Chapter 6
Identifying Information and Reason for Referral

6.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a discussion of how to present the identifying information and the reason for referral sections of a report. Both sections are among the first you will encounter when reading a psychoeducational report. They present important contextual information that set the stage for the rest of the report.

6.2 Identifying Information

The identifying section of a report is the initial section of a report that provides demographic information about the child. It will include the full name of the child, the parent's names and address, caregiver contact information, the grade of the child, the child's date of birth, the date of report completion, and the date the report was sent to the caregivers. At the top of the report can be found the title. This is often "Psychoeducational Report" or "Psychological Report" with the word "Confidential" placed underneath the word "Psychoeducational Report." Placed beneath the words "Confidential" will be the identifying information.

The following example with furnish the reader with an idea of how this section is formatted. Your school district or university clinic may have a slightly different format for the title and identifying section, but much of what is presented below is fairly standard.

Example Identifying Section

	Pyschoeducational Report
	Confidential

Name: Jane Doe	Date of Birth: 1/20/2003
Grade: 5th	Age of Child: 10 years 4 months
Date of Report: May 10, 2016	Date Sent: May 11, 2016
Parents: John and Ruby Doe	Examiner's Name: Sean Parker, B.A.
Address: 124 Main Street	Supervisor's Name: Stefan C. Dombrowski, Ph.D.
Glastonbury, CT	
(203) 555-1212	
Local Education Agency:	Glastonbury Public Schools

Depending upon the school district, clinic, or psychologist, additional information may be included in the identifying section. This section of the report should be presented in an aesthetically appealing fashion with a visual balance between the right and left columns noted above. The title of the report should be centered.

6.3   Reason for Referral

The reason for referral is an important section and should contain referral questions that need to be addressed by the report (Brenner, 2003). The omission of referral questions within a report is considered by most texts and articles on report writing to be poor practice (Ownby, 1997; Tallent, 1993; Watkins, 2014; Weiner, 1985, 1987). The reason for referral helps to focus the report and assures that issues of concern are addressed by the psychologist. The reason for referral section is generally about a paragraph long and should be written concisely. It is inappropriate to incorporate too much information or information that makes this section into a mini-background section. Instead, the reason for referral section should discuss specific referral concerns. Most referrals for psychoeducational reports stem from concerns about a student's cognitive, academic, social, emotional, behavioral, communicative, or adaptive functioning. Often, but not always, the reason for referral will include a referral source. In the case of psychoeducational reports, the source is usually the parents/caregivers or the multidisciplinary team.

There are generally two approaches to writing the reason for referral section. One is to include a generic reason for referral and the other is to list specific referral questions *a priori* that need to be addressed. As mentioned the latter is the preferred approach by most texts and articles on report writing. However, when focusing a report through the provision of referral questions it will be important for the psychologist to be mindful to not overlook additional issues that will need to be addressed. For this reason, a combination of the specific and general referral question—a hybrid approach—may be useful.

6.3.1   Generic Referral

The generic referral question can sometimes be seen used for psychoeducational evaluations conducted within a school setting. This is utilized when the exclusive focus of the report is on classification eligibility. It is noted that the field has moved away from the test-and-place paradigm of yesteryear, but psychoeducational reports continue to serve the function of providing a child access to specially designed instruction. This is not best practice by any means and I do not advocate this practice that the report function in the service of gatekeeping. However, when the sole purpose of the report is to determine eligibility then the following format might be incorporated.

> Example 1: Following concerns about his academic and behavioral progress at school, Jack was referred for a comprehensive evaluation to determine his present level of functioning and whether he might qualify for specially designed instruction. Recommendations to enhance Jack's functioning are also provided.
>
> Example 2: Jack was referred for a comprehensive evaluation following concerns about his academic functioning and to determine whether he might qualify for special education support.

These two referral questions present a generic framework that might be employed for practitioners interested in a global referral question. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this approach.

Advantages: Permits the psychologist to retain a panoramic perspective and be a bit more unconstrained in targeting additional areas of concern following commencement of the evaluation. For instance, at the outset of the evaluation, perhaps there was the suspicion that the child solely had an issue with reading and attention. A specifically targeted referral may overlook the fact that the child also has issues with anxiety and possibly even depression.

Disadvantages: The psychologist may not sufficiently focus the evaluation on specific areas of need or may miss areas that should have been targeted. This could render the evaluation less useful to parents and teachers and be potentially off target.

6.3.2   Specific Referral

Listing of specific referrals questions is generally recommended as a best practice. It permits the psychologist to focus the report on areas of concern. The following are two examples of a reason for referral that is of a specific nature.

> Example 1: Jack was referred following concerns about low progress in reading. Specifically, he struggles with automatically decoding words and comprehension of text. Jack also struggles with remaining seated for long periods of time and cannot focus on his classwork. This evaluation will determine whether Jack has a learning disability or whether his attentional difficulties have an impact on his educational progress.
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> Example 2: Jack is struggling with understanding social nuance which tends to hamper his capacity to get along with other children at school. Jack also struggles when his routines at school are changed. The school district wonders whether Jack has an autism spectrum diagnosis and will benefit from specially designed instruction.

Advantages: This approach focuses the report, providing evaluation goals for the psychologist. It also permits the psychologist to thoroughly evaluate the referral questions to be addressed and offer targeted feedback.

Disadvantages: The psychologist may overlook additional, uncovered issues by too narrowly focusing efforts solely on the referral question.

6.3.3 Hybrid Referral Question

A combination of the specific and general referral question may capture the advantages of both approaches. The following furnishes several examples of a hybrid type of reason for referral (i.e., combines the generic with the specific noted in the above discussion). I have found that this combined approach is useful. It not only serves to guide the reader and focus the report on salient concerns that led to the referral, but also permits the option to explore additional, uncovered issues not originally addressed within the referral.

6.3.4 Example Referrals for IDEA Categories

6.3.4.1 Referral for Suspected Learning Disabilities

Joquim struggles with sounding out words and understanding written text. His teachers have furnished him with additional intervention in this area but he still continues to struggle. Ms. Smith, Joquim's mother, noted that Joquim has had a tutor over the past year but still experiences difficulty with reading. Joquim was referred for a comprehensive evaluation to determine whether he qualifies for specially designed instruction. Recommendations to support Joquim's reading progress are also offered.

6.3.4.2 Referral for Suspected Emotional Disturbance

Matthew struggles with getting along with other children in the classroom. He misperceives other children's intent and views their words and actions toward him as hostile even though this is not the case. When this occurs, Matthew will argue with and often hit, kick or punch other children. Teacher reports indicate that Matthew disregards teacher redirection and has sometimes cussed out the teacher or thrown his books across the room when frustrated or upset. Matthew was referred for a comprehensive evaluation to determine whether he qualifies for special education support and what recommendations and accommodations might be appropriate to support his behavior in school.

6.3.4.3 Referral for Suspected Autism

Nick struggles with communicating and socializing at an age expected level. He rarely makes eye contact when being addressed by or speaking with others. He vocalizes sounds "eee aw eee aw" repetitively. Nick becomes distressed when his routines are changed and seems lost during times of transition. Nick was referred for a comprehensive evaluation to determine whether he qualifies for special education support and what recommendations and accommodations will be appropriate to support his learning and behavior in school.

6.3.4.4 Referral for Suspected Intellectual Disability

Tina faces considerable difficulty with all kindergarten tasks. She still cannot distinguish between numbers and letters and cannot identify colors. Tina can only recognize the letters in her name and the letters /a/, /b/, and /c/. Tina enjoys playing with other students and she is generally well liked. However, she sometimes cannot communicate her needs to them and so she will grab and hit when things do not go her way. Tina was referred for a comprehensive evaluation to determine whether she qualifies for special education support and what recommendations will be appropriate to support her learning and behavior in school.

6.3.4.5 Referral for Other Health Impaired

Aaron has an outside classification of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) from his pediatrician. In class, he struggles with staying seated, remaining on task, following directions, and calling out at inappropriate times. With redirection, structure and support, Aaron is able to persist and complete his classwork. Aaron is presently reading above grade level and is in one of the higher math groups. Ms. Jones, Aaron's mother, sought an evaluation to determine what supports are available to Aaron. Aaron is undergoing a comprehensive evaluation to determine

whether he qualifies for special education support and what recommendations will be appropriate to support his learning and behavior in school.

6.3.4.6   Referral for Giftedness

Lukas reads several grades above level and has extremely high mathematics abilities. Lukas is interested in a wide variety of subjects and requires differentiated instruction because of his advanced academic skills. Lukas was referred for a comprehensive psychoeducational evaluation to determine whether he qualifies for the district's gifted program and what enrichment activities might be appropriate for him.

6.4   Conclusion

It is understood that the field of school psychology has moved away from its singular focus on being the gatekeeper of special education but an important purpose of the report is to determine eligibility for special education services. Because of this the reason for referral should include specific referral questions that need to be addressed along with a generic statement that indicates that the purpose of the report is to determine whether the child qualifies for special education support. The reason for referral should be sufficiently detailed to offer the reader a panoramic perspective— an executive summary statement of sorts—of what the comprehensive psychoeducational report will entail.

References

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