



The Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Adults

Information for GPs

This leaflet provides information about what you can do if you have concerns that an adult you know may be on the autistic spectrum.

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 1% 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.

It is also recognised that women and girls on the autistic spectrum may present differently and are therefore at greater risk of being 'missed'. For example, they may be better able to observe and mimic social behaviour in order to fit in, special interests may appear more mainstream (e.g. horses, books), and/or they may be more inclined to escape into fantasy.

Further information on autism, gender issues and diagnosis can be found at:
<http://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/gender.aspx>

What type of difficulties might I see?

- Persistent difficulty in social interaction
- Persistent difficulty in social communication
- Stereotypic (rigid/repetitive) behaviours, resistance to change
- Restricted interests
- Problems with obtaining/sustaining employment/education
- Difficulty in initiating or sustaining social relationships
- History of neurodevelopmental condition (including intellectual disability and ADHD) or mental disorder
- Gender dysphoria
- Diagnosis of an eating disorder

(Information from SIGN Guideline 145. Annex 2)

Interpreting SIGN in Practice

Please note that undiagnosed autistic adults will have spent many years attempting to function in a social world despite their core difficulties – they will often have found ways to adjust and ‘mask’, often at great cost to themselves and making it more difficult for the observer to detect.

If there is evidence of more than one of the following (long-standing, especially if dating back to childhood), consider autism as a possible contributing factor:

- Social and/or communication problems might include social naivety, social cynicism, a difficulty making or sustaining interpersonal relationships or just ‘getting it wrong’, rather than a lack of interest in doing so
- A pattern of intense interests (this could extend to a drive to know everything there is to know on a topic, an obsession with a particular person, or excessive rumination), and/or rigidity in behaviour, thoughts or beliefs (e.g. strong sense of morality, intolerant of those not following ‘the rules’)
- Strong preference for detail over ‘the broad picture’, pedantic
- Sensory differences (e.g. over- or under-sensitivity to noise, light, smell, pain) – bearing in mind the person might not be consciously aware of this themselves (ie. behavioural outbursts or self-harm may tend to occur in response to these triggers, or an overload across several modalities)

What is the Process of Assessment?

In Argyll and Bute the pathway for the assessment and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder in adults has been developed using national guidelines.

Referrals by GPs to the Argyll and Bute Adult Autism Diagnostic Service (AADS) should be made via the SCI Gateway referral system. Other professionals (e.g. Community Mental Health Team workers) can obtain referral forms from the service administrator (see below).

It is helpful to include any existing information potentially relevant to the diagnostic process, such as previous reports containing a developmental history. Both SIGN 145 and NICE CG142 recommend the short Autism Spectrum Quotient AQ (AQ-10) test as an initial screening tool, although referral should be based on clinical judgment rather than test scores. The AQ-10 tool is available from <http://docs.autismresearchcentre.com/tests/AQ10.pdf>

It should be explained to individuals that it is most helpful if a relative who can provide information on their early developmental history can be involved, but we appreciate it is not always possible in an adult population with a wide age range.

It may be useful to share the following process information with the individual in question, in order to reduce uncertainty.

The AADS also makes use of more in depth screening questionnaires in deciding to progress an individual to full clinical assessment. Both the individual and the referrer are informed if there is felt to be insufficient grounds for further assessment, otherwise, they are placed on a waiting list until an assessment slot becomes available. Initial appointments are typically three hours in length, but often further sessions are required, either with the individual or their relative, to ensure sufficient information is gathered.

Individuals are provided verbally with the diagnostic decision as soon as the clinician has made it. Draft reports are provided to the individual for a factual accuracy check.

One post-diagnostic session is offered. Individuals are provided with post-diagnostic information (e.g. signposting to other organisations and resources) and there is an opportunity to discuss the decision and ask questions. They are then discharged from the AADS.

Who should I contact to make a referral or further information?

Please contact the Adult Autism Diagnostic Service Administrator:

Adult Autism Diagnostic Service (AADS)
The Islay Centre
Argyll & Bute Hospital
Lochgilphead
PA31 8RA

Tel: 01546 704890
High-UHB.ASD@nhs.net

Chris Tanner
Administrator
Autism Diagnostic Service
Islay Centre
Argyll and Bute Hospital
Blarbuie Road
Lochgilphead
PA31 8LD

Tel: 01546 704890

Email: chris.tanner@nhs.net

Resources

Argyll and Bute Council. Information about Autism in Argyll and Bute. Available at- www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/autism-argyll-and-bute

Autism Argyll. Available at- www.autismargyll.org.uk

[Autism Network Scotland](http://www.autismnetworkscotland.org.uk/). Available at- <http://www.autismnetworkscotland.org.uk/>

National Autistic Society. Available at – <http://www.autism.org.uk/>

NICE CG142. Autism: recognition, referral, diagnosis and management of adults on the autism spectrum. Available at-www.nice.org.uk/CG142

NHS Education for Scotland.
Autism Spectrum Disorder Learning Space. Available at- <http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/home/learning-and-cpd/learning-spaces/autism-spectrum-disorder.aspx>

Research Autism. Available at <http://researchautism.net/>

Royal College of General Practitioners. Autistic Spectrum Disorders Toolkit. Available at- www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/toolkits/asd-toolkit.aspx

Scottish Autism. Support for professionals. Available at- <http://www.scottishautism.org/services-support>

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145. Assessment, diagnosis and intervention for autism spectrum disorder. A national clinical guideline. (2016). Health Improvement Scotland. Available at- www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/SIGN145.pdf

For information about autism, local services and support in Argyll and Bute, visit the Argyll and Bute Council website www.argyll-bute.gov.uk

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