



What Is a School Psychologist?

BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS

School psychologists help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. They collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community for all students.

School psychologists are highly trained in both psychology and education, completing a minimum of a specialist-level degree program (at least 60 graduate semester hours) that includes a year-long supervised internship. This training emphasizes preparation in mental health and educational interventions, child development, learning, behavior, motivation, curriculum and instruction, assessment, consultation, collaboration, school law, and systems. School psychologists must be certified and/or licensed by the state in which they work. They also may be nationally certified by the National School Psychology Certification Board (NSPCB). The National Association of School Psychologists sets ethical and training standards for practice and service delivery.

WHAT DO SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS DO?

School psychologists work to find the best solution for each child and situation. They use many different strategies to address individual student needs, and to improve classroom and school climates and support systems.

School psychologists work with students to:

- Provide counseling, instruction, and mentoring for those struggling with social, emotional, and behavioral problems
- Increase achievement by assessing barriers to learning and determining the best instructional strategies to improve learning
- Promote wellness and resilience by reinforcing communication and social skills, problem solving, anger management, self-regulation, self-determination, and optimism
- Enhance understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures and backgrounds

School psychologists work with students and their families to:

- Identify and address learning and behavior problems that interfere with school success
- Evaluate eligibility for special education services (within a multidisciplinary team)
- Support students' social, emotional, and behavioral health
- Teach parenting skills and enhance home–school collaboration
- Make referrals and help coordinate community support services

School psychologists work with teachers to:

- Identify and resolve academic barriers to learning
- Design and implement student progress monitoring systems
- Design and implement academic and behavioral interventions
- Support effective individualized instruction
- Create positive classroom environments
- Motivate all students to engage in learning

School psychologists work with administrators to:

- Collect and analyze data related to school improvement, student outcomes, and accountability requirements
- Implement school-wide prevention programs that help maintain positive school climates conducive to learning
- Promote school policies and practices that ensure the safety of all students by reducing school violence, bullying, and harassment
- Respond to crises by providing leadership, direct services, and coordination with needed community services
- Design, implement, and garner support for comprehensive school mental health programming

School psychologists work with community providers to:

- Coordinate the delivery of services to students and their families in and outside of school
- Help students transition to and from school and community learning environments, such as residential treatment or juvenile justice programs

Where Do School Psychologists Work?

The majority of school psychologists work in schools. However, they can practice in a variety of settings, including:

- Public and private schools
- Universities
- School-based health and mental health centers
- Community-based day-treatment or residential clinics and hospitals
- Juvenile justice centers
- Private practice

How Do School Psychologists Make a Difference in Schools?

All children and adolescents face problems from time to time. They may:

- Feel afraid to go to school
- Have difficulty organizing their time efficiently
- Lack effective study skills
- Fall behind in their school work

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- Lack self-discipline
- Worry about family matters such as divorce and death
- Feel depressed or anxious
- Experiment with drugs and alcohol
- Think about suicide
- Worry about their sexuality
- Face difficult situations, such as applying to college, getting a job, or quitting school
- Question their aptitudes and abilities

School psychologists help children, parents, teachers, and members of the community understand and resolve these concerns. Following are examples of how school psychologists make a difference:

HELPING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS

Tommy's parents were concerned about his difficulty reading and writing. They feared that he would fall behind and lose confidence in himself. In school, the teacher noticed that Tommy often struggled to understand what he was reading and often needed the help of his classmates to do related written work. After observing Tommy, consulting with his teacher, and gathering specific information about his skills, the school psychologist collaborated with his parents and teachers to develop a plan to improve his reading and writing. The plan worked, and Tommy's reading, writing, and confidence as a learner improved.

HELPING STUDENTS COPE WITH FAMILY AND LIFE STRESSORS

The teacher noticed that Carla, an able student, had stopped participating in class discussions and had difficulty paying attention. The school psychologist was asked to explore why Carla's behavior had changed so much. After discovering that Carla's parents were divorcing, the school psychologist provided counseling for Carla and gave her parents suggestions for this difficult time. Carla's behavior and emotional well-being improved, and she felt more secure about her relationship with her parents.

HELPING STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS LEARN NEW WAYS TO RESPOND

David was a high school student who often skipped class and got into fights with others. He acted out in class and had been suspended from school on various occasions. After establishing a relationship with David, the school psychologist taught him simple techniques to relax, recognize his needs, and to control his aggressive behavior. David's mother and his teacher worked together on a plan designed by the school psychologist to establish limits, recognize David's escalating tension, and improve communication. David's relationships with peers and adults improved and he began to make steady progress toward graduation.

IMPROVING CLIMATES FOR LEARNING

Mr. Smith, the middle school principal, was concerned about the increasing number of discipline referrals and students with attendance problems in his school. After reviewing the school's data with the school psychologist, it was determined that the school had a bullying problem that contributed

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both to conflicts occurring during unstructured times and students' staying home from school to avoid being picked on. The school psychologist worked with Mr. Smith, the staff, and parents to establish a school-wide positive behavior supports program that set clear behavioral expectations and rewards for good behavior and taught students how to respond to conflicts and bullying. The school successfully improved student attendance and decreased the number of office discipline referrals.

To learn more about school psychologists and school psychology, contact the National Association of School Psychologists: <http://www.nasponline.org>; 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814; (301) 657-0270

The National Association of School Psychologists represents and supports school psychology through leadership to enhance the mental health and educational competence of all children.

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