Red Flags

• No life history or other context
• Only symptoms reported are those that align with diagnosis
• The summary does not make sense
• Over reaching statements, opinions that are not outlined as opinions, broad and generalized statements
• Absence of recommendations
• Recommendations that address someone other than who was referred
Diagnostic Assessment that includes a Trauma Assessment

• Trauma assessments should not be done without other diagnostic information
• Can be done by licensed mental health professionals that have additional training on the use of trauma assessments
• Beware of the “trauma informed” clinician who does not include assessment data
Trauma Assessments

When to refer

• Presence of a Traumatic Event—known or strongly suspected
• To determine the affect of a traumatic event on life and current circumstances
• To contextualize traumatic stress with other symptoms
• To obtain recommendations about treatment of trauma related to other MH needs
Trauma Assessment Instruments

Children

Examples:
• Trauma Symptom Checklist for Young Children
• Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children
• UCLA PTSD Reaction Index
• Child PTSD Symptom Scale
• SCARED for Anxiety & PTSD
• PTSD Checklist

Adults

Examples:
• Trauma Symptom Inventory
• Trauma Assessment for Adults
• Life Stressor Checklist-Revised
• PTSD Checklist for Adults
• Post-traumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale (PDS)
• Traumatic Experiences Checklist
• Clinician Administered PTSD Scale for Adults (CAPS)
Trauma Assessment Red Flags

• Minor or unclear traumatic event was the basis for the assessment—was there fishing
• Absence of assessment instruments
• Trauma explains all symptoms
• Recommendations do not address if, when, or how trauma should be treated
Psychological Evaluations

• The use of standardized instruments and systematic procedures to assess a patient’s affective, cognitive, perceptual, visual-motor and/or verbal functioning.

• Should address the presence of current or past trauma

• May include a trauma assessment
Psychological Evaluations

- Completed by Licensed Psychologist with training in evaluations
- *Referral questions/goals of the evaluation are important*
  - How does their mental health issue affect their ability to interact with others?
- Should use multiple data points
- Should differentiate inferences, conclusions, and opinions
Psychological Evaluations

When to refer:

• To clarify MH diagnosis
• To determine mental capacity
• To obtain thorough information about affect of mental health on functioning across domains
• Assess interaction of intellectual functioning, personality, MH diagnosis, etc.
• Provide recommendations for treatment
What Should Be In An Evaluation Report?

Everything from a DA plus:

• Court order and identifying data
• Sources of information (interviews, tests, records, contacts)
• Psycho-legal questions and the answer
• Recommendations
• Test results
• Collateral information
Intellectual Capacity vs. Adaptive Functioning

Intellectual capacity as measured by IQ
- Direct measure of client performance
- Influenced by education
- Influenced by emotional factors
- Does not measure parenting abilities

Adaptive functioning
- Reflects functioning in real world
- Assess: responsibility, coping
- Allows for comparative observations by others
- No more time consuming than IQ
- Used in conjunction with IQ tests
All Tests are Not Created Equal—Ensure Tests are Standardized, Valid, Reliable, Norm Referenced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wechsler Tests of Intelligence</td>
<td>A brief explanation of the test should be included in the report.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMPI-2/MMPI-A</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCMI-III</td>
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<td>PAI</td>
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<td>PSI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rorschach</td>
<td>Other tests may be of value when combined with other information, but the author should be clear about which type was used.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Behavior Checklist</td>
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<td>WISC</td>
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<td>WAIS</td>
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Psychological Evaluations with a Parenting Focus

• **When to refer**
  – Parental Capacity Evaluation is not available or unnecessary
  – To determine affect of mental health, intellectual functioning, personality issues, insight, etc. on ability to parent

**Include information in Psychological Evaluation plus:**

• Thoughts about situation that led to referral
• Parenting Interview
Parenting Interview

- Child’s development
- Parenting skills and knowledge
- Perceived needs of the child
- Knowledge of medical needs
- Knowledge of educational needs
- Basic nutritional knowledge
- Need for child’s protection
- Ways protection might take place
- Discipline techniques
- Perceptions about reunification
- Reactions to interventions
- Attainment of new skills
Psych Evaluation Red Flags

- Lack or paucity of standardized or norm referenced assessments/only involve checklists
- Lack of multiple data points
- Failure to reconcile or address incongruent information
- Providing opinions or recommendations without the data to support the statement
- Dual Relationships
Psych Evaluation with Parenting Component Red Flags

• Include an assessment of the child or opinions about the child’s treatment or needs outside of development

• Do not address how parenting needs may change in time

• Parenting recommendations are based on continued involvement of others
Parental Competency Evaluations

• Ordered to recommend appropriate treatment for remediating behavior, or if such remediation is possible (APA Practice Guidelines)

• “Assist in identifying poor prognosis, to target any red flags for successful outcomes, and to offer services and recommendations for the family.” (MN Judges Juvenile Protection Benchbook, Nov. 2011)
Parental Capacity

• Consider questions in one or more of the following domains:
  – Capacity to care, nurture, and be involved
  – Capacity to protect—supervision, frustration tolerance, impulse control
  – Capacity to Change—Intelligence, response to interventions, recognition of need to change (Haynes 2010)
Parenting Capacity Evaluations

• Not always needed
• Addresses risk, safety, and resiliency related to parenting
• Includes one or more observations of parent-child interactions
  – Assessment Instruments
    • The Differential Assessment Tool
    • Parent-Child Interaction Assessment II
    • Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory
Assessment Instruments

- The Differential Assessment Tool
- Parent-Child Interaction Assessment II
- Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory
Parental Capacity Red Flags

- Fails to address parent-child dynamics
- Does not address child safety
- Does not support conclusions with data
- Fails to account for cultural context
- Does not address evolving child needs
- Dual Relationships
We have the report, now what?
Questions??
References


References


• Minnesota Judges Juvenile Protection Benchbook (Nov 2011).
Hon. Sally Tarnowski, District Court Judge, 6th Judicial District

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