

Clinical Psychologists and FASD

Clinical Psychologists can support individuals on the NDIS to improve their social and emotional wellbeing. This can include developing an individual's skills in a range of areas such as helping them understand and manage their emotions, developing their social skills (including making and keeping friends), improving their problem-solving skills, assisting them with focusing, attention and concentration, managing sensory issues and assisting them with the skills needed to learn. A Psychologist can help people with their goals in all the above areas and can be very helpful for individuals who also have mental health issues, are trying to adjust to major life changes or who are having difficulties in their relationships with others. They can work directly with clients but can also work indirectly by training and supporting family and caregivers.

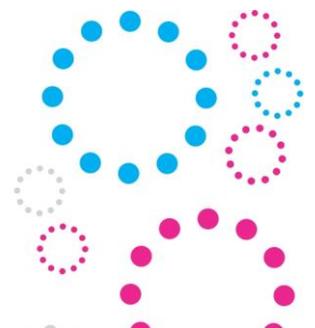
Clinical psychologists can also conduct assessments that confirm diagnoses, identify a person's strengths and weaknesses and provide recommendations for other people supporting the person such as schools, support workers or other organisations. They are experienced in assessing for conditions such as FASD, Autism, ADHD, Intellectual Disability as well as taking into account a range of mental health concerns.

Clinical Psychologists will often:

- Take a *biopsychosocial* approach to information gathering and consider a client within their biological, psychological and social context.
- Investigate both strengths and challenges
- Conduct formal assessments – these will often be a combination of questionnaires and direct face-to-face assessments
- Develop a plan with the individual and/or their family/caregivers that outlines the frequency of therapy and what the/their goals will be.
- Work with the individual and/or their family/caregivers to achieve their/the set goals

Clinical Psychologists can assist to achieve:

- Improved functioning (navigating own way through the world)
- Connections to people and services



- Improved overall wellbeing (physical, social and emotional)
- Improved sense of personal strengths and self-confidence
- Educational and social inclusion

Clinical Psychologists may also incorporate or recommend:

- Regular physical activity that can assist with emotional regulation, attention and concentration including reducing cortisol levels (the stress hormone). Organised, non-team, non-competitive sports which involves doing activities with others but which don't put a high demand on social skills, problem-solving, or memory such as trampolining and bike riding will often be especially helpful for people with FASD
- Structured and supervised group activities such as scouts/guides (with support)
- Individual caregiver/parent psychological supports and support groups. Respite care can also be very beneficial.

Overview of Activities, Skills, Strategies and Goals

See the table below for a summary of possible daily living activities, skills required, speech therapy strategies and goals that are relevant to Clinical Psychology.

Activities of Daily Living	Skills Required	Psychology Strategies	Goals
<p>Emotion Regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying emotions • Expressing emotions appropriately (verbally and non-verbally) <p>Social Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding social cues and behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of emotions • Cognitive skills – problem solving, planning, imagination • Self-reflective skills • Social skills • Cooperation and working with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the skills and factors that are an individual's strengths • Build on strengths and assist with skill development one step at a time • Identify helpful and unhelpful behaviours, thoughts and coping mechanisms • Assist in reducing unhelpful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase engagement and success experienced at home, school, and in community • Increase interdependence and independence • Increase positive friendships and social interactions



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful social interactions including playing with others • Making and keeping friendships • Relationships with family and/or caregivers <p>Problem Solving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffolding • Making individual and supported decisions • Create solutions to social problems <p>Attention & Memory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend when someone is giving instructions • Follow out instructions • Keep focused on the task at hand and be able to shift focus to new task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention and concentration 	<p>thoughts, behaviours and coping mechanisms for more helpful alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break down tasks into small steps • Reduce distractions • Creating step by step plans for completing tasks including the use of visual prompts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce frustration and increase coping skills
---	---	--	---



Psychological Interventions with Children			
Issue	Why is problem occurring	Goal of intervention	Technique Examples (<i>Direct Strategies</i> or <i>Indirect/Environmental Strategies</i>)
Difficulty with Emotion Regulation (e.g., meltdowns, violent outbursts)	Inability to communicate needs	Increase emotional and self-regulation literacy	Emotion identification psychoeducation. This can involve playing emotion games, reading books on different emotions and role-playing emotions and facial expressions.
			Programs such as the “ALERT” program to develop child’s skills in self-regulation
			Place an emotions chart somewhere visible in the house and work with family to use the chart and integrate more discussion about emotions and regulation
	Sensory overload	Increase communication skills	Role play different ways to express emotions appropriately and problem solve how to communicate needs
			Reduce the amount of sensory input the child is required to process
		Identify and develop helpful sensory strategies	Reduce the noise in the room, use ear plugs or noise cancelling headphones, dim lighting, creating spaces for children to withdraw; remove tags from clothing, remove visual distractions.
		Identify and develop helpful sensory strategies	Recommending strategies, e.g., allow child to do physical activity before attempting a difficult task; taking frequent breaks, using squishy toys or a weighted blanket.

			Develop child's self-soothing by practicing/role playing selecting a sensory toy/object or going somewhere safe to regulate. Practice other helpful strategies such as deep breathing.
Difficulty with Social Interactions, Making and Keeping Friends	Inability to understand social situations and cues	Increase social understanding and the ability to behave and respond in social situations	Individual social skill development through role play, positive reinforcement and 'Social Stories' (specifically designed books to explain social interactions)
			Social Skills Small Groups – teaching social problem-solving skills, how to play with others and make friends.
	Reduce the expectations on the child to manage social situations	Recommending strategies to adapt expectations for the child, e.g., Increase supervision of play, reduce the size of the group, provide structured rather than unstructured play experiences, limit the duration of free play.	
	Social anxiety	Increase positive participation in social interactions	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to assist with identifying specific social fears, beliefs and negative thoughts about participating in social interactions. Once identified, these beliefs and thoughts can be worked through (if child is cognitively able for this type of therapy).
			Graduated Exposure: the psychologist will suggest a sequence of socially related and social activities to work through one at a time. Starting from the easiest/least anxiety-producing.
Increase positive coping skills	Develop child's ability to cope and sooth anxiety symptoms for example with deep breathing, mindfulness techniques and physical activity.		
Difficulty with Attention & Memory (e.g., attend and follow instructions)	Impaired attention, memory and executive functioning	Increase child's ability to attend to and follow instructions	Conducting assessments and working with family, caregivers and teachers to identify child's level of attention and memory in different situations. Modify expectations accordingly (e.g., give only 1-step instructions). Use a clear voice, simple language and avoid unnecessary words.
			Use visual prompts such as lists and schedules

		Reduce distractions	Make sure the environment is as quiet and simple as possible and free of unnecessary sensory input
Difficulty Adjusting to Change	Impaired executive functioning, poor memory	Increase mental flexibility	Work with caregivers and teachers to develop a plan for when change is necessary. This plan can include strategies such as gradually implementing change, multiple mental and physical preparations for the change (e.g., reminding them in advance), inviting them to have an important role in the change/understanding why the change is needed and rewarding small steps of increased mental flexibility
		Increase positive coping skills	Develop child's ability to cope with anxiety symptoms from change with deep breathing and mindfulness techniques. Can assist child to learn other communication strategies such as asking for a break or asking to alter the new situation if the change is becoming too difficult to cope with.

Interventions for Youth & Adults			
Issue	Why is problem occurring	Goal of intervention	Technique Examples (<i>Direct Strategies</i> or <i>Indirect/Environmental Strategies</i>)
Difficulty attending and succeeding at secondary school, further education or employment	Difficulty with learning (planning, organisation, attention and memory)	To develop the young person's planning and organisational skills	Individual cognitive Interventions, student support groups or explicit teaching of planning skills.
		To simplify the demands on the young person	Recommendation of tools such as planners, colour coding of books by class, using apps such as reminders, visual checklists or to do lists.
			Recommending teachers provide homework in printed form or email as well as verbally, emailing reminders to student and parents/carers about due dates.

	Difficulty with social interactions	To simplify the demands on the young person	Make social interactions structured, planned and regular so there are limited unexpected surprises.
		Increase social and interpersonal communication skills	Individual therapy to address barriers to social interactions; targeted training and support.
Difficulty with romantic/sexual relationships (e.g., inappropriate sexual behaviour or difficulty with finding and maintaining a relationship)	Difficulty understanding and responding to social cues	Increase social and interpersonal communication skills	Individual therapy to address barriers to social interactions and relationships. Training on appropriate behaviour/targeted training and support.
	Lack of self-esteem and confidence	Increase individual's confidence to approach and engage in relationships	Individual therapy to address negative thoughts and beliefs that prevent the young person from engaging with others.
			Recommending supervised social groups or activities that the individual can attend to practice and gain confidence in approaching others.
	Impulsiveness	Increase skills in "stopping" and acting in times of strong emotion	Individual therapy to assist in identifying warning signals that a strong emotion is approaching and to 'stop' and think about what to do before it arrives.
Mood difficulties	Depressive Disorder	Increase positive mood	Using a combination of techniques suited to the specific client. May involve individual therapy to address negative thoughts, beliefs, emotions and behaviour. Assisting the individual to plan pleasurable activities and change the cycle of negative thoughts, sadness and subsequent withdrawal.
			Work with the individual and the family to decrease demands or social situations that may be creating stress for the individual.
	Anxiety Disorder	Decrease anxiety and increase coping skills	Individual therapy including mindfulness and breathing techniques. Gradual exposure to objects/situations that cause anxiety (if appropriate) in controlled ways to reduce fear.

	Traumatic Stress	Increase knowledge of trauma	Psychoeducation on trauma responses and reactions. Support to identify individual triggers and how they manifest in the body.
		Learn to calm the nervous system	Individually tailored therapy to assist in reducing hyperarousal of the nervous system. This can include mindfulness, breathwork, physical movements and suggestions for improved sleep and eating habits. Other specific trauma techniques such as Eye Movement Desensitisation & Reprocessing (EMDR) can be used if appropriate.
Difficulty with substance use	Higher genetic risk and poor executive functioning combined with peer pressure, trauma and mental health challenges	Decrease harmful substance usage	Individual assessment and discussion of the harms vs positives of using a substance. A decision to change usage will mean finding alternative strategies to replace positives gained from the substance use. A plan of change/action will often be written and shared with close family and friends for support.
		Increase adaptive coping skills	In addition to specific replacement behaviours such as chewing gum or drinking alternative drinks, general adaptive coping behaviours can be recommended such as regular physical activity (which assists withdrawal symptoms).
Difficulty with criminal behaviour	Impaired brain function: reduced Inhibitory control	Increase understanding of the legal process	Individual therapy and support to rehearse and prepare mentally for proceedings.
		Reduce demands on the individual	Advise legal staff of capacity to understand the legal process. Advise strategies to assist understanding and interactions.
		Reduce risk of future criminal behaviour	Work with the individual to promote their strengths and get involved with activities and contribute to the community. Assist them to develop coping skills and a plan for when criminal activity seems like the only option. This will be done alongside a Justice Officer.