

Autism Assessment a Re:Minds Q&A

How do I get an autism assessment?

To get an autism assessment your child's school or GP can complete the referral form and send it to the Southampton Autism Assessment Service. If your child is under 5 they will be referred to the Community Paediatrics Service. Often they will want to know things that you have done or tried before asking for an assessment. The Southampton Autism Service is not part of CAMHS, but they share a building.

What happens when I have requested an autism assessment?

Once the paperwork has been submitted you will get a phone call from an assistant psychologist and they will talk to you about your reasons for wanting an assessment. They will ask other agencies for any reports or information they have about your child. The referral form, the outcome of the conversation they have with you and other reports will go to a panel of clinicians who then make a decision will be made about whether to assess for autism or not. If there is not enough evidence to assess for autism you will be told in writing and will be sent out an information pack of places that can support you.

If they agree to assess what can I expect?

You will be contacted via letter and told they are assessing, they will also send you some information about other services that might be able to support you. If they are assessing you will be added to the waiting list. The waiting list is around one year currently, whilst you are waiting you will receive occasional texts to reassure you that you are still on the list.

What if school don't think it is autism?

This can happen, but the Autism Service also look at your reports and the clinicians observations to make a final decision.

Where does the assessment take place?

It can vary, since Covid, the parent's part of the assessment can be done via phone. Alternatively, the parent and child assessment can take place in a number of buildings in and around CAMHS. Most assessments occur downstairs at the back of the Horizon building, in the 'Child Development' area. Some assessments take place at the Adelaide Centre near to CAMHS and others happen upstairs at CAMHS. You will be told where to go when your assessment date is sent out

What if I think there are other issues?

You can talk to the clinician who does the parent interview about any other concerns. Children are screened for ADHD during the assessment and if they feel there is an issues they will discuss this with you. The clinician will advise you what to do about any concerns you have.

What will I be asked during the assessment?

You will be asked about your concerns for your child, their development and their behaviour This meeting is called an Autism Diagnostic Interview or ADI. The clinician will ask about how your child was in their early years, until about age 5, and how they are now. Questions will be about things such as your child's speech, friendships and getting along with others, what their play is like, how they ask for things, how they show emotions, and their interests and difficulties. Most parents have difficulty remembering details of what their child was like at that early age. You can prepare by looking at old photos or watching old videos, but don't panic if you cant remember. A lot of the focus will be on how your child is now and all reports and assessments are taken into account when assessing.

What happens when my child is assessed?

Ideally, children go into the assessment room alone, and here they will be asked to do some very short activities with the clinician. These can include looking at a book together, retelling stories with objects and other short activities. The clinician wont just be looking at what they do in the activities, they will also be looking at their behaviour and communication. So if your child is having a bad day that is ok, the clinicians are used to this. You will not get a decision about whether your child has autism at this time.

What happens after the assessment?

Once you have the decision you will be signposted to Autism Hampshire and Re:Minds. The Autism Service is just there to assess, not to give ongoing support. CAMHS does not offer support for autism, but if there are other mental health needs a referral can be made to them.

How long does it take to get the decision?

Within a day or two you will be contacted to arrange a phone call meeting, which lasts for about half an hour. The meeting usually occurs about two weeks after the assessments. This gives time for the panel to meet to look at all the evidence and make a final decision. During the phone call you will be told the outcome of the assessment. A report will follow within a few weeks.

If we don't get a diagnosis can we apply again?

Sometimes there is not enough evidence to reach a diagnosis and clinicians have to be absolutely certain before giving a diagnosis. As a child gets older they may display more behaviours so you can apply again for another assessment.

Referral Received

Once the referral form received by the Autism Service it is passed to an assistant psychologist. A letter saying they have received the referral and signposting information is sent to the parent/carer. If the referral has not been completed on the correct form it will be sent back and asked to be done correctly.

Under 5s - Referral goes to Community Paediatric Medical Services.

1 week

An assistant Psychologist will call the parents/carers to talk about the referral, find out a bit more about the child and get consent for the assessment to take place.

Next 5 weeks

Requests will be sent out for more information and reports about the child. This might include reports from: Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Paediatrician or further information from school.

After 5 weeks all the reports and extra information will be taken to a meeting with other clinicians and a decision will be made about whether to carry out an autism assessment.

Not accepted

If the evidence does not meet the referral guidance then the request for an autism assessment will be turned down. You will be called by a clinician and the reasons will be explained. A follow-up letter will be sent to confirm the assessment request has been turned down.

Accepted

Parents/carers will be told an assessment is going to take place. Your child's name will be added to the list, waiting times for this vary but are currently around 1 year. Every few months you will get a text to confirm you are still on the list and haven't been forgotten.

The assessment will take place. The ADI (Autism Diagnostic Interview) will involve a two hour discussion with parents to talk about the child now and when they were aged 4-5. The child will be asked to come to a one-hour ADOS (Autistic Diagnostic Observation Assessment) meeting to carry out some activities with a clinician, which will be used as part of the assessment. Once both assessments have taken place the parents/carers will be called to arrange a meeting to discuss the outcome. Some families are offered endorsements - this means there is already enough evidence so a full assessment is not needed.

During the meeting, which is approximately half an hour and can be done by phone or in person, the parent/carers will be given the outcome of the assessment and some details of the assessments.

No diagnosis

The final assessment report will be sent to parents/carers and GP/school if agreed. Family will be referred to the appropriate services.

ASC Diagnosis

The final assessment will be shared with parents/carers and GP/school if agreed. Parents/carers will be referred to the appropriate services. A referral to Autism Hampshire will be made if the family consent