



YOUR FREE RESOURCE

# Cognitive Assessment Observation Checklist

DEVELOPED BY

**Lydia Meem**

Clinical Psychologist  
BA(Psych)Hons, MPsych(Clin), MAPS, CClin



 (02) 4967 3363

 PO Box 747 The Junction NSW 2291

 office@autismunderstanding.com.au

 www.autismunderstanding.com.au

# About me.

Hello! I'm Lydia Meem, founder of Autism Understanding psychology practice in Newcastle, Australia.

As a neurodivergent clinical psychologist, author, speaker, and clinical supervisor, I'm dedicated to enhancing the psychological assessment for Autistic individuals and their families.

I'm also passionate about promoting school strategies for neurodivergent students to engage, learn, and thrive.



I help psychologists, allied health professionals and teachers create neurodiversity affirming spaces and practices through online tools, interactive workshops, national and international conferences, supervision and retreats.

I've been working with neurodivergent individuals since 1998 and I am a Fellow of the APS College of Clinical Psychologists. My book, [Beyond IQ Scores](#), combines case-review research and clinical insights, guiding clinicians through psychometric assessments, enhancing their capacity to discern and interpret subtle signs of autism and other developmental differences.

If you'd like to dive deeper into autism and ADHD assessment and consultation, I invite you to explore my 2024 [Neurodiversity Affirming Clinician](#) training. Packed with tools, templates, case studies, resources, and strategies, it empowers you to confidently craft a neurodiversity-friendly experience for your clients.

For primary and high school teachers seeking insights and practical strategies in the classroom and playground, my on-demand course, [Supporting Autistic Students](#), is tailored for you. Let's connect and collaborate to understand, celebrate, and accommodate the full range of human brain styles!

# Hello and welcome.

Welcome! The Cognitive Assessment Observation Checklist is designed for immediate use after a cognitive assessment, while your observations are still fresh in your mind. Refer to it later when incorporating your observations and assessment modifications into your report.

Developed by Lydia Meem, this checklist draws from her case review research. Initially presented at the Asia Pacific Autism Conference in 2015, it has undergone updates and now incorporates neurodiversity affirming language and aligns with Lydia's book, Beyond IQ Scores.

Beyond IQ Scores takes you through every stage of the assessment process - from initial engagement with children and families to the nuanced analysis of responses, observations and neurodiversity affirming report writing. It dives deep into each section of the Cognitive Assessment Observation Checklist, including:

- Observations worth noting.
- Examples of how to include these observations in your reports.
- Could it be Autism?
- What else could it be?
- Questions and observations in the classroom, playground and at home.
- Further assessments to consider.
- Strategies to include in your report.

Scan the QR codes below to share a free copy of the checklist, and to learn more about the Beyond IQ Scores book.

SCAN ME!



GET THE BOOK!

# The checklist.

## Rapport and interest in the assessor

- Not interested in making “small talk” with the assessor.
- Asks assessor if they like \_\_\_\_, but doesn't wait for their response (uses the question to switch topics and provide information about their special interest as a way of connecting).
- Needs a rationale for participating/completing assessment.
- Needs rewards for completing subtests/assessment.

## Eye gaze and joint attention

- Less eye contact than you would expect.
- Doesn't watch you do the examples.
- Needs extra prompts to look at the book.

## Self-directed versus following your lead

- May not acknowledge the assessor's agenda, preferring to pursue their own ideas.
- Wants to make own designs with blocks or puzzles.
- No sense of urgency in timed subtests.
- Stops to eat, play, or go to toilet during a timed subtest.
- Helps themselves to stopwatch, materials, suitcase.
- Insists on turning pages of book themselves.
- Takes the pen out of your hand, wants to do sample items themselves, not watch you demonstrate.

**Social questions and Double Empathy Problem**

- Logical or rule-based responses to social questions, without reference to how another person might be feeling (e.g. apologising so you don't get in trouble, rather than so the other person feels better).
- Scores higher on fact-based questions than social questions (e.g. can answer questions about justice and fairness, but will say "I don't know" for other social questions).

**Response to change in routine**

- Repeatedly mentions what they're "missing out on", even if they don't enjoy the activity.
- Distressed/agitated by taking a different route to come to the assessment.
- Says "I haven't been here before" several times.
- Mentions disliking changes in routine that their peers might find exciting or interesting (e.g. excursions, sports carnivals, substitute teachers, out of uniform days, special assemblies, holidays, parties).

**Performance anxiety, learning difficulties, and coping with mistakes**

- Visibly baulks at questions, can't think "on the spot".
- Worried about reading, says "I forgot my glasses".
- Baulks or comments "I'm not good at maths".
- Worried about making mistakes.
- Needs additional reassurance or praise that they are doing well, that the test includes items for older students, and the assessor doesn't expect 100% performance.
- Asking "What was my time?" or grabs the stopwatch.
- Asking if answers are correct repeatedly.
- Attempting to look at manual or form for answers (this can be subtle or not so subtle).

**Detail focus and bottom-up processing**

- Notices small, specific details in pictures.
- Notices differences rather than similarities.

**Inventing own rules and deviating from instructions**

- Wants to “go back” to a favourite activity, item, or picture.
- Wants to ‘use’ a favourite picture again.
- Disregards item order, does favourite shapes first.
- Creates a personal marking system instead of using the system you’ve demonstrated.
- Responds in unexpected ways (e.g. touches items with toes or nose rather than finger).
- Matches blocks directly onto the book, not on the table.

**Cognitive flexibility and routines**

- Repeats words or phrases (e.g. when asked how things are alike, repeated the phrase “They can both be green” or “It’s very important in your life” for several items).
- Uses previous instructions for later task (e.g. Using Digit Span forwards or backwards instructions for the Letter-Number Sequencing task).
- Continues to pick items from same row (e.g. continuing to select two items from the top row after being reminded to pick one from each row in the Picture Concepts task).
- Continues guessing items beyond picture (e.g. when asked “What’s missing in the picture?”, keeps finding something missing outside the picture instead of within it).
- Touches every option, not just the answer.
- When faced with multiple response options, consistently indicates only the responses they are excluding (e.g. ‘not that one, not that one’), even after a reminder to either touch just one, or to state their final response.

**Visual problem-solving and semantic categories**

- Responds quickly and accurately on visual tasks.
- Picks items based on shape (e.g. items that are both round or long) or by colour rather than grouping items by semantic categories (e.g. marine animals, things that blow in the wind, things that are alive, stationery items, clothing).

**Special interests and connection making**

- Asks questions that seem unrelated to the test items.
- Mentions special interests with a tangential connection or no connection to the topic (e.g. “Ben10 does that”, “Did you know that it takes more muscles to frown than smile?” or “I made my own server”).
- Gives a list of facts, doesn’t want to stop (e.g. needs to tell you everything they know about dinosaurs in response to “What is a fossil?”).

**Sensory overload and sensory seeking**

- Can do practice items but baulks or scribbles on a busy page with too many items.
- Distracted by visual or auditory stimulation (e.g. posters, phone ringing, clock ticking).
- Distracted by patterns in carpet, blinds, fan, “dancing dust”, turning lights on and off.
- Touches, sniffs, licks, chews on self/others, clothes, pencils, materials, toys, or furniture.
- Seeks sensory stimulation (e.g. toys that light up, spin, make sounds, sparkle, or are squishy).

**High energy, impulsive, or repetitive motion**

- Responds before instructions are finished.
- Doesn’t sit still, but kneels, stands, rocks on their chair, adjusts their position frequently.
- Sweeps hand over the desk, taps their fingers, taps or twirls their pencil.

- Kicks legs under chair, bounces, sways in seat.
- Needs breaks to move and stretch.
- Climbs onto furniture, spins in an office chair.
- Helps themselves to toys, stationery, computer, phone, cords, light switches.
- Lines up, stacks, sorts items by colour or size, drops blocks off a table over and over.

### **Expressing dislike and absconding**

- Expressing dislike of test items or frustration with the testing process.
- Refusing to attempt items.
- Throws materials.
- Runs away from table.
- Runs out of room.
- Hides themselves or test materials (e.g. places blocks or themselves under the table).

- Spiky Subtest Profile**

**Congratulations!**  
**You have reached the end.**





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