

Mental Health Evaluations

(Revised 12/30/22)

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Forms

The following forms are referenced in this file:

- 04-24A-P Authorization to Use or Disclose Protected Health Information – All Providers
- 04-24A-Psp Authorization to Use or Disclose Protected Health Information – All Providers (Spanish)
- 04-24C Order Authorizing Examination and Treatment - Court
- 04-24P Consent for Treatment - Parent
- 04-24Psp Consent for Treatment – Parent (Spanish)
- 04-130C Payment Authorization for Mental Health Services (CWS/CMS Template)
- 04-178 Request for TERM-Appointed Evaluator (CWS/CMS Template)
- 04-236 Psychological/Psychiatric Report Cover Sheet

Staff Resources

For added resource, SWs may use the tip sheets below for additional information, which includes links to evaluation questions that Optum TERM will provide to the evaluator.

- When to Refer for a Psychological/Psychiatric/Neuropsychological Evaluation - CHILD/YOUTH
 - When to Refer for a Psychological/Psychiatric/ Neuropsychological Evaluation - PARENT
 - Psychological Evaluation FAQ
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Policy

The decision to refer a parent or a child, youth, or nonminor dependent (herein referred to as youth) for a mental health evaluation (e.g., psychological, psychiatric, or neuropsychological) is best discussed using the CANS (Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths) and in conversation between members of the Child and Family Team (CFT) in the CFT Meeting (CFTM), which guides services and case planning decisions.

Staff will refer to the [Psychological Evaluation](#), [Psychiatric Evaluation](#), and [Neuropsychological Evaluation](#) sections below to determine the conditions in which a parent or youth may be referred, for a mental health evaluation.

There may be evaluations that the parent and youth need that are outside the scope of Optum TERM (e.g., Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders). It is recommended that SWs consult with the CWS Staff Psychologist prior to completing the 04-178.

When a mental health evaluation is being considered for a youth prior to the Jurisdiction/Disposition Hearing, the SW will ensure that the following steps are taken:

- Obtain a signed 04-24P/04-24Psp or 04-24C
- Notice the Minor's Attorney of the request for evaluation
- Share the evaluation report with the Court and Minor's Attorney
- Share the evaluation with Probation Officer, when applicable

Psychological Evaluation

The table below lists reasons when a parent or youth may be referred for a psychological evaluation.

Youth	Parent
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adoption Assessment for Telling2. Diagnostic Clarification and Treatment Recommendations, e.g.,<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Therapist recommendation• Recent escalation and/or significant symptoms of emotional or behavioral disturbance e.g., escalating/significant behavioral/mood symptoms, concerns for suicidal ideation/homicidal ideation/self-harm, or lack of safety related to the youth's behavior) and an evaluation is necessary to clarify diagnosis and appropriate interventions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Diagnostic Clarification, e.g.,<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Therapist Recommendation• Parent is not making expected progress or mental health/behavioral issues interfering with progress in case plan• Psychiatric evaluation recommendation• Court ordered2. WIC Family Code Section 7827 (Mental incapacity or disorder that renders the parent unable to care for and control the youth adequately) NOTE: Do not use #2 unless parent's mental health history/developmental delays make the parent unlikely to benefit from services

Psychological Evaluation (cont.)

Youth	Parent
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased level of care or continued Short Term Residential Treatment Program (STRTP) placement is being considered and an evaluation is requested to guide treatment and understanding of the youth's needs• 300 (C) – Serious Emotional Damage (evidenced by severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or untoward aggressive behavior toward self or others, as a result of the conduct of the parent or guardian or who has no parent or guardian capable of providing appropriate care)• Court ordered	

SWs are encouraged but not required to discuss requests for psychological evaluations with the CWS Staff Psychologist for added guidance.

Court ordered psychological evaluations must be performed by evaluators on the Optum TERM (Treatment Evaluation and Resource Management) panel list unless there are extenuating circumstances approved by the CWS Staff Psychologist.

The psychological evaluation may take 4-8 hours or more and will include an in-depth clinical interview and formal psychological testing. Interviews with important collaterals are typically included.

Regulations for psychological evaluation:

- In cases of sexual abuse with a youth under the age of 15, any mental exam of the youth shall not exceed three hours, including breaks.
- If needed, the court may grant an extension of the three-hour limit for good cause. The SW will need to submit an Ex-parte requesting the extension.

The completed report is due back to Optum TERM within 30 days of assignment and receipt of all relevant case-related records from the SW, whichever is later.

**Psychological
Evaluation –
Adoption Cases**

For youth age 6 and older who may need a psychological evaluation prior to finalization of an adoption, refer to the Developmental/Psychological Assessment Policy for Children Being Adopted policy for additional information.

Prospective Adoptive Parent

A psychological evaluation of a prospective adoptive parent can be requested in consultation with the CWS Staff Psychologist if they deny significant mental illness, but CWS suspects that mental illness is contributing to safety and risk concerns or placement issues. This request will be initiated by the Resource Family Approval (RFA) SW as part of the RFA assessment, however the evaluation is not requested or performed through Optum TERM. The Adoptions Children’s Worker may discuss with the RFA SW the need for the evaluation. Schedule a Case Consultation to discuss the concerns and whether a psychological evaluation may be warranted. Ensure the CWS Staff Psychologist is included in the case consultation. For additional information, refer to the Requesting a Psychological Evaluation for a Resource Family Approval (RFA) Applicant policy.

**Psychiatric
Evaluation
(Medication vs.
Non- Medication)**

Medication Psychiatric Evaluation

A medication psychiatric evaluation is the first step in assessing a parent or youth’s psychiatric needs, including medication.

Optum TERM evaluators do not prescribe or manage medications and this type of evaluation is not requested through Optum TERM. A medication psychiatric evaluation is conducted and completed through a community health clinic prior to a non-medication psychiatric evaluation.

The table below lists the process when a medication psychiatric evaluation is needed:

If ...	Then...
the parent is privately insured	parent will call mental health number on their insurance card for a referral.
the parent is Medi-Cal insured	parent will call Access and Crisis Line (ACL) : (888) 724-7240 and ask for a psychiatrist that treats adults.
the parent has no insurance	parent can be seen at a County operated or contracted mental health clinic. The ACL can provide a list of clinics and their contact information near the parent’s address or can obtain additional resources with Emergency and Crisis Services for Adults .
the youth is a dependent (regardless of insurance coverage)	SW can refer the youth to Vista Hill Clinic for a medication evaluation and medication management on an interim basis while they are waiting to see a psychiatrist.

Psychiatric Evaluation (Non-Medication vs. Medication) (cont.)

For dependent and out-of-home youths prescribed with psychotropic medication(s), court approval is needed. Refer to the Psychotropic Medications policy for additional information.

Non-Medication Psychiatric Evaluation

A consult with the CWS Staff Psychologist is required prior to requesting a non-medication psychiatric evaluation.

Requesting a non-medication psychiatric evaluation through Optum TERM is **rare**. In these situations, the parent or youth should already be receiving psychiatric treatment, but there is no evidence of progress, current medications are not alleviating the symptoms, and there may be confusion as to the diagnosis (possibly due to substance use, other medical and organic conditions, traumatic brain injury, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, etc.).

A non-medication psychiatric evaluation would provide recommendations to help a parent or youth function better in the community and make progress in their treatment or case plan.

The table below lists reasons when a parent or youth may be referred for a non-medication psychiatric evaluation.

Youth	Parent
<p>Youth must have had a medication evaluation within the past 6 months. This evaluation will review current medications, as part of the comprehensive evaluation of medical and mental health status.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Therapist Recommendation 2. Psychological Evaluation Recommendation 3. Youth shows signs of serious mental illness (SMI) (e.g., appears to exhibit psychotic symptoms and/or significant emotional/behavioral challenges) and current treatment approaches are not ameliorating symptoms. Consider the following conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Youth is on multiple medications but symptoms and functioning have not improved or have worsened ○ Youth may have a history of repeated psychiatric hospitalizations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Therapist Recommendation 2. Psychological Evaluation Recommendation 3. Parent is showing signs of SMI that interferes with adherence to case plan 4. Court ordered

Psychiatric Evaluation (Non-Medication vs. Medication) (cont.)

Youth	Parent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Behavioral acting out may be jeopardizing placement and/or academic functioning ○ Youth may be exhibiting behaviors that put the child at risk of harm to self or others <p>4. Court ordered</p>	

SMI is defined as a mental, behavioral or emotional disorder resulting in serious functional impairment, which substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities (e.g., current psychotic symptoms, severe major depression, and severe bipolar disorder)

Neuropsychological Evaluation

Prior to requesting a neuropsychological evaluation, the following must be completed:

- Consult with the CWS Staff Psychologist
- Assess whether the parent or youth is best served by San Diego Regional Center
- A neurologist or general practitioner must see the parent or youth prior to the referral

The table below lists reasons when a parent or youth may be referred for a neuropsychological evaluation.

Youth	Parent
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Therapist Recommendation 2. Psychological/Psychiatric Recommendation 3. Youth is showing signs of cognitive deficits and there is concern for a history of developmental or brain trauma 4. Court ordered 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Therapist Recommendation 2. Psychological/Psychiatric Evaluation Recommendation 3. There is concern for developmental or brain trauma or progressive cognitive decline that is impacting progress with the case plan and/or effective parenting 4. Court ordered

Authorization Process

If a psychological, non-medication psychiatric, or neuropsychological evaluation appears to be warranted, the table below lists next steps to authorize the process.

Who	Action
SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consult with Staff Psychologist for Psychiatric (Non Medication) and Neuropsychological Evaluation requests.• If the parent lives in San Diego County:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Complete the 04-178 and submit to PSS and CWS Manager for approval○ Submit the approved 04-178 to the regional JELS staff to upload• If the parent lives out-of-county or if a Non-TERM Provider is required because the client has linguistic, cultural, or other special needs that cannot be met through the Optum TERM panel, complete Section G in the 04-178 and consult with the CWS Staff Psychologist.• Gather all prior mental health, educational, and CWS records.• Once an evaluator is assigned:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Contact the evaluator to determine how they will receive records for review prior to the evaluation and○ provide the evaluator's name/address/phone to the parent.
PSS	Review and sign 04-178
Regional JELS Staff	Upload documents to Optum TERM JELS

For payment authorization of psychological evaluations, see the Payment for Psychological Evaluation section of the Mental Health Services – Payment Authorization policy for additional information.

Youth in Juvenile Hall or PCC**For Dual Jurisdiction cases and CWS is the lead agency:**

When a psychological evaluation is court ordered for a youth in Juvenile Hall or PCC the psychological evaluation is due to Optum TERM within ten (10) business days from the date the Optum TERM provider accepts the assignment AND receives all relevant case-related records from the SW.

Youth in Juvenile Hall or PCC (cont.)

The following table shows who is responsible for what action to meet the 10-day deadline:

Who	Action
SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow SW Steps noted in Authorization Process • Clearly note the location of the youth on the 04-178 • Ensure that suitable office space will be available for the evaluation to take place at Juvenile Hall or PCC • Immediately send (or hand deliver) all of the necessary documents (noted below) to the evaluator • Share evaluation with the Probation Officer, when applicable, once completed
Optum TERM Administrative Support Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm the placement location prior to assigning the evaluator • Inform the prospective evaluator of the timeline and ensure that the evaluator agrees

Documents to Send to Evaluator

The following CWS records are to be forwarded to the evaluator as soon as one is assigned and *prior* to the evaluation appointment:

Youth	Parent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent to Treat (04-24C or 04-24P) • Authorization to Use or Disclose Private Health Information (04-24A-P or 04-29) • Special Matter Order (SMO) - Release of Health Information Order • Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS/CANS-EC) • Court Reports • Case Plan • Case Notes (for VS cases) • Health Assessments • History of Child Placement Report • Psychological Evaluation(s) and Treatment Plans(s) (if applicable) • Current HEP (if applicable) • Current IEP (if applicable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorization to Use or Disclose Private Health Information (04-24A-P or 04-29) • Court Reports • Case Plan • Case Notes (for VS cases) • Health Assessments, including psychiatric hospitalization discharge summaries • Psychological Evaluation(s) and Treatment Plans(s) (if applicable)

NOTE: Due to confidentiality laws, case information that identifies clients cannot be emailed to anyone outside the county email system without county-approved safeguards. Refer to Email Policy for additional information.

Evaluations and Court Reports

Once the mental health evaluation is completed and provided to the SW, it is distributed to the attorneys via Court JELS and a hard copy is filed with the court. The evaluation is not attached to the parent or youth copies of the reports.

The 04-236 must be placed on top of all evaluations when attaching the evaluation to the court report, using the procedures below:

Step	Who	Action
1	SW	Complete the 04-236 and identify the mental health evaluation for clerical staff
2	Clerical Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Copy the evaluation and attach a yellow cover sheet to the top of the evaluation• Attach the evaluation at the end of the court report attachments

NOTE: Initial/updated treatment plans and progress reports from individual and group therapy are "regular" attachments and are not to be included under the yellow sheet. The SW will reference information from mental health evaluations **minimally** in their court report.

Concerns with Evaluations

Late Evaluations

If the evaluation was completed but has not been received within 30 days of assignment, the SW will contact Optum TERM to determine the reasons for the delay and the estimated date when the report will be forwarded to CWS. If the evaluation cannot be submitted to Court for the next hearing, the SW will explain in the court report the reason(s) for the delay.

Optum TERM policy requires providers to submit all evaluations and reports directly to Optum TERM for quality review. Providers are prohibited from sending copy of an evaluation/report to the SW before it is reviewed.

When the evaluation/report is reviewed and approved, it will be uploaded to Optum TERM JELS. This procedure ensures that if an evaluation/report needs to be revised, all parties will have the same version of the report.

Deficient Evaluations

All evaluations go through Optum TERM for quality review. Sometimes an evaluation falls short of Optum TERM standards but can be corrected subsequent to a discussion between Optum TERM and the evaluator.

Concerns with Evaluations (cont.)

If Optum TERM deems an evaluation to be "deficient", the SW will be advised of what will happen next. The SW will then incorporate the following language where appropriate in the court report:

"The court-ordered psychological evaluation of (name of client) that was conducted by Dr. _____ was found to have deficiencies upon review by Optum TERM that rendered it unacceptable for submission to the court."

Sometimes a SW will have questions about a report that was reviewed and released by Optum TERM. SWs may contact the CWS Staff Psychologist to discuss any questions they might have about the evaluation.

Parent Attorney Responsibilities

Per Rule of Court 6.6.12, adopted on 1/1/2013, Disclosure of Psychological Evaluations and Psychiatric Evaluations, no attorney may disclose a psychological evaluation or psychiatric evaluation contained in a juvenile court record to any parent, youth, legal guardian, or de facto parent, including the person who is the subject of the evaluation, except upon order of the court based on a showing of good cause.

Request for Copies of Mental Health Evaluation and Feedback Session

The parent has a right to request a copy of their own mental health evaluation. If the court, finding good cause to do so, orders the evaluation report released, the SW will request that the evaluator provide a feedback session prior to the parent receiving a copy of their evaluation. This process allows the evaluator to review the report in a therapeutic setting with the parent before the evaluation report is released. The SW may not release a copy of the parent's evaluation and will instead, refer the parent to their attorney.

A court order is not necessary for the evaluator to provide a feedback session to the parent. The SW will contact the evaluator to discuss providing the feedback session.

If the evaluator...	then the SW will...
agrees to the feedback session,	submit the 04-130C (select the appropriate CPT code for the feedback session in the Evaluations section of the form to authorize payment.
does not agree to the feedback session,	consult with CWS Staff Psychologist and discuss the next steps.

Refer to the Confidentiality Guide when a parent's mental health evaluation is being requested by another party or agency.

Bonding Study

Under WIC 366.26, an exception to adoption applies where a court finds the youth has a substantial, positive emotional attachment to their biological parent due to the parent being consistently present in the youth's life, and the harm of severing that relationship outweighs the benefits of adoption. In *In re Caden C.*, the California Supreme Court recognized that bonding studies can be informative in assessing the parent-youth relationship at a WIC 366.26 hearing.

A bonding study is outside Optum TERM's scope of service. When a SW wants a bonding study to help with assessment of the parent-youth relationship in a case, the SW will complete the following:

- Consult with PSS and CWS Staff Psychologist to find an evaluator
- Obtain a court order authorizing the bonding study and release of records from the dependency file to the professional conducting the bonding study for purposes of conducting the assessment

NOTE: CWS cannot release dependency records for this type of assessment without involving the court under local San Diego Rules of Court.

- Arrange for the bonding study to occur
- Inform the youth's caregiver of the bonding study
- Provide any necessary background information to the evaluator
- Authorize payment by completing the 04-130, obtain the required signatures, and send to Fiscal to process payment
- Provide bonding study to court and all parties upon completion

Conflict of Interest

No evaluator will provide therapy/treatment for any member of the family if they are completing, or have completed, a court-ordered evaluation for any member of that family. Psychological Evaluations are distinct from the treatment process and having an evaluator provide therapy or vice versa is a conflict of interest.

It is against CWS policy to have one provider evaluate both parents or any two members of one family. At times, it may be acceptable to refer siblings to the same evaluator. Consult with CWS Staff Psychologist.

Alignment with SET

This policy supports [SET Value 1](#) and the guiding principles of partnering with the whole family when assessing and providing mental health services to children, youth, and family to create long-term safety, ongoing permanency, and well-being. It also supports [SET Value 3](#) and the agency practices of valuing the need for ongoing needs assessment and identifying ways to mitigate the trauma using a trauma-informed perspective.
