



## The Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in children and young people

### Information for Health Visitors and Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Staff

This leaflet provides information about what you can do if you have concerns that a child or young person 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 females on the autistic spectrum may present with a different symptom profile and level of impairment than males on the autistic spectrum.

### What type of difficulties might a pre-school child have?

- Delay or absence of spoken language
- Looks through people; not aware of others
- Not responsive to other people's facial expression / feelings
- Lack of pretend play; little or no imagination
- Does not show typical interest in<sup>1</sup> or play near peers purposefully
- Lack of turn-taking
- Unable to share pleasure
- Qualitative impairment in non-verbal communication<sup>2</sup>
- Does not point at an object to direct another person to look at it
- Lack of gaze monitoring
- Lack of initiation of activity or social play
- Unusual or repetitive hand and finger mannerisms
- Unusual reactions, or lack of reaction, to sensory stimuli<sup>3</sup>

*(Information from SIGN Guideline 145. Annex 2)*

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<sup>1</sup> other children

<sup>2</sup> E.g. limited eye contact, facial expression or gesture

<sup>3</sup> E.g. oversensitivity to specific sounds

## **How should I raise concerns?**

Families may approach you with a specific concern that their child may be on the autistic spectrum. Alternately, concerns may be raised by another professional following developmental review or observations.

It can be difficult for professionals to raise concerns with families. Rather than talking in terms of diagnostic labels, it may be more appropriate to give descriptions of behaviours or developmental concerns. If they do not share your concerns, you may need to make this a gradual process.

## **Who should I contact to make a request for assistance?**

In Argyll and Bute we have developed a multidisciplinary pathway for the assessment and diagnosis of ASD in children and young people.

This pathway has been developed using national guidelines and aims to provide timely assessment and where appropriate, diagnosis close to home if possible.

The process is usually initiated by a referral to the most appropriate members of the multidisciplinary team.

If not already known to outside agencies, this would involve making a request for assistance/referral to community child health and speech and language therapy. Your local team contacts are provided in this information leaflet.

## **What information do I need to gather?**

Your observations of the child at home or in the ELCC setting will be very helpful in informing the assessment process. Surveillance tools such as those noted in SIGN Guidance 145, Section 4.1.3 can be helpful to ensure relevant observations are noted. ([www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/SIGN145.pdf](http://www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/SIGN145.pdf))

The assessment process involves gathering information about the child and young person in the form of a developmental assessment, as well as clinical and contextual observations.

The local staged assessment process should be implemented as soon as possible. GIRFEC child planning meetings will make sure families are supported regardless of diagnostic labels as well as ensuring a joined-up approach between agencies for assessment and support.

**Request for assistance can be directed to the local teams as below.**

**West Team: North Argyll, Mid- Argyll, Kintyre and Islay**

Chris Tanner  
Administrator  
ASD Diagnostic Service  
Islay Centre, Argyll and Bute Hospital  
Blarbuie Road  
Lochgilphead  
PA31 8LD  
Tel: 01546 704890

**Cowal and Bute**

Mrs Yvonne Crawford  
Medical Secretary  
Community Child Health  
Victoria Hospital Annexe  
Townhead  
Rothesay  
Isle of Bute  
PA20 9JH  
Tel: 01700 501543

**Helensburgh**

ASD Diagnostic Team Clerical Officer  
Victoria Integrated Care Centre  
93 East King Street  
Helensburgh  
G84 9BU  
Tel: 01436 655024

## Resources

Argyll and Bute Council. Information about autism in Argyll and Bute.  
Available at-[www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/autism-argyll-and-bute](http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/autism-argyll-and-bute)

Autism Argyll.  
Available at-[www.autismargyll.org.uk](http://www.autismargyll.org.uk)

Autism Toolbox. A resource for Scottish schools.  
Available at- [www.autismtoolbox.co.uk](http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk)

National Autistic Society.  
Available at- [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

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/>

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

SIGN 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](http://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](http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk)

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