

Dear Zoey:

When I met you a few weeks ago, we did an *evaluation*. An evaluation is a way to learn more about you. I wanted to learn how you think, feel, and see yourself and other people. It was great getting to know you while you were here for the evaluation. I wrote this letter to thank you for working so hard. Thank you for being so honest. I also wanted to let you know what I learned about you.

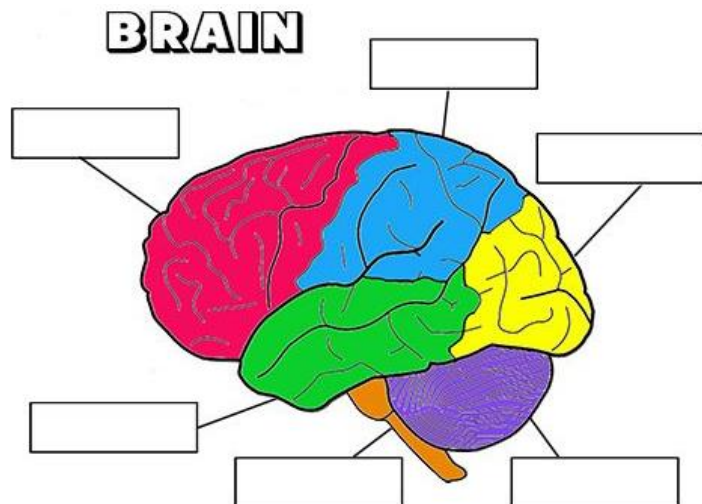


Every kid has unique strengths and weaknesses. Every kid also has different way of seeing the world and different emotional struggles they are going through. The evaluation gave us a lot of information about what you are good at, as well as what is hard for you. The evaluation also told us about how you are thinking and feeling compared to other kids. I know this information will help you, your family, and teachers plan for your future.

Some of the things we did the day you were here told me what your **strengths** are. I learned what you are really good at. I learned:

- You can think deeply to solve all kinds of problems. Some of the problems I asked you to solve used words, and some were hands-on or used pictures. You were good at all of these kinds of problems. You can solve just as many problems as other kids your age!
- When you are calm and comfortable, you can think and work quickly. You also have an amazing memory for stuff you only have to remember for a minute or two. For example, you can remember three-step directions, or a bunch of numbers like 548163. You also have a good memory for stuff you need to remember for a long time.

Your Strengths:
Here are of some things you're great at!



- You also did well on tasks that look at other skills that help kids do well in school. You can understand others and tell others how you feel or what you think. You also have good skills that help you see, draw, move your muscles, and stay organized. These skills will help you understand other people and tell them what you know. These skills will also help you show what you've learned.
- Sometimes I think you wonder if there is something wrong with you, or if your mind is working "okay." The results of the evaluation show that your mind is working really well. You know and can do a lot of things. You work hard to show what you know and what you can do. You also want to do well and have people like you. These are all wonderful qualities about you. These qualities will take you far in life.

Every kid is on their own journey! Some kids' brains grow faster and some kids' brains grow slower. Here's where you are!



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

- During testing with me, you sometimes worked at a slower pace than you needed to, but other times you rushed. Sometimes kids work too fast or too slow when they are *worried*. You also seemed really concerned about making a mistake or small error. You often told me you were not doing well on something, even when you were doing incredible work. I think *you* are your own worst critic. You may feel like there is a voice in your head that wants you to focus more on any mistake you make (or might make), rather than appreciating your strengths and hard work.
- You do best on tasks when you know what to expect. New tasks, or situations that are very unfamiliar, might "throw you for a loop" sometimes. Sometimes it might be difficult for you to "shift gears" to think about something else, or to start a new task.
- When you are anxious or uncomfortable, you might feel like your mind is "going blank." It may also be really hard for you to pay attention when you are nervous or worried.



Important!

Your brain is like a muscle. If something is hard for you, don't worry. You can build your skills. You just have to practice!

This evaluation also revealed a lot about your *personality* and feelings. The evaluation taught me some words others might use to describe you: smart, creative, kind, good at noticing details, cooperative, interesting and fun to be with, interested in other people. Others might also notice, though, that you take criticism *very* personally. You might think someone is telling you that you are doing something wrong, when they just want to offer you help or a suggestion. Teachers might also say that you do your best work when you're feeling calm and comfortable.

You also completed some questionnaires asking about your mood, or how you feel most of the time. I ask questions about mood because how a kid is feeling can have a big impact on how they are thinking and how well they can do in school. You reported really high levels of anxiety and sadness. You reported that you have a lot of worries, and you think about them a lot of time. You feel what we call *anxiety*, which is when you think a lot about everything. You also reported that you feel *nervous, tense, and hopeless* a lot of the time. You also reported that you feel your anxiety and sadness in your mind and in your body. Kids who are anxious and sad have trouble paying attention and feeling calm. They also have tense muscles. They can have trouble sleeping and eating, and they often get a lot of headaches or other aches and pains.

Based on what you said on the questionnaires, you're experiencing more symptoms of anxiety and sadness than most other girls. You are a really smart, capable, hard-working kid, but currently, you are also really anxious and unhappy. This is not because of something you did. It also does not mean something is "wrong" with you.



Some people are just born more sensitive to worries and feelings than others. We are all born with the ability to worry about things – that's what keeps us safe and helps us solve problems. You can think of that part of the brain as an "alarm" that signals when there is possible danger. People are born with different alarms – some are really sensitive, and go off all the time, even when things are not really dangerous. Other people's alarms are not very sensitive, and do not go off as easily. Your brain came with a really sensitive alarm.

On the one hand, that's good – you are amazing at noticing things and making sure you and everyone you love is safe and secure. On the other hand, your brain often tells you that there is something to worry about even when there isn't. Your brain is constantly “on the lookout” for problems or things to get stressed about. That means you are stressed and worried a lot of the time. You might even be stressed and worried when there is nothing to worry about. Being that stressed and worried a lot of the time also uses up a lot of your “mental energy.” It might be hard to think, concentrate, and do your best when your brain is busy worrying about everything. It's almost impossible to share your creativity and enthusiasm with others when anxiety or depression is sucking up your attention.

Based on what I learned about you, I think there are **four things** that will help you. I am making these suggestions because I want you to always be able to show how talented and hard-working you are. I also want you to feel comfortable tackling any problem that comes your way. Here are some things that might help you do that:

- You should keep being challenged at school so you can keep learning new things!
- You should continue to work with someone who can help you feel less anxious, sad, and scared. You know how a sports coach helps athletes get in the right “mental game” for winning by helping them think positively, visualize success, handle nerves, get over failures, and talk to themselves in positive ways? I want that for you, but around everyday life. I think a feelings coach can help you reach greater heights. I think you're ready for training in this area, because you are smart and capable and can work really hard. I suggested to your parents that you are ready for this “next step.”
- One of the things that helps people who have brains that are oversensitive to danger is to use a medication that helps “turn the volume down” on the alarms. You want to notice danger, but not worry when there is nothing to worry about. A lot of kids (and adults) find the right balance for their brain's “alarm” by taking medication. I think you should keep taking medication to help you feel calm and comfortable.
- I also want you to stay active and involved in things that make you feel good. Getting good sleep, healthy food, keeping close with your friends, and getting regular exercise will help you feel balanced. You might also want to try calming activities like meditation or yoga!



Most of all, I want you to know that you are an amazing girl with a lot of strengths. If you have questions, let me know and we can set up another time to talk. Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephanie Nelson".

Stephanie Nelson, Ph.D., ABPP, ABPdN