

Autism Spectrum Disorder: recognition, referral and diagnosis for children aged 4-18

What is the Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Assessment pathway?

The aim of the ASD pathway is to provide a coordinated diagnostic process for children and young people aged 4 to 18 years old.

Recognition

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) develop at a different rate and may not develop skills in the same order as typically developing children.

If you have concerns about your child's development please contact your GP, school nurse or School SENCO who will discuss with you whether your child should be referred for assessment.

Diagnostic assessment

Comprehensive assessment is available for children aged from 4 to 18 years old.

Once referred to the CAMHS, your child will be allocated a care coordinator. This may be a CAMHS nurse, senior CAMHS practitioner or clinical psychologist. They will meet with you to explain the process and agree an assessment plan. Please note there is currently a substantial waiting list for this service.

A member of the team will complete a full developmental history with you. We will gather information from the school and will request reports from professionals that have been involved in your child's care, including educational psychology and North Tyneside Council Language and Communication Team. An observation of your child at school may also be arranged. We may also complete an Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS), which is a play-based assessment undertaken with your child. If appropriate, additional assessments may also be completed to help us understand your child and their difficulties.

Once the assessment is completed, we will meet with you to discuss the outcome. The assessment can either take place over a number of separate appointments over a specific period of time, or if you prefer, and we feel it would be possible, you can choose for all of these activities to be undertaken on the same day.

What happens if your child is diagnosed with ASD?

If your child is diagnosed with ASD you will be provided with an information pack detailing local and national support services. If you are happy for us to let the North Tyneside Council Language and Communication Team know about your child's diagnosis, you will be provided with the opportunity to attend the Cygnet Parent Programme. You need to complete and return the 'expression of interest form' provided in the pack to be eligible. Cygnet is a Barnardo's programme aimed to empower and help parents/carers to support their child's social communication and appropriate behaviour.

You will also be offered the opportunity to attend our Understanding Autism Parent workshop. This workshop is designed to help develop your understanding of autism and provides the opportunity for you to meet other parents of children diagnosed with ASD, enabling you to share experiences and strategies.

Post Diagnosis

Currently, CAMHS do not offer ongoing interventions for young people diagnosed with ASD unless they are presenting with mental health difficulties that meet the criteria for specialist CAMHS.