

What is Autism and where to find help and support?

'Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. One in 100 people are on the autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK.' - The National Autistic Society

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a medical diagnosis of a number of needs that are likely to affect an person's ability to read other people's body language, to express themselves, through words and actions, and behaviours. There are lots of different views about what autism is and people tend to think of it being a range of needs with people have some autistic tendencies to others whose needs make it difficult to do everyday things. It can be seen as positive and negative - many people who have autism have found ways to adapt life to work well for their skills and strengths whilst for others it interrupts their everyday lives and is difficult to manage. More recently, people have started to talk about people with autism as being 'neurodiverse' - simply thinking differently.

How do I know if my child is autistic?

There are a number of common things that you might see in children who go on to have diagnosis of autism. but some of these things can be seen in children with other needs too. Common examples that may suggest autism include difficulties reading and understanding other people's body language and words / emotions.; repeated body movements that are used to calm themselves like hand flapping or rocking; over or under sensitivity to stimulation; highly focused interests; anxiety; meltdowns and shutdowns. Some of these things are also seen as children develop and it can be difficult to be certain which are lifelong, and which are delayed development. This is why some children do not get a diagnosis until it becomes clear this is not just a delay in developing skills. It is, therefore, important to ensure that children get support with their early development and where there are delays that extra advice and help is sought.

Who can help?

- ◆ If your child is not yet at school, talk with your health visitor, paediatrician or GP about what is worrying you. They can help you get extra help for your child.
- ◆ 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-people-health-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-autism-spectrum-service-class-clinic-22/>
- ◆ Our Handy Guide on a ASD Assessments will give you more information.

Where to find out more on website:

[hwww.pinpoint-cambs.org.uk](http://www.pinpoint-cambs.org.uk) and look under Useful Information