



The Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Children and Young People

Information for Primary Schools

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 types of difficulties might a primary school-aged child have?

Communication Impairments

- Abnormalities in language development, including muteness
- Odd or inappropriate prosody¹
- Persistent echolalia²
- Reference to self as 'you', 'she' or 'he' beyond three years
- Unusual vocabulary for child's age/social group
- Limited use of language for communication and/or tendency to talk freely only about specific topics

Social Impairments

- Inability to join in play of other children, or inappropriate attempts at joint play (may manifest as aggressive or disruptive behaviour)
- Lack of awareness of classroom 'norms' (criticising teachers, overt unwillingness to cooperate in classroom activities, inability to appreciate or follow current trends)
- Easily overwhelmed by social and other stimulation
- Failure to relate normally to adults (too intense / no relationship)
- Showing extreme reactions to invasion of personal space and resistance to being hurried

Impairments of Interests, Activities and/or Behaviours

- Lack of flexible cooperative imaginative play / creativity
- Difficulty in organising self in relation to unstructured space (e.g. hugging the perimeter of playgrounds, halls)
- Inability to cope with change or unstructured situations, even ones that other children enjoy (school trips, teachers being away, etc).

¹ rhythm, stress and intonation of speech

² repetition of words and phrases

Other Factors

- Unusual profile of skills / deficits
- Any other evidence of odd behaviours, including unusual responses to sensory stimuli

(Information from SIGN Guideline 145. Annex 2)

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 Speech and Language Therapy or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) already have involvement, please contact the team in the first instance to discuss your concerns. Your local team contacts are provided in this information sheet.

What information do I need to gather?

Your observations of the child at home or in the school 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)

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

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

Autism Toolbox. A resource for Scottish schools.
Available at- www.autismtoolbox.co.uk

National Autistic Society.
Available at- 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

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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