

Clinical vs School Eval

Some parents are encountering difficulties with their school systems claiming that the evaluation their child received at Charis was somehow not complete or correct. This is usually because there are different purposes for evaluations, and some schools may be confused as to which purpose the Charis evaluation serves.

Charis is not part of the education system. We are healthcare providers, and our evaluations establish diagnoses meeting the standards of the healthcare system. We cannot determine eligibility of students for school-based services. A diagnosis from Charis establishes eligibility for healthcare services. Schools may use our evaluations to assist them in their process of determining eligibility, but we have no authority to do anything more than recommend what we feel will be best for the client.

School evaluations are used to determine eligibility for special education services using the applicable rules and laws. Those evaluations are not diagnoses, and, in fact, schools cannot provide diagnoses. A school may state, for example, that its evaluation shows that a child is eligible for services as having a specific learning disability (e.g. dyslexia), but that is not a diagnosis of dyslexia (Specific Learning Disorder). Those diagnoses can only be made by healthcare providers with the appropriate licensure. By contrast, a healthcare provider can diagnose a student's dyslexia, but that diagnosis will not automatically establish eligibility for special education services.

Because school and healthcare diagnoses are intended to serve different purposes, the evaluations may look very different. Many categories of special education eligibility use numerical standards and require certain scores on certain types of instruments for a student to receive services. However, the diagnostic standards that Charis is required to meet, found in the DSM-5, do not require specific instruments or specific numerical scores. Instead, clinicians use a variety of assessment methods, observation, and record review to demonstrate whether a client does or does not meet certain specific diagnostic criteria.

Our team is composed of specialists in areas related to the population that we serve. In addition to each specialist using evaluation methods in their field to establish diagnostic indicators, our psychologist is trained to provide differential diagnoses. That means considering whether or not a client is best described by a particular diagnosis, and eliminating those diagnoses that are not appropriate. This is similar to the procedure used by medical personnel in determining whether a patient's symptoms indicate a cold, flu, allergy, or Covid, for example.

Parents are welcome to share our evaluation reports with their child's school, but need to be aware that our diagnosis is only one piece of information the school will consider. Schools may wish to do their own evaluation for establishing eligibility. The process for establishing eligibility for special education services is sometimes frustrating for parents, and often requires them to advocate for their child's needs. We hope you will find our diagnoses and recommendations helpful to you in obtaining the services and supports your child needs in home, school, and healthcare.