



### Which One’s Right for Your Child?

## Mental Health Providers Serving 2e Children

*There are many types of professionals qualified to provide mental health services. You may not realize just how many until you start searching for one. But the right provider can change lives by helping 2e children and their family members deal with the issues facing them.*

*This article features six different types of mental health providers you may encounter as you seek help for your child or family – licensed clinical social worker, school psychologist, mental health counselor, clinical psychologist, neuropsychologist, and psychiatrist. You’ll find general information about each, followed by a profile and brief interview with a provider who works with twice-exceptional children.*

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## The Clinical Psychologist

Clinical psychologists study the workings of the human mind. They are concerned with people’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. They have a degree in psychology rather than a medical degree and are, therefore, unable to prescribe drugs in most states.

Most clinical psychologists earn a doctoral degree, either a Psy.D. or a Ph.D., which requires several years of supervised clinical work experience. After receiving a state license, these professionals may work in private practice, hospitals, clinics, schools, community agencies, or other settings. Among the work that clinical psychologists may perform are conducting assessments, diagnosing and treating mental disorders, and providing individual and group psychotherapy.

All clinical psychologists can treat children and adolescents. Some, however, specialize in working with this population. In addition, clinical psychologists may achieve certification from the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP), which recognizes professional achievement in a number of different specialties.

### Profile of Dan Peters, Ph.D.

Dan Peters is co-founder and Clinical Director of the Summit Center (<http://summitcenter.us>), which specializes in the assessment and treatment of children, adolescents, and families, with special emphasis on



gifted, talented, and creative individuals. He presents at state and national conferences on a variety of gifted topics. Dan also serves on the SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted) Editorial Board and consults with school gifted and special education departments. His clinical interests include the diagnosis and misdiagnosis of gifted and twice-exceptional individuals, overcoming anxiety, and helping individuals achieve their developmental potential. He is also co-founder of Camp Summit ([www.campsummitforthegifted.com](http://www.campsummitforthegifted.com)), a sleep-over summer camp for gifted youth in the San Francisco area.

**Q:** Why do parents bring their 2e children to you?

**A:** For a variety of reasons. Some common reasons are: underachievement and lack of school engagement; executive functioning weaknesses that lead to problems with sustaining attention, organization, and completing tasks; learning weakness in reading, writing, and/or math; non-verbal learning issues; sensory issues and overexcitabilities; anxiety; low energy or depression; low self-confidence and self-worth; and social issues associated with Asperger’s or with developmental asynchrony (immature social functioning relative to advanced reasoning and intelligence).

**Q:** What is the range of services you provide?





## The Clinical Psychologist, continued

**A:** I provide four primary services:

- Parent consultation — helping parents gain an understanding of their 2e child and providing them with guidance for parenting and handling educational issues
- Individual counseling/therapy — working with children and their families on an identified issue, such as anxiety or lack of motivation for school, to help the children gain a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, and to learn techniques and strategies for coping with their overexcitabilities and their emotional or learning challenges
- Psychological and psychoeducational evaluation — conducting comprehensive psychological and psychoeducational evaluations to help uncover the “mysteries” of a child’s cognitive and learning strengths and weaknesses, and social/emotional functioning
- Consultation/advocacy in schools — attending student study team meetings and IEP meetings to help school personnel better understand a 2e student and to make recommendations for building a strength-based educational plan for the student.

**Q:** Can you provide a typical example of a twice-exceptional child you have worked with?

**A:** Patrick is a gifted 10-year-old fifth grader who came to my office because his parents were concerned that he may have obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Among the behaviors they noticed were washing his hands several times a day, losing sleep because of worrying, and jumping in and out of bed. His parents also saw that he was touching things and people over and over, and touching himself in a certain way. He also had bad dreams and occasionally wet his bed.

Patrick explained that if he didn’t do the behaviors his parents noticed, he felt weird, angry, and scared that something bad would happen. His worst times were when he experienced change or thought about something changing.

With therapy, Patrick came to understand and manage his OCD and anxiety. He learned how anxiety works in

his brain and body, and we talked about how the “OCD monster” and “anxiety monster” work — how they are bullies who scare kids and keep them from enjoying their life and developing their talents. Patrick, along with his dad, who was on his “team,” had homework assignments to practice resisting his compulsions and changing his irrational thoughts about something bad happening.

After meeting every other week for four months, Patrick’s OCD and anxiety diminished significantly. At our final appointment, Patrick said, “I don’t let the OCD monster bully me like I used to. I just tell myself that he can’t do the things he says he will do. When I live with it, it goes away; when I fight it, it makes me do [things] over and over again.” Patrick knows we can meet for a “tune-up” when the OCD monster and anxiety monster come back for a visit.

**Q:** What advice can you give parents about working effectively with a psychologist?

**A:** First, interview the psychologist you are considering working with. It’s critical that your psychologist be at least familiar with characteristics of gifted children as well as the notion that one can be both gifted and also have learning, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. If you sense that the psychologist has negative feelings about the gifted label or doesn’t know about the topic, keep searching.

Second, it’s important to feel comfortable with the psychologist you are going to work with. If you don’t feel that you or your child are being understood, or if you feel there is not a good fit between the psychologist’s personality and yours or your child’s, keep searching.

Finally, it’s important to work with a psychologist who takes a “strengths-based” approach. Many psychologists were trained in the “medical model,” which is based on finding pathology — what’s wrong with an individual — and trying to fix it. This model does not work well with 2e individuals, nor is it very affirming. 2e children respond much better when their psychologist understands and celebrates their strengths and builds on them. ☒

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