

## **Developmental Assessment**

Some children experience challenges in meeting developmental milestones on time and as a result may also display problem behaviours or difficulties that are unique to the child. There are a select number of neurodevelopmental diagnoses, including Autism Spectrum Disorder that should be assessed as soon as concerns arise to treat the child and ensure they have the opportunity to meet their full potential. Although there is currently no medical test to diagnose, a thorough assessment can help to identify each child's strengths and needs to determine the best intervention for that child.

### **Some Symptoms Associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder include:**

- Difficulties initiating or responding to social interactions
- Limitations in verbal and nonverbal communication (facial expression, gestures)
- Difficulties developing, maintaining and understanding relationships
- Restricted or fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
- Unusual interest or heightened sensitivity to sensory aspects of the environment
- Repetitive motor movements (e.g., hand flapping, rocking)

## **Components of the Developmental Assessment**

**Consultation Appointment:** Consists of a one-hour session providing the psychologist an opportunity to meet the child and parents in order to discuss the family's current concerns.

**Indirect Assessment:** Consists of the Autism Diagnostic Interview - Revised, a gold standard diagnostic tool used for assessing individuals for Autism Spectrum Disorder. In addition, multiple questionnaires are provided that are used to identify specific social, communication, motor, self-help, and behavioural strengths and limitations. Information gathered through the indirect assessment process helps to identify the primary concerns that affect the child's ability to meet his/her potential and to determine what level of intervention is required.

**Direct Assessment:** Consists of additional observations designed to determine if the child exhibits symptoms similar to those with developmental delays and what impact this has on his/her ability to function in a variety of settings.

- **Behavioural Observations:** Environmental factors can trigger problematic behaviour and have an impact on the way children behave. Direct observations are conducted to gather detailed information about the contexts in which behavioural difficulties occur and to gain an understanding of why those behaviours occur.

**Clinical Report and Feedback Session:** A feedback session is scheduled following the completion of the indirect and direct assessment components. This session provides an opportunity for the parents to review the report with the psychologist in detail and to discuss the findings and recommendations. Follow-up appointments for parent education / training, treatment for addressing specific skills deficits as well as appointments to collaborate with school personnel can take place following the feedback session to ensure success in treatment.

### **Dr Rebecca K. Dogan**

Ph.D. (Behavioural Psychology/Behaviour Analysis)

M.A. (Clinical Psychology)

Board Certified Behaviour Analyst - Doctoral (BCBA-D)

Licensed Mental Health Practitioner (LMHP) USA