

Autism – referrals and assessments



Who can make an assessment?

Autism is a diagnosis that can only be made by a suitably qualified medical professional. In Cambridgeshire, this service is provided through the NHS by the Community Paediatrician or Clinical Psychologist for pre-school and primary school-aged children and the Child psychiatrist/psychologist (CAMH) for secondary school age. Referrals are through professionals working with the child: the school, a paediatrician or GP.

In Cambridgeshire, the diagnostic service is provided through the NHS by the Community Paediatrician or Clinical Psychologist for preschool and primary school-aged children 0 -11 years (<https://www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk/what-we-do/children-young-peoplehealth-services-cambridgeshire/contact>) and the Child psychiatrist/psychologist (CAMH) for secondary school age, 11- 18 years. Young people over the age of 18 will be referred by their GP to adults' mental health services and Cambridge Lifespan Autism Spectrum Service (CLASS) <https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/service-detail/service/cambridge-lifespan-autismspectrum-service-class-clinic-22/>

How is an assessment made?

The process in the Multidisciplinary Social Communication Clinic is clearly defined.

Parent carers will be asked to attend an appointment where they will provide a case history to a clinician and describe needs/behaviours/what they see and experience with their child. At the same time there is also an opportunity to observe the child's social communication skills to contribute to the clinical opinion about whether the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder is relevant or not. (exactly what this play based assessment looks like depends on the age of the child).

Since Covid, the assessment happens in a slightly different way: the history taking with the parent happens over video or over the phone, sometimes with the child present. The clinician then decides whether the information, provided by the parent and also from school, is sufficient to come to a conclusion. In some cases, a short face-to-face assessment will be offered but for most children the recognition that there are significant social communication difficulties should be sufficient to access the right support. In some cases, the level of need is apparent from a very early age. In most cases the need emerges over time as communication skills develop and as a child's emotional response matures and the child then not being able to meet the increasing social demands.

Parent Courses

You may be offered a course intended to offer support and some practical things that may help your child or young person. The Cygnet course is accessible to parents of all primary school children with significant social communication difficulties, and ASD, following assessment. This is the main intervention and is provided in a multiagency collaboration between Community Paediatrics, CAMH and SEND services.

Free Pinpoint Workshops

Pinpoint offer free ADHD and ASD workshops. These are open to all parent carers of children with or without a diagnosis. You can find out more on our website: pinpoint-cambs.org.uk under Events.