

The assessment and diagnosis of **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** in children and young people

Information for Primary Schools

This leaflet provides information about what you can do if you have concerns that a child or young person you know may have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

What is ASD?

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people and the world around them. It is thought to affect at least one per cent of the population. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people with autism share certain areas of difficulty, their condition will affect them in different ways.

What types of difficulties might a primary school-aged child have?

(From SIGN 98)

Communication impairments:

- Abnormalities in language development, including muteness
- Odd or inappropriate prosody
- Persistent echolalia
- Reference to self as 'you', 'she' or 'he' beyond three years
- Unusual vocabulary for child's age/social group
- Limited use of language for communication and/or tendency to talk freely only about specific topics.

Social impairments

- Inability to join in play of other children, or inappropriate attempts at joint play (may manifest as aggressive or disruptive behaviour)
- Lack of awareness of classroom 'norms' (criticising teachers, overt unwillingness to cooperate in classroom activities, inability to appreciate or follow current trends)
- Easily overwhelmed by social and other stimulation
- Failure to relate normally to adults (too intense / no relationship)
- Showing extreme reactions to invasion of personal space and resistance to being hurried.

Impairments of interests, activities and/or behaviours

- Lack of flexible cooperative imaginative play / creativity
- Difficulty in organising self in relation to unstructured space (e.g. hugging the perimeter of playgrounds, halls)
- Inability to cope with change or unstructured situations, even ones that other children enjoy (school trips, teachers being away, etc).

Other factors

- Unusual profile of skills / deficits
- Any other evidence of odd behaviours, including unusual responses to sensory stimuli.

How should I raise concerns?

Families may approach the school with a specific concern that their child may have ASD. Alternately, concerns may be raised by a professional following developmental review or observations in class.

It can be difficult for professionals to raise concerns with families. Rather than talking in terms of diagnostic labels, it may be more appropriate to give descriptions of behaviours or developmental concerns. If they do not share your concerns, you may need to make this a gradual process.

Who should I contact to make a request for assistance?

In Lothian we have developed a multidisciplinary pathway for the assessment and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in children and young people.

This pathway has been developed using national guidelines and aims to provide timely assessment and where appropriate, diagnosis close to home if possible. The process is usually initiated by a referral to the most appropriate members of the multidisciplinary team.

For young children up to the age of seven years, this would involve making a request to community child health and speech and language therapy. Your local team contacts are provided at the end of this information sheet.

With children and young people aged 7 and above, the initial concern may have been raised because of anxiety, over-activity or significant behaviour issues. These children may be more suitably supported by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

If CAMHS already have involvement, please contact the team in the first instance to discuss your concerns.

What information do I need to gather?

Surveillance tools such as SIGN guidance can be helpful to ensure relevant observations are collected.

The assessment process involves gathering information about the child and young person in the form of a developmental assessment, as well as clinical and contextual observations.

The local staged assessment process should be implemented as soon as possible. GIRFEC child planning meetings will ensure families are supported, regardless of diagnostic labels, as well as ensuring a joined up approach between agencies for assessment and support.

Request for assistance (Local Teams):

Edinburgh:

Tel:

Community Child Health:

Community Child Health Department,
10 Chalmers Crescent: (0131 536 0461)

Speech and Language Therapy:

Sighthill Health Centre: (0131 537 7119)
Gracemount Medical Centre: (0131 672 9456)
Leith Community Treatment Centre: (0131 536 6467)

CAMHS North: Royal Victoria Hospital: (0131 537 5228)

CAMHS South: 3 Rillbank Terrace: (0131 536 0534)

West Lothian:

Tel:

Community Child Health:

St John's Hospital, Livingston: (01506 524 403)

Speech and Language Therapy:

St John's Hospital, Livingston: (01506 524 191)

CAMHS:

St John's Hospital, Livingston, OPD5: (01506 434 274)

East Lothian:

Tel:

Community Child Health:

Musselburgh Primary Care Centre: (0131 446 4123 / 4129)

Speech and Language Therapy:

Musselburgh Primary Care Centre: (0131 446 4009)

CAMHS:

The Esk Centre, Musselburgh: (0131 446 4880)

Request for assistance (Local Teams), continued:

Midlothian: Tel:

Community Child Health:

Musselburgh Primary Care Centre: (0131 446 4131)

Speech and Language Therapy:

Newbattle Medical Centre: for assistance, phone 0131 454 9544
on a Tuesday afternoon (parents and professionals)

CAMHS:

Eastfield Medical Centre (01968 671678 / 671356).

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in accordance with SIGN, NICE, and the Autism Achieve Alliance.

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