



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

Information for Secondary Schools

This leaflet provides information about what you can do if you have concerns that a child or young person you know maybe 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 an adolescent have?

Language and Communication

- Problems with communication, even if wide vocabulary and normal use of grammar
- May be unduly quiet, may talk at others rather than hold a 'to and fro' conversation, or may provide excessive information on topics of own interest
- Unable to adapt style of communication to social situations, e.g. may sound like 'a little professor' (overly formal), or be inappropriately familiar
- May have speech peculiarities, including 'flat' un-modulated speech, repetitiveness, use of stereotyped phrases.
- May take things literally and fail to understand sarcasm or metaphor
- Unusual use and timing of non-verbal interaction (e.g. eye contact, gesture and facial expression).

Social Problems

- Difficulty making and maintaining peer friendships, though may find it easier with adults or younger children
- Can appear unaware or uninterested in peer group 'norms', may alienate by behaviours which transgress 'unwritten rules'
- May lack awareness of personal space, or be intolerant of intrusions on own space
- Long-standing difficulties in social behaviours, communication and coping with change, which are more obvious at times of transition (e.g. change of school, leaving school)
- Significant discrepancy between academic ability and 'social' intelligence; most difficulties in unstructured social situations, e.g. in school or work breaks

Rigidity in Thinking and Behaviour

- Preference for highly specific, narrow interests or hobbies, or may enjoy collecting, numbering or listing
- Strong preferences for familiar routines; may have repetitive behaviours or intrusive rituals
- Problems using imagination, e.g. in writing, future planning
- May have unusual reactions to sensory stimuli, e.g. sounds, tastes, smell, touch, hot or cold.

(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 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) already have involvement with the young person please contact the team in the first instance to discuss your concerns. Your local team contacts are provided in this information leaflet.

For secondary pupils with language and communication difficulties or learning difficulties it may be appropriate to contact Child Community Health Services with a request for assistance.

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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