

Getting Inside Your Client's Head... How to assess Psychological Disorders

To suggest topics, call Angela Veri, National Director of Customer Relations.

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When it comes to rehabilitation, treating the whole person cannot be understated. Whether physiological, cognitive, emotional, or psychological issues— all are important aspects of client recovery, however, sometimes the 'injuries' you can't see may be the ones slowing down recovery.

Similar to the range of physical issues that your client may experience after a motor vehicle accident that are important to assess and treat, your client may also be experiencing psychological issues that require attention. The inter-relatedness of the issues makes treating the whole person especially important.

A Psychological Assessment determines:

- the presence and severity of a psychological impairment,
- whether the client is an appropriate candidate for psychotherapeutic intervention (i.e., treatment), and
- truthfulness (i.e., veracity).

During the assessment, the emphasis is on administering numerous psychological questionnaires to ensure an objective and comprehensive review of your client's psychological functioning. The complete assessment typically includes three components:

- client interview focused on the psychological symptoms reported by the client,
- psychological questionnaires, and
- limited cognitive testing.

The Psychologist then integrates all the information, addressing and reconciling any differences, to form a final opinion. Objective measurements are built into the Psychological Assessment. As a result, it provides objective information that is independent of the file documentation and interview, so the Psychologist's recommendations are based on scientific data that is defensible.

Please see the attachment for an overview of the types of psychological disorders that the Psychological Assessment identifies.

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Here are some post-MVA psychological issues often identified by a Psychological Assessment:

Psychological Disorder	Symptoms	Treatment
<p>Adjustment Disorder: “refers to an extreme reaction to a particularly stressful life event. It is generally a short-term condition that lasts six months or less, although some cases of this mental disorder can become chronic. It usually takes place within three months of the stressful event.” (Canadian Mental Health Association)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional: nervousness, anxiety and excessive worry, feeling overwhelmed, sad and/or hopeless, difficulty sleeping, problems concentrating, suicidal thoughts, etc. • Behavioural: reckless/rebellious acts like fighting, driving too fast, skipping school or work, refusing to pay bills and/or antisocial behaviour like avoiding family and friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange for a Psychological Assessment as soon as possible because if left unaddressed, Adjustment Disorder can lead to other complications like substance abuse and/or depression. • Psychotherapy: usually the most effective treatment. It involves discussing the stressful event that brought on the symptoms and identifying coping skills to ‘get over it.’
<p>Pain Disorder: usually diagnosed if client has experienced pain for at least six months and there is evidence that psychological factors are playing an important role in the onset, maintenance, and severity of the pain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain for longer than six months. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the client acknowledges that psychological issues may be contributing to their physical pain, psychiatric treatment is often helpful. • Treatment goal is to not only ease the physical pain, but also investigate any underlying psychological issues and teach coping skills.

Psychological Disorders (Continued)

Psychological Disorder	Symptoms	Treatment
<p>Major Depressive Disorder: feelings like worthlessness, self-blame, sadness, disappointment and emptiness that are severe, lasting for several weeks, and interfering with work and social life.</p>	<p>feeling worthless, helpless or hopeless</p> <p>sleeping more or less than usual</p> <p>eating more or less than usual</p> <p>having difficulty concentrating or making decisions</p> <p>loss of interest in taking part in activities</p> <p>decreased sex drive</p> <p>avoiding other people</p> <p>overwhelming feelings of sadness or grief</p> <p>feeling unreasonably guilty</p> <p>loss of energy, feeling very tired</p> <p>thoughts of death or suicide</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May last for long periods, but it is rarely permanent. • Professional help usually aids recovery: medication and/or psychological counseling. • Support from family, friends and self-help groups is invaluable.
<p>Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): "...experiencing anxiety and emotional numbness after a traumatic event, long after any physical threat exists. ." Canadian Medical Association</p>	<p>Symptoms usually begin within three months of the accident, however, sometimes symptoms surface years later. Symptoms fall into three categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Re-living the event:</i> main characteristic of PTSD (e.g., recurring memories, nightmares, flashbacks). • <i>Avoidance and emotional numbing:</i> avoiding scenarios that are seen as reminders of the trauma. Emotional numbing: usually in the form of withdrawal from friends and family, loss of interest in activities, difficulty feeling emotions, extreme guilt, etc. • <i>Increased alertness and changes in sleeping patterns:</i> insomnia, difficulty concentrating, sometimes increased aggression. <p>Common for another anxiety disorder to be present at the same time as PTSD. Dizziness, chest pain, gastrointestinal complaints and immune system problems also sometimes associated with PTSD.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange for a Psychological Assessment as soon as possible because if left unaddressed, PTSD can lead to other complications like substance abuse and/or depression. • Cognitive-behavioural therapy • Group therapy • Medication to help with depression, anxiety, and sleep issues

For more information, please contact Sibley at 1.800.363.8900