



CCHP Autism Assessment Hub

The Autism assessment process: more information for families

We carry out a detailed assessment of each child or young person (CYP), which can take some time. We aim to complete these steps in close succession, sometimes on a single day, and will keep families informed of the next steps at all times.

The assessment process will depend on the CYP's needs, but as a general guide, follows the process below:

1. Information gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We review the information sent with the referral.• We might ask for more information if needed, e.g. calling schools or families.
2. Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We meet the CYP to assess their strengths and needs.• We talk to the CYP's family about their current concerns, and the CYP's early development, progress and strengths and needs.• The CYP and their family will be sent information about the appointment and what to expect, in advance.
3. Professional discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professionals will discuss whether the CYP's difficulties and differences meet the criteria for a diagnosis of Autism (using the DSM-V criteria) or can be explained in another way.• This will take around 1 hour, and CYP and families can take a break whilst this is happening.
4. Further assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes (not always), we might need to get more information to complete the assessment.• If this is the case, we will tell the family what will happen next, and why.• After this, we will go back to professional discussion (above).
5. Feedback meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will share the outcome of the assessment with the family: more information about this is on our website.• The CYP is welcome to join this discussion, if appropriate.• We will talk about next steps and suggest further resources
6. Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will provide a written report summarising the assessment and decision made.• We will recommend some ways to support the CYP and sign-post the family to further resources.
7. Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depending on the outcome, we can offer a follow-up appointment with one of the professionals who assessed the CYP.• The family can ask any further questions and discuss any other concerns.• This appointment could be at the hub, or via telephone/video call.• The CYP is welcome to join this discussion, if appropriate.

Service provided by:

What will the assessment involve?

Depending on your child or young person's (CYP) strengths and needs, the assessment will involve one or more of the following. You will be told in your assessment invitation which assessment type(s) will be offered. Further assessment may be required at a later date.

Developmental history discussion

What is it?

There are lots of different reasons why a child or young person may have difficulties or differences in behaviour, communication and interaction. The developmental history is an opportunity to explore these with you.

You (and your child) will be asked about their early development and birth and medical history. We will ask questions about the family set-up and health conditions in family members.

We are particularly interested in mental health and neurodevelopment conditions (such as autism and ADHD). It is also important for us to know about any adverse childhood experiences. You may have already mentioned these on the social communication questionnaire.

You and your child will be asked about things they are good at and enjoy and also things they find difficult, or they/you are worried about. We are interested about how your child experiences home, school and other situations.

You will have already given lots of information in the social communication questionnaires and we may ask for some more details about communication, interaction and behaviour.

This time is also an opportunity to raise any concerns you have, that have not already been discussed. Throughout this discussion, the idea is simply for parents to describe what is 'usual' or 'typical' for your child; to describe what the young person usually does or how they often behave.

In some circumstances, if your child is already known to community paediatrics, we will already have the information we need and we may just need to hear about any recent changes.

Who will be there?

The appointment may be with a paediatrician, a nurse or another professional.

Where will it take place?

The appointment may take place on the phone, by video or face-to-face in clinic with you and your child and will take up to an hour.

Additional examination and observations

Children and young people are all different – some like to be part of the discussions, while others may prefer to play joining in occasionally. We are happy to adapt to what works best for you. It is useful for the professional to have a chance to observe your child and possibly engage them in conversation or play.

All children should have a physical examination as part of their autism assessment. This is a general examination and includes height and weight. Younger children may also have a development assessment. The examination may take place at the same time as the developmental history or another appointment may be made for this.

How do I prepare?

You are not expected to interpret your child's behaviours but we are interested to hear if you or your child have been thinking about the possibility of an Autism Spectrum Disorder/Aspergers or whether you think there may be another

reason for the differences or difficulties.

If you have some questions you would like to ask you may like to write these down and bring them with you.

You do not need to bring your child's hand-held record but if you have used this to record their early development you may find it useful to bring along.

Please let us know if you would like to give some of the information without your child or if you are worried your child may be upset by being weighed and measured beforehand or when you arrive for the appointment.

ADOS assessment

What is it?

The ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) is a 'semi-structured, standardised assessment' – this means that it has set activities and questions, but the professional can use them flexibly with the CYP.

The activities include:

- Play-based activities e.g. imaginative play with toys, cause and effect toys, bubbles
- Sharing books and looking at pictures
- Conversation about interests, feelings and getting on with other people
- Story telling activities

There are different modules, which are used depending on the CYP's language skills, and each one involves slightly different activities (for example, there would be more conversation tasks with older CYP, and more play tasks with younger children).

Who will be there?

This assessment is usually carried out by two ADOS-trained professionals, often including a Specialist Speech and Language Therapist.

The activities allow the professionals to observe behaviours important to the diagnosis of Autism at different developmental levels.

The second professional observes the ADOS, then the two professionals score it together. The score gives an indication of whether the CYP showed behaviours associated with Autism. It is a 'snapshot' of social communication, and so it may not reflect the whole range of a CYP's strengths and needs.

Where will it take place?

The ADOS usually takes up to 1 hour to complete and is usually carried out at the hub. However, we can also do an ADOS at school or home.

How do I prepare?

Although this is a scored assessment, we just want CYP to be themselves and answer as honestly as they can. There are no right or wrong answers, we just want to know what they think.

If there is anything that they don't understand, or find too difficult to talk about, that's ok – we will try to help or just move onto something easier. They don't need to bring anything and there is no writing involved.

Social communication assessment

What is it?

This is an assessment developed within our team and the activities include:

- Play based activities e.g. imaginative play with toys, simple board games
- Looking at pictures to talk about social situations and feelings
- Conversation about interests, social situations and getting on with other people
- Story telling activities

We tend to use this assessment for primary school age children i.e. 5 to 11 years old.

Who will be there?

The social communication assessment is usually carried out by a Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (SLT).

The activities allow the SLT to observe behaviours important to the diagnosis of Autism. It is a 'snapshot' of social communication, and so it may not reflect the whole range of a CYP's strengths and needs.

Where will it take place?

The social communication assessment takes about 1 hour to complete with a child. It is usually carried out at the hub, but we can also do a Social Communication assessment at school or home. Sometimes we visit school to combine it with a school observation (see below).

How do I prepare?

We just want child to be themselves and answer as honestly as they can. There are no right or wrong answers; we just want to know what they think.

If there is anything that they don't understand, or find too tricky to talk about, that's ok – we will try to help or just move onto something easier. They don't need to bring anything and there is no writing involved.

School observation

What is it?

It can be really helpful to see the CYP's social interaction skills in this everyday social situation. It also helps us understand their functional communication skills and how they engage with learning.

We ideally aim to observe the CYP:

- In a lesson where some social interaction is involved e.g. group/paired work
- At break-time with their peers

Who will be there?

A professional from the assessment team would visit the CYP at school. We also welcome the chance to talk to adults at school who know the CYP well.

How long does it take?

The school observation takes about 1-1.5 hours to complete.

How do I prepare?

We want to be as subtle as possible, as we want to see how the CYP behaves on a 'normal day'. Families should decide whether the CYP should be aware they are being observed – some can feel more worried that they are being watched, but others need to know what to expect in advance. Obviously, if they've met us before this is difficult! The CYP does not need to talk to us and

should be encouraged to do what they normally do at school.

Language assessment

What is it?

Sometimes, we need more information about a CYP's level of understanding and use of language, compared to others their age. This can help us identify any needs, so we can give advice and direct you to the Speech and Language Therapy team if needed. Sometimes, language difficulties can be a barrier to social communication and interaction.

Activities include:

- Following instructions
- Talking about pictures
- Listening to information and answering questions
- Remembering spoken information

Who will be there?

A Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) will carry out a language assessment. They use a range of formal and informal language assessments, based on the CYP's strengths and needs. These are scored against what we expect for their age.

How long does it take?

A language assessment can take up to 1 hour to complete (often less), although we understand this is a long time to focus for, so we may take short breaks within this.

How do I prepare?

Although this is a scored assessment, we are just trying to work out if the CYP needs any help with their understanding and talking. They just need to have a go.

If there is anything that they find too difficult, that's ok – we will try to help or just move onto something different. They don't need to bring anything and there is no writing involved.

Early Years SEESAW group

Please note, at time of writing (July 2020), we are unable to offer this service due to coronavirus restrictions. We are looking at alternative ways to assess early years children for Autism, in line with public health guidance.

This is an opportunity for you to develop ways of helping your child, in a supportive and friendly environment and will enable us to assess their social communication skills in more detail and to consider a possible diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The SEESAW group is run by two Speech and Language Therapists/Assistants. It consists of four group sessions of one hour each. You may also be offered an individual feedback session (20-30 minutes) to discuss the next steps for your child.

This document can be provided in other formats and languages. Please email sirona.communications@nhs.net or speak to a member of the team for more information.