

Information Pack



Sydney Cognitive Development Centre

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Who we are?

The Sydney Cognitive Development Centre is a group of specialist psychologists and neuropsychologists who are all qualified with a minimum masters level in psychology/neuropsychology. Our director, Dr Shelley Hyman, is a Senior Clinical Neuropsychologist with both a masters and PhD, with speciality in paediatrics and child health. She has raised over \$2 million dollars in research grants looking at child assessment procedures and cognitive training programs. Dr Hyman is widely published in leading medical and psychology journals, having appeared as an expert on various TV and newspaper publications as well as scientific panels. She has worked in the hospital system as well as privately, in Australia and overseas. Her main area of interest is the use of new technologies in therapy treatment systems, and is a pioneer in developing individualised cognitive training programs in Australia. Please see our website for a full list of our practitioners and their areas of expertise.

What assessments we offer?

At the SCDC we see a large variety of children with developmental, cognitive, learning, social, emotional and behavioural issues. We offer a very flexible assessment system: we do not believe in a fixed battery system as every child is highly unique with different core issues underlying their functional weaknesses and differing patterns of strengths and weaknesses. To administer all available cognitive tests to children would take over 6 hours and be highly inefficient and stressful for the child. We therefore base the initial assessment on parental ratings/ interview as well as teacher ratings, and then continue the assessment according to patterns of performance noted on the testing. An IQ test and academic tests are starting points, but we do not recommend these tests in isolation as they tell you little about the core issues underlying performance. We also do not recommend that questionnaires alone are used to measure attention skills as numerous processing issues (other than true attention problems) can create low ratings. It is vital that when you are looking to get your child assessed you ask what sort of assessment the health professional conducts and whether they can give all the tests noted in the box on the left. Otherwise you may find yourself shuffled to numerous professionals before a diagnosis can be made, or a misdiagnosis may be made if certain issues are not ruled out. Over 50% of patients we see who come to us with a diagnosis of ADHD are misdiagnosed and actually have a non-attention based processing disorder such as a visual processing, auditory processing, or speed of information processing disorder. All of our assessments are aimed at understanding your child holistically in regards to not only their cognitive skills but the impacts upon them psychologically, emotionally, socially and behaviourally. We recognise that accurate diagnosis and assessment is vital to be able to treat the child as holistically as possible in order to help them maximise their potential. We understand that a child who is frustrated and disengaged will not work to potential and will need more than just basic cognitive training. All our assessments are aimed at providing the parents with a full description of their child's strengths and weaknesses, short-term recommendations on how to manage their weaknesses at school and at home, and then a long-term program of how to manage and improve the areas of weakness through various types of therapy and cognitive training. We aim to provide families with a *complete* solution to helping their child maximise their potential and create the best quality of life for them in the long-term.

Areas we assess:

- ✓ Intellectual functioning: verbal reasoning, nonverbal reasoning, working memory, processing speed
- ✓ Reading accuracy & comprehension
- ✓ Spelling & writing
- ✓ Phonological Awareness: blending, segmentation, rapid naming, phonological memory, non-word reading
- ✓ Mathematical operations and reasoning
- ✓ Memory (visual & verbal, immediate and delayed)
- ✓ Attention: visual sustained, auditory sustained, switching, divided, selective attention
- ✓ Attention/ memory span (auditory & visual)
- ✓ Impulsivity & stimulation levels
- ✓ Executive functioning: planning, organisation, abstract reasoning, self-monitoring
- ✓ Processing speed (visual and auditory)
- ✓ Cognitive flexibility
- ✓ Visual processing
- ✓ Auditory processing
- ✓ Psychological issues: depression, anxiety, anger/frustration, aggression, self-esteem
- ✓ Social skills

HighQ Cognitive Training Program

The HighQ cognitive training program is a "brain training" program which is an individual program, tailored personally to your child according to their specific pattern of strengths and weaknesses noted on assessment. This program is a unique synthesis of over 16 of the most effective cognitive training programs from around the world, the majority of which are only available to specialist psychologists and cannot be accessed directly by the public. This program is highly unique in that it trains children holistically, opposed to commercially available individual programs that only target a small range of areas, are computer based, and hence do not tend to train real-life skills (but more "gaming" skills). Our aim is to train the core building blocks and then teach children how to apply these skills to the real world.

How does HighQ cognitive training differ from tutoring?

Cognitive skills training is different from educational tutoring. Tutoring is simply re-teaching material that your child missed the first time it was presented with the hope is that the material will be remembered this time. If however the problem persists with repeated instruction, there is most likely an underlying skill weakness that tutoring or re-teaching cannot correct. Until the underlying skills required to learn are strengthened, tutoring can only produce limited results. Struggles will re-emerge because the root of the problem (ie. weak cognitive skills) has not been addressed. Cognitive skill training provides your child the chance to get to the root of the problem and literally build their core processing skills to make learning a less effortful and "painful" process. This way children will be able to get much more out of the time they spend sitting in class and with tutoring



Our areas of expertise

- ✓ Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (inattentive, hyperactive/impulsive and combined)
- ✓ Learning problems & specific learning disorders (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia)
- ✓ Autistic Spectrum Disorders (high functioning autism & Asperger's)
- ✓ Genetic/neurogenetic and developmental disorders
- ✓ Traumatic brain injury, epilepsy, stroke

What therapy & treatment we offer?

At the SCDC we offer different treatment programs that are all individually designed according to the assessment results. We aim to treat as broadly as possible and try and combine as many treatments as feasibly possible into one program. Our main areas of treatment are:

- ✓ Cognitive "brain" training for a broad range of cognitive/neuropsychological issues (see box on left)
- ✓ Psychological therapy: cognitive behavioural therapy (7 yrs+), ACT therapy (7 yrs+) & play therapy (ages 3+ years).
- ✓ Behavioural therapy & parental behavioural management training
- ✓ Social skills training
- ✓ Habit reversal (tic management: 7 yrs+)
- ✓ Medication monitoring on/off medication (with paediatrician)

Things to clarify before assessment:

- ✓ What psychological, behavioural &/or emotional therapies can the health professional offer after the assessment? There is little benefit in seeing a person who cannot offer a treatment solution to the problems you are struggling with. For example, if you are struggling with your child's behaviour &/or emotions make sure you see someone who can offer behavioural or psychological therapy.
- ✓ What treatment is available for the cognitive issues? Some practitioners offer computerised solutions like CogMed and neurofeedback but as these are *visual* they are only helpful for children with visual attention/ working memory problems. If your child has any other types of cognitive issues they may not be able to provide an individually tailored program addressing ALL noted cognitive weaknesses (which will limit the overall benefits)
- ✓ What are your opinions on medication? If you don't want to start with this avenue then beware of seeing someone who only offers this type of treatment.

