

Autism Assessment

Referral criteria

Our Autism Assessment Team provides an assessment service for children and young people up to the age of 18, where there is a concern that they have difficulties with communicating and relating to others. We assess children and young people to see if their difficulties are due to autism.

There is no medical test for autism. A decision about diagnosis is made based on detailed information about the child's early development and how they are now. This information is gathered by talking to you, an individual assessment with your child, and gathering information from school.

Once an assessment is complete, parents and carers are given information about support available at home and at school. This includes information on autism-specific parenting workshops and groups in their area, and access to specialist advisory teachers where possible. Parents will also be invited to join an online support network.

How to access our services

We accept referrals from professionals who know the child or young person, including health visitors, nursery nurses, teachers, GPs, special educational needs coordinators (SENCO) and educational psychologists. Ideally referrals should come from professionals that know the child best, such as their teacher, SENCO, or health visitor.

Pre-referral assessment

There are many conditions that can cause social communication difficulties for children and young people, including conditions such as hearing, speech and language difficulties, learning difficulties, dyspraxia, depression and anxiety, bullying and emotional worries about the home.

It's important, therefore, to carefully consider these possibilities before making a referral to the Autism Assessment Team. Before referring a child for an assessment, please make sure the checks outlined below have been taken.

Pre-referral checklist for under 5s

We only accept referrals for autism assessments in Under 5s in West Berkshire. Referrals in East Berkshire need to be made to the Community Paediatricians using our referral form.

- Confirm that the child has had a developmental check within the past 12 months
- Make sure there has been a hearing test to rule out hearing difficulties
- If there are concerns about language and communication, check if the child has been referred to Speech and Language Services, and a speech and language therapy assessment has ruled out a specific language impairment, delay or language disorder

For further information on speech development, visit our website

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/slt>

When all these checks have been completed – and the child is showing evidence of difficulties in social interaction, social communication and repetitive and restrictive behaviours that can't be attributed to other factors – a referral can be made.

Referrals should include information about the previous assessments and evidence of difficulties in the areas stated above. In CAMHS, we assess all referrals for clinical risk and prioritise appointments on that basis. Some young people will therefore be offered an assessment appointment very quickly.

Pre-referral checklist for 5-17½ year olds

- Make sure that needs-led support is in place within the school environment and under the supervision of the SENCO
- In cases where there is a question about a child or young person's cognitive ability or ability to access the curriculum, check that the SENCO has discussed the difficulties with educational psychology, and that observation or assessment has been undertaken if necessary
- Check that parents have been offered parenting support and advice through school-based parenting support, Positive Parenting Programme ('triple P') or a family support worker
- For older children, check that difficulties with social interaction, communication and restrictive behaviours pre-date secondary school and have been present since early childhood

When all these checks have been completed – and the child is showing evidence of difficulties in social interaction, social communication and repetitive and restrictive behaviours that can't be attributed to other factors – a referral should be made to the Autism Assessment Team.

Referrals should include information about the previous assessments and evidence of difficulties in the areas stated above.

Pre-referral checklist for 17½ -18 year olds

Referrals for young people aged 17½ and over can be made directly to the Adult Autism Spectrum Service, 25 Erleigh Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5LR. Call: 0118 929 6477

We need confirmation that the steps outlined above have been completed before we can accept a referral. Once we've received this, we will request additional information from families and the school to determine whether a referral to the Autism Assessment Team is the best way to meet the young person's needs.

If the young person is accepted for an assessment, this pre-assessment information is vital in helping us decide about diagnosis at a later stage.

If the information doesn't support an assessment, we'll advise the family or carer what support or assessment might be more appropriate. This reduces the chance of a young person attending an assessment they don't need, and will allow them to access the right support more quickly.

Screening questionnaire

Professionals who are unsure about referring can complete a screening questionnaire (AQ-10 or Q-CHAT for children 18-24 months). Ideally, this should be completed by professionals (such as teacher, SENCO or health visitor) who know the child best.

Waiting times for an autism assessment

All referrals received by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are triaged for current clinical risk and prioritised on that basis. Young people at high levels of risk are offered an assessment more quickly.

**How to
contact us**

**If you have an urgent enquiry please
contact us**

Call: 0300 365 1234

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/autism>

