

Dear *Joey*:

When I met you last week, we did an evaluation to figure out how you take in info, learn new things, and view yourself. Everyone has unique strengths and weaknesses and their own perspective on the world. Everyone also has different emotional struggles they are going through. The evaluation gave us a lot of info about what your strengths and weaknesses are, and about how you are thinking and feeling compared to others teenagers. I hope this information will help you, your family, and your teachers plan for your future.

It was great getting to know you. I want to thank you for working so hard on the tests, and for being so willing to fill out questionnaires in an open and honest manner. Not every teenager is so motivated and willing to talk about themselves, so I really appreciate your cooperation and self-awareness. I am writing this letter to say thank you and to let you know what the tests told me.

Some of the tests told me what your cognitive and interpersonal **strengths** are. Your test results show:

- You can think deeply and innovatively to solve problems. You are especially good at (1) verbal tasks like explaining how two concepts are alike, and (2) nonverbal problem-solving tasks that are spatial and mechanical (for example, building a design out of blocks).
- You can communicate your ideas most of the time. You can almost always understand what others are trying to tell you when they use clear language. Your vocabulary is outstanding.
- You have a great long-term memory and can easily able to hold on to what you've learned. For example, when I asked you to learn a list with 15 items on it, you remembered as even more items than most students your age.
- Your sensory skills are just fine. These skills are important to assess in an evaluation, because if your senses – like vision, touch, and hearing – aren't working as well as they should, that can affect so many other things. Your test results show your senses are all functioning like we would expect. You can see well, and you can build, draw, and design with good accuracy. These hands-on skills will help you with art, music, athletics, and other similar activities.

Some of the tests told me about your **weaknesses**, or things that are hard for you. Here are some things that the tests told me:

- Some people naturally focus on the “big picture” and easily get the main idea. Other people, like you, focus more on the details. Sometimes, it's hard for you to grasp the “bigger picture.” We call the ability to think about the main idea **abstract thinking**. This is an area of weakness for you. You'll want to pick tasks that take advantage of your attention to detail instead.
- Some people easily “go with the flow.” Other people, like you, don't like it when things change unexpectedly. You probably don't like when you have to adjust to new circumstances. It can really throw you off mentally and emotionally. You do best when you know what to expect and can focus on one thing at a time without having to “shift gears” too often. If you have to “shift gears” too much, it can interfere with your learning and mood. Sometimes you might even find you get “stuck” on a particular thought, feeling, or way of doing something, and feel like you can't let go. Learning to ‘let go’ can be an important lesson that will help you handle life's inevitable ups and downs.
- You do best when you can focus on one task at a time. People often think that they are good at multitasking, but the truth is, multitasking is hard for everyone! Completing two tasks at the same time usually means neither task gets done very well. Your test results show multitasking is especially hard for you – you always did much better on tasks when you got to focus on just one thing at a time.

- Sometimes you have trouble reading subtle social cues. You might not understand what another person means if they don't tell you directly. Sometimes you might miss what they are trying to tell you through nonverbal cues or other hints. For example, on the tests we did, you had trouble reading the facial expressions on the pictures of those kids I showed you. Sometimes you might feel like other people have an easier time reading those "unwritten social rules" or those little social clues that help people get along. You might find it really useful to get some specific training in what those cues mean and how to read them. It might improve your confidence or help you avoid misunderstandings.

The evaluation also revealed a lot about your emotions. I talked to you and your parents, and also had you and them complete a lot of questionnaires. On those questionnaires, you reported that in some ways, things are going okay for you. You do not seem to be more anxious than other kids your age, for example. You also aren't having any difficulty controlling your behavior, even when you get very angry or upset. In fact, compared to most teenagers, you do not get angry especially often. You also reported pretty good physical health. These are the positives that came through very clearly on your test results.

On some of the more "personality" type questionnaires, I learned others are likely to describe you in these positive terms: unique, idealistic, tactful, sympathetic, interested in human welfare and understanding others better, good at coming up with new solutions to problems, interested in learning and personal development. You are more likely to enjoy having a small circle of close friends and family members, rather than a wide circle of more distant acquaintances.

Your questionnaire results also highlighted three particular things you are concerned about. First, you reported fewer positive feelings and a lower mood than most teenagers. You reported that most of the time, you feel irritable, cranky, sad, down, or apathetic (like you "don't care"). You do not feel happy, positive, calm, or upbeat very often. It's not uncommon for adolescents to feel bad some of the time. However, you reported feeling fewer positive moods and more upsetting feelings than most boys your age.

You also reported not feeling good about your relationships with others right now. You have a lot of negative feelings about school, your classmates, and your family. You're becoming more independent as you get older, and so part of your job right now is to feel like your parents and teachers don't understand you. That feeling helps you want to grow up and get to be in charge of yourself, instead of having to listen to adults tell you what to do. However, compared to most teenagers, you reported more feelings of not liking, trusting, or respecting the people around you. This leaves you with few people to learn from, confide in, turn to for help, view as role models, or even just spend positive time with.

I'm worried this is a difficult place to be in, because everyone needs positive social connections. Learning from other people helps us become the best version of ourselves. Trusting other people helps us not have to do everything on our own. Not liking other people and being grumpy with them makes us difficult to get along with. And thinking other people don't understand us makes us pull away and start viewing everyone and everything through a negative lens. That ends up fueling feelings of greater mistrust.

You also reported a lot of what we call "aberrant experiences." *Aberrant* is another word for unusual. Everyone has times when they are not sure if they are seeing what they think they see, or hearing what they think they hear. Everyone also gets unusual ideas that pop into their head, seemingly from nowhere. Everyone also has times when things feel strange, unreal, or even bizarre. These experiences seem to follow specific patterns, often related to our own safety or our own abilities. We might think that someone is watching us, out to get us, or wants to harm us in some way. Or, we might think that we might have some special purpose, supernatural ability, or destiny. These patterns tell us these unusual experiences are ways our brains evolved to keep us safe when we have limited information. Our brains think it is better to assume someone is out to get us if we are not sure, than to trust someone who might want to hurt us.

Almost every single person has aberrant experiences at one time or another. However, these experiences are called "aberrant" because most people have them *infrequently*. The experiences are unusual and occur pretty rarely for most people. Some people have more aberrant experiences than others. Some people notice aberrant

experiences happen more frequently to them during times of stress, change, or when they are feeling a lot of strong emotions. Other people have a lot of aberrant experiences even when they are not going through stress. You reported right now, you are having *very frequent* aberrant experiences.

During an evaluation, it is important to look at how many aberrant experiences someone is having. This is because aberrant experiences can get in the way of having good relationships, doing as well as you should in school, getting stuff done that you want to do, and feeling confident. It's fine not to trust one person, but if you feel like you can't trust *anyone* because they might be out to get you, you don't have anyone to learn from or spend time with. If you hear or see one or two things that aren't there, that usually isn't cause for concern, but if you start feeling unsure about whether you can trust *any* of your own thoughts or perceptions, it can feel lonely, confusing, scary, or weird. These experiences can affect your ability to feel like you can handle any problem that comes your way. They can eat away at your ability to feel safe, secure, relaxed, and confident. For these reasons, most of my suggestions for you are going to be around helping you experience fewer of these aberrant experiences.

Based on what I learned about you during the assessment, I think there are **four things** that will help you feel most comfortable. I am making these suggestions because I want you to be able to always show how smart and talented you are. I also want you to feel comfortable tackling any challenge that comes your way, and confident in being your best self.

Here are some things that might help you do that:

1. I am confident you'll continue to benefit from working with a counselor to help you learn more about yourself and how to harness your strengths and be aware of your weaknesses. Counselors have specific techniques and tools that you can learn to feel more confident about what you're good at. They can also help you get better at things that are hard for you. For example, a counselor can help you learn how to "let go" of thoughts and feelings that you don't need any more. A counselor can also help you learn how to read other people's subtle social cues. A counselor would also be a great person to talk to whenever you start having experiences that make you feel strange or unreal.
2. You should continue to get a little bit of support in the school setting, with a specific focus on making it a positive place for you. As you go through high school, you should try to choose classes that are a good match for your interests and learning style. When you pick electives, try to focus on classes that are a good fit for you – classes where you get to pursue your passions, where you'll be matched with teachers that you "click" with, where you can focus on one subject at a time, where you can work in depth without having to multitask, and where you can get some supports that help not feel too 'rushed' under time pressure.
3. I also want you to stay active and involved in things that make you feel good. Getting good sleep, good nutrition, avoiding caffeine (or other substances), and getting regular exercise will help you feel balanced. Based on how you completed the personality questionnaires, you may especially like hands-on, individual sports and activities, like swimming, martial arts, animation, and volunteering.
4. Your profile shows that how you feel physically and how you feel mentally are closely connected. That means you should continue to meet with Dr. Psychiatrist to monitor how you are feeling physically, emotionally, and mentally. There are medications that can help you if your aberrant experiences start becoming too frequent or bothersome. Dr. Psychiatrist would be the right person to talk to about that option. She can also help you with ideas about how to support your physical health.

Most of all, I want you to know that you are an amazing young man with a lot of strengths. If you have questions, ask your parents to contact me and we can set up another time to talk.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Nelson, Ph.D., ABPP, ABPdN