

Can we test clients?

Frequently one of my students or colleagues ask what are our professional limitations regarding the use of tests. When I ask them to transform their questions into affirmations, usually their responses take the form of “counselors cannot do testing” or “we cannot test children or adolescents.”

As far as I understand it, we have no limitations beyond acquiring the knowledge, training, and competence needed for an ethical use of the instrument. Something clearly outlined in the ACA Code of Ethics 2009: **E.2. Competence to Use and Interpret Assessment Instruments**
E.2.a. Limits of Competence

Counselors utilize only those testing and assessment services for which they have been trained and are competent. Counselors using technology assisted test interpretations are trained in the construct being measured and the specific instrument being used prior to using its technology based application. Counselors take reasonable measures to ensure the proper use of psychological and career assessment techniques by persons under their supervision. (See A.12.)

E.2.b. Appropriate Use

Counselors are responsible for the appropriate application, scoring, interpretation, and use of assessment instruments relevant to the needs of the client, whether they score and interpret such assessments themselves or use technology or other services.

E.2.c. Decisions Based on Results

Counselors responsible for decisions involving individuals or policies that are based on assessment results have a thorough understanding of educational, psychological, and career measurement, including validation criteria, assessment research, and guidelines for assessment development and use.

Furthermore, as stated by our 491 Board in their **491.003 Definitions**: *The practice of mental health counseling also includes the provision of needed information and education to clients, when using methods of a psychological nature to evaluate, assess, diagnose, treat, and prevent emotional and mental disorders and dysfunctions (whether cognitive, affective, or behavioral), behavioral disorders, sexual dysfunction, alcoholism, or substance abuse.... (b) The use of specific methods, techniques, or modalities within the practice of mental health counseling is restricted to mental health counselors appropriately trained in the use of such methods, techniques, or modalities.*

Of course the next comment is usually “but this doesn’t apply to testing children.”

According to CHAPTER 394, MENTAL HEALTH, it does. See what is stated in PART I FLORIDA MENTAL HEALTH ACT (ss. 394.451-394.4789):

394.495 Child and adolescent mental health system of care; programs and services.—

(1) The department shall establish, within available resources, an array of services to meet the individualized service and treatment needs of children and adolescents who are members of the target populations specified in s. 394.493, and of their families....

(2) The array of services must include assessment services that provide a professional interpretation of the nature of the problems of the child or adolescent and his or her family; family issues that may impact the problems; additional factors that contribute to the problems; and the assets, strengths, and resources of the child or adolescent and his or her family. The assessment services to be provided shall be determined by the clinical needs of each child or adolescent. Assessment services include, but are not limited to, evaluation and screening in the following areas:

- (a) Physical and mental health for purposes of identifying medical and psychiatric problems.*
- (b) Psychological functioning, as determined through a battery of psychological tests.*
- (c) Intelligence and academic achievement.*
- (d) Social and behavioral functioning.*
- (e) Family functioning.*

The assessment for academic achievement is the financial responsibility of the school district. The department shall cooperate with other state agencies and the school district to avoid duplicating assessment services.

(3) Assessments must be performed by:

- (a) A professional as defined in s. 394.455(2), (4), (21), (23), or (24);*
- (b) A professional licensed under chapter 491; or*
- (c) A person who is under the direct supervision of a professional as defined in s. 394.455(2), (4), (21), (23), or (24) or a professional licensed under chapter 491.*

The department shall adopt by rule statewide standards for mental health assessments, which must be based on current relevant professional and accreditation standards.

In addition, the position adopted by the Fair Access Coalition on Testing (FACT), an organization coordinated by NBCC to promote fair use of tests, states that training and qualifications rather than degree or discipline should determine the ability to test. For more information and advocacy suggestions, visit their site at <http://www.fairaccess.org/>.

I hope this information helps you enhance your understanding of our scope of practice.

Respectfully,

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