



Your 101 Guide to Visiting a **CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST**

A PUBLICATION OF CBT PROFESSIONALS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1

What is a Child Psychologist?

2

What to tell my child before visiting a psychologist

3

How to select a “good” psychologist

4

Types of psychology referrals

5

Mental Health Care Plans

6

PHN PSP referral – no cost service

7

Visiting your GP for a referral

8

What to expect at your first appointment

1. What is a Child Psychologist?

A child psychologist is a psychologist who has trained specifically to provide assessments and treatments for children experiencing behavioural, social, emotional, or educational problems. They have specific knowledge about child development and childhood disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Children and adolescents require different assessments and treatments to adults, because children think very differently to adults.

What does a Child Psychologist do?

Child psychologists work in different ways to other psychologists. This is because we work with adults central to children (such as teachers and parents) as well as with children themselves. Visiting a child psychologist will first involve an assessment phase, where it is determined what is happening, and then a treatment phase, this is when the psychologist, parents and child are actively working together to improve the problem.

During the assessment phase, parents are very important since they spend the most time with their child, they are often the best informants about what is going on. During the first sessions, we spend time with parents to understand what they are most concerned about. We will ask parents about their child's development, their family, and their schooling. We might ask questions about their child's friendships, their wellbeing, and their health. These are often questions that children don't know the answers to or can't remember.

The assessment may also involve contacting the child's teacher to understand what is happening for the child at school. Teachers provide us with information about children's relationships, their academic progress and their behaviour. During school visits, we may observe a child in the classroom or in the playground. This tells us information about similarities or differences across home and school.

1. What is a Child Psychologist?

Continued.....

Once we have a better understanding of why your child is experiencing problems, we devise a treatment plan specifically for your child. For example, if a child has anxiety, we may work with the child and parent to think and respond to the anxiety in more helpful ways, complete behavioural tasks that challenge fears, and help parents assist their child to feel safe and secure.

Psychological treatments with children are different to those with adults – interventions need to be targeted to the child’s developmental age, therefore, important messages and helpful skills are taught through the use of games and activities that are interesting and fun!

Do I attend the first session with my child?

Yes, definitely. Children need time to get to know us and feel comfortable. Often younger children will snuggle with their Mum or Dad during the first session.

Children don’t know what to expect before coming to see us, and they need time to watch and listen until they feel more at ease. Secondly, parents need to give consent for us to work with their child. Children need to be intellectually capable to understand confidentiality and the reasons for coming to our service before they can give their own consent to treatment. This is not normally achieved until children reach adolescence, but there is no set age for this.

2. What to Tell My Child Before Visiting a Psychologist

A number of parents ask this question, and it is an important one. Children, just like adults, like to be informed of what they are doing and why! What you say should depend on their age and their ability to understand what is happening. Try to prepare children as much as possible by telling them the name of the person they are coming to see, and when the appointment is.

I often tell younger children that I am a lady who talks with kids when they have “big feelings” like anger or worry. Sometimes these feelings get so big that they might feel sad, scared or angry a lot. My job is to help them to make their big feelings smaller so they feel happy more often. You might like to explain this to your little one too before their first appointment.

For older children and teenagers, you can send the same message, but using more age-appropriate language. So you might explain that a psychologist is someone who can help you work through the difficult feelings and times you’ve been having and will help you to solve their problems in a safe and confidential place.

Finally, it may be helpful for your child to hear from you that you are taking them along because you care for them and want to see them get help so they can feel better sooner.

These conversations may be helpful to have before visiting your GP for a referral. Read on to learn how to select a good psychologist and what referrals and services are available for child psychology services.

3. How to select a “good” psychologist

Once you have made a decision that you want to see a child psychologist, how do you find a “good” one?

You can find a selection of child psychologists working in your local area by either

- 1) Talking to your GP for a recommendation and/or
- 2) Using online search engines such as Google
- 3) Using the Australian Psychological Society Find a Psychologist service
<https://www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist/>

You will want to check the credentials of the psychologist you intend on visiting. A reputable psychologist will have the following registrations, memberships, and training:

- Registration with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. You can look up how long they have been registered and check their registration status and if there are any conditions restricting their practice here:
 - <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/Registration/Registers-of-Practitioners.aspx>
- Member of the Australian Psychological Society [APS]. APS psychologists are highly educated and experienced, are committed to the highest professional standards and abide by a strict code of ethics.
- Completion of a 5th and 6th year of psychology is not compulsory for becoming a psychology practitioner, however, you may wish to see a psychologist who has completed a Masters degree in Clinical psychology to ensure they have the additional benefit of postgraduate clinical training by university experts.

4. Types of referrals

How to get “Low” or “No-Cost” services

Private Referral

A referral is not required to see a child psychologist and you can call and book an appointment to see a psychologist at anytime. This is called a private referral. No communications are made to a third party [such as a GP] and your service is completely confidential. However, these services are non-rebateable under Medicare and attract a full fee charged by your psychologist.

Better Access to Mental Health Care Plan Referral

If your child is experiencing symptoms of a mental health disorder, your child may be eligible for a Mental Health Care Plan referral, prepared by your GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician. Under this government initiative, you can access Medicare rebates for up to 10 individual and 10 group sessions per calendar year. This can significantly reduce the costs of your visits to a psychologist to a modest out-of-pocket fee. See more information about Better Access in Section 3 of this eBook.

Primary Health Network Psychology Services Package [PHN PSP]

If you have a **health care card** and your child either has a diagnosable mental health condition or is at risk of developing a mental health disorder, then your child may be eligible for a referral under the Primary Health Network Psychology Services Package [PHN PSPS]. This is another government initiative that your GP may refer you under and the cost of your treatment is completely covered by the PHN. There are no fees associated with your visit to a psychologist when referred by your GP for PSP. Learn more about this scheme in Section 4.

5. Mental Health Care Plans

Medicare rebates for psychology

Medicare rebates are available for psychological treatment by registered psychologists when referred by their GP, psychiatrist or pediatrician under the Australian Governments' Better Access to Mental health Care initiative.

What are the eligibility requirements?

The Better Access initiative is available to patients with an assessed mental disorder that is significantly impacting upon a person's emotions, thoughts, social skills, and decision making. Example mental disorders include:

- Alcohol use disorder
- Anxiety disorders [phobia, panic, OCD, PTSD]
- Adjustment disorder
- Attention deficit disorder
- Bereavement disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Conduct disorder
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Psychotic disorders
- Sexual disorders
- Sleep problems

How many sessions can I have?

This scheme provides considerable assistance for people living with mental health problems including Medicare rebates for up to

- 10 individual psychology sessions and
- 10 group sessions in a calendar [Jan to Dec] year.

5. Mental Health Care Plans

Continued.....

What will it cost me?

The cost to you will depend on the fee being charged by the psychologist.. The cost for a therapy session is usually greater than the Medicare rebate, and you will be responsible to pay the co-payment or difference between the set psychologist's fee and the Medicare rebate.

The current rebates for psychology session under Better Access are:

Clinical Psychologist (50 min session)	\$124.50
Registered Psychologist (50 min session)	\$84.80
Clinical Psychologist Group session	\$31.65
Registered Psychologist Group session	\$21.65

Can I request a referral to a specific child psychologist?

The doctor must first assess that your child requires the service of a psychologist. Your doctor may allow you to request a specific psychologist or may also refer you to a psychologist that he/she recommends. The psychologist must be registered and have a Medicare Provider Number for you to be able to claim a Medicare rebate.

How do I get a Mental Health Care Plan?

If you believe your child may be eligible, then you need to book a long consultation with your GP and request to be assessed for a Mental Health Care Plan referral to a psychologist. Read more about what to expect at this appointment in Section 5.

6. GCPHN PSP referral

No Cost for Health Care Cards

GCPHN PSP is a Commonwealth Government funded program bringing access to psychological treatment to patients experiencing mental disorders of mild to moderate severity whom can't afford to access psychology services through mainstream mental health services such as Better Access.

Who is eligible?

- People who fall into one of seven Hard to Reach groups
- Must be experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues
- Patients who are financially disadvantaged and can't afford mainstream services
- Patients who have not received services under Better Access in the same calendar year
- Patients with a Health Care Card or Pension card

Hard to Reach Groups

- Children aged 0 to 12
- People who self-harm or are at risk of suicide
- Women experiencing perinatal depression up to 1 year post-birth
- Culturally and Linguistically diverse
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people
- People at risk of homelessness
- People who identify as LGBTI or other

How many sessions can I have?

This scheme provides full funding for

- 6 individual psychology sessions and
- Attendance to a group program - check with your psychologist what options are available in your Primary Health Network

6. GCPHN PSP referral

Continued...

What will it cost me?

This is a program which is at no cost to you and the cost of the sessions is fully covered by the PHN, so long as you have a health care card or pension card, or are experiencing genuine financial hardship that is preventing you from accessing mainstream mental health services.

Can I choose which psychologist I see?

Not all psychologists are providers of the PSP program. You will need to check with your selected psychologist if they are a PSP provider or alternatively your GP may recommend a psychologist. The PSP program may run differently depending on where you live.

Gold Coast Residents

The Gold Coast Primary Health Network [GCPHN] are responsible for managing referrals under the PSP program. GCPHN contract qualified and experienced psychologists to provide services to patients under the PSP scheme.

Your GP will prepare a Mental Health Care Plan AND a PSP referral and send it to the Gold Coast Primary Health Network. Once the referral is accepted, a PSP provider will contact you to make an appointment.

Check the provider list and download a fact sheet to take to your GP here:

<http://healthygc.com.au/GCPHN/media/Site-Pages-Content/ATAPS/ATAPS%20rebranded/ATAPS-Consumer-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

7. Visiting your GP for a referral

Book a long consultation

After reading the information available in this eBook and you have decided you may be eligible for a referral under a government funded mental health initiative such as Better Access or PHN PSP, the next step is to book a long consultation with your GP.

You will need to express your interest in seeing a child psychologist to your GP and your GP in turn will need to assess if your child meets criteria for a diagnosable mental health disorder or is at risk of developing a mental health disorder..

What the GP may ask as part of their assessment:

- Questions to determine what symptoms your child may be experiencing
- E.g., How is your child's mood? Behavior? Functioning at school and home?
- Questions about current and past stresses in your family
- Questions about your current supports
- You may be asked to fill in a questionnaire called the K10 which measures symptoms of psychological stress. You can take this test here:
- <http://cbtprofessionals.com.au/test/depression-anxiety-test>

Treatment Options:

Your GP will discuss the available treatment options for your child, and this may depend on the severity of your presentation. In addition to seeing a psychologist your GP may discuss:

- Referral to a child psychiatrist or pediatrician
- Referral to other allied health providers such as speech therapist or occupational therapist

8. What to expect at your first appointment

Visiting a psychologist for the first time can be a daunting process, if you don't know what to expect. Here is a general guide for what to expect at your first therapy session.

- Upon arrival, the clinic receptionist will collect your child's GP referral and your personal details from you to set up a patient record on the clinic system.
- A psychologist is required to gain your informed consent for treatment and will outline a confidentiality agreement explaining the bounds and limits of confidentiality.
- You may be asked to complete an outcome measure to assess for the initial severity of your child's symptoms. Outcome measures are then used to track your child's therapy progress and are a compulsory component of government initiatives such as Better Access or GCPHN PSP.
- Once the administration process is completed, your psychologist will come to greet you and take both you and the child through to a private and confidential consulting room.
- The psychologist will ask you a similar set of questions that your GP asked in order to develop a shared understanding between you and your psychologist of
 - The reason or problem you are seeking help for
 - The contributing factors to the problem
 - Possible treatment goals for your therapy

At the end of your first therapy session you can expect:

- You should have an understanding of what further assessment needs to be completed with your child and significant others
- A general indication of how many sessions your treatment will take
- Feel comfortable with your psychologist and are happy to continue working with your psychologist.

8. What to expect at your first appointment cont...

At the end of your therapy session you should not expect to:

- Have all your problems solved – therapy takes time and the initial visit is an assessment of where things are at and does not involve active treatment
- Feel more confused than before your session – a skilled therapist should be able to help you order your thoughts and break down your problems in to smaller and more manageable goals
- Not know what your future treatment is going to involve or look like – an experienced psychologist will discuss your treatment and expectations with you at your first visit.

Changing Psychologists

Occasionally, patients may feel that the therapist is not a good match for them or their child. Either they felt that they didn't connect with their therapist or that the therapist may not have the right professional experience to help them. Psychologists know and understand this and would much rather that you speak up and ask to see someone else rather than to drop out of treatment all together.

If you would like to transfer to another psychologist your options are:

- 1) Speak to the psychologist you visited about your concerns and they will happily assist with a transfer to someone more suited to your needs
- 2) Speak to the clinic receptionist and they can easily arrange a transfer to another clinician
- 3) Return to your GP and ask to be referred somewhere else.

The APS has produced a Charter of Rights for patients. You can download it here:

<https://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/APS-Charter-for-clients.pdf>



CBT Professionals Psychology: This free eBook was bought to you from the CBT Professionals psychology team. Experienced psychologists providing psychological therapy at their private clinics on the Gold Coast, and online psychology sessions to residents across Australia.

Never lose hope...

You may not see the answer, but we can!

CBT Professionals

Book an Appointment Today

Ring and speak to one of our friendly team members and book an appointment to see a child psychologist best suited to your needs.

(07) 5551 0251

