

Social Communication / Autism - over 7's



Worried about your child's communications - talking , listening, body language, behaviour?

Children develop at different rates but most will gain skills at about the same stage and in a similar way. By the time your child is 7 , or older, it would be usual for them to have gained all of their milestones for speech and language development. This makes it easier for professionals to make decisions on a children's needs and to give a diagnosis, if appropriate. Some children will have their own preferred style of communication and this doesn't stop them from getting on day to day. For other children their needs are more noticeable and they may need much more help, support and understanding.

How do I know if my child has a communication difficulty or autism?

This is a difficult paragraph to write as there are lots of different views on this and the experts do not all agree. In simple terms, children who have speech and language delay or difficulties are not necessarily autistic. Not every child who doesn't choose to speak or make eye contact will have a diagnosis of autism either. It can be helpful to think of it as a continuum of need and focus on identifying your child's needs, working out what helps and what doesn't, then putting in place the right help and support. Some argue strongly that the key is that in autism there are communication difficulties and repetitive and/or disruptive behaviours but every child is unique and autism can look different in every person with a diagnosis.

Communication skills can develop over time. 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. Only a qualified professional (in Cambridgeshire is the Paediatricians for primary aged children) can make a diagnosis of Autism (see our Handy Guide on autism assessments). Many children will not receive an assessment or diagnosis until it is clear that normal delay can be ruled out.

Who can help?

If you have concerns about your child and they are over seven (but not secondary school age) , speak to your GP or school so they can offer suggestions and support. You may want to ask for a referral to the Paediatrics Team so that they can assess your child and offer support if its needed. They have a useful leaflet:

<https://www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk/docs/default-source/leaflets---community-paediatrics/0044---social-communication-difficulties-and-autistic-spectrum-disorders.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

If your child/ young person is secondary school age, its CAMHS (the Children and Adults Mental Health Service) that will make an assessment:

<https://www.cpftr.nhs.uk/training/cambridgeshire-neurodevelopmental-service.htm>

You will find our Handy Guide on Autism Assessments useful as it helps make the process clear for parent carers.

Where to find out more on website:

www.pinpoint.cambs.org.uk and look under Useful Information