**Autism Assessment Referral Criteria and Guidance**

**Children between the ages of 5 – 18 years old (up to 18th birthday)**

The Solent NHS Trust Autism Assessment Service delivers assessments for children and young people between the ages of 5 – 18 (up to 18th birthday).

Children under the age of 5 should be referred to the Community Paediatric Team.

Please send referrals, or queries connected with referrals, to email: cpmsreferrals@solent.nhs.uk

We are pleased to receive referrals from professionals who know the child and family well. This is most likely to include, but not exhaustive to, health visitors, teachers, SENCOs, Social Workers and/or CAMHS Clinicians. If we receive a referral from a GP, or other professional outside of the child’s school setting we will request additional information from the child’s school to assist us in the referral process.

Whilst our preference is for referrals to come from professionals who know the child and family well we understand this is not always possible, for example, where a child or young person is not in school. In such circumstances we will accept referrals from parents and carers but will require supporting information from a professional who is known to the family. This will be done in discussion with the family.

If a referral has come from a parent/carer and the child is in a school setting then we will need to request additional information from the child’s school to assist the referral process.

Please note that:

* The Autism Assessment Service is assessment only.
* The service does not monitor other areas of need such as risk, safeguarding concerns or other unmet health needs. If these are present then the referrer should ensure such needs are monitored appropriately or refer onto other relevant services
* It is not necessary to have an autism diagnosis to apply for an EHCP, nor does a diagnosis of autism mean that a child will require an EHCP.

**Pre-referral input**

While many children with autism will initially present with social communication difficulties it must be noted that such difficulties can be due to other causes, for example, speech and language difficulties, learning needs, emotional difficulties resulting from early trauma, and hearing loss.

It is important therefore, to include in your referral, details on interventions which have been put in place prior to a referral being considered. This might include

1. Early intervention from Speech and Language Therapy
2. Needs led support within the education environment
3. Parent led intervention through locally commissioned groups

Please also include with your referral any relevant assessments or reports related to the child’s needs.

**How to make a referral for Autism Assessment**

Referrals can be made by any professional but we prefer referrals to be completed by school settings. Referrals will only be accepted using the official referral form which must be completed in full. l. Referral letters will not be accepted. The Referral Form has been shared with services and education settings across Southampton and is included with this guidance.

If you require a referral form to be sent to you then please contact the team on 0300 123 6661 or email autismsouthampton@solent.nhs.uk

Once a referral is received it will be triaged to ensure there is sufficient evidence of need for an assessment of autism. This will consider the impact on functioning. If there is limited evidence of impact on function, then an autism assessment will not be recommended.

As part of our triage process we will advise parents/carers of other support services that may be more appropriate to their needs.

If you are wishing to make a referral for a young person aged 18 and over then please get in touch with the adult autism assessment service delivered by Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust on 02382 310981.

<https://www.southernhealth.nhs.uk/services/community-services/specialist-community-services/autism/>

**Other support available**

The number of referrals received by the Autism Assessment Service is greater than the number of assessments we have capacity to provide. This means that there are unfortunately lengthy wait times.

All support services and strategies are available to children, young people and their families regardless of diagnosis. Access to them, and implementation of strategies known to be useful for children and young people with neurodevelopmental needs should be encouraged. Services available include:

* **Autism Hampshire** run information and support workshops and can be contacted on 02380 766162. More information can be found [here](https://www.autismhampshire.org.uk/how-we-can-help/information-advice/)
* **Re:Minds** (parent/carer support group) have developed a guide to available services in Southampton which can be found [here](https://www.reminds.org.uk/advice-1)
* **Southampton Special Educational Needs & Disability Information Advice & Support Service (SENDIASS)** aims to empower children and young people with special educational needs and their parents/carers to make informed decisions about education, health and social care. More information can be found [here](https://www.southamptonsendiass.info/)

Please note that it is not necessary to have an autism diagnosis to apply for an EHCP.

**Prioritisation criteria**

As support and strategies are available to children and young people regardless of a diagnosis there are limited reasons as to why a child or young person would need to access an autism assessment urgently. The service will prioritise an assessment based on the levels of clinical risk and not on the support needs within the school or following complaints from parents/carers or professionals in connection with the length of wait.

The consideration, or application for an Education and Health Care Plan is not influenced by whether a young person has a diagnosis of autism. This needs led process is one which sits independent to the Autism Assessment pathway and as such any requests for prioritisation in connection with the EHCP process will be declined.

The service will automatically prioritise young people who are 17 ½ years of age and will consider the need for prioritisation if one or more of the following criteria are indicated:

* Active child protection proceedings
* Children who are looked after
* Active involvement with safeguarding services due to concerns regarding child sexual exploitation
* Active involvement with Youth Offending Services

(with thanks to Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust Prioritisation criteria)

**Waiting times for an autism assessment**

As at Jul-21, the longest time a family had to wait for a routine assessment was 18 months and 300 children were on the waiting list for an assessment. We are outsourcing approximately 200 referrals to another Provider to reduce waiting times however referral numbers continue to increase by approximately 30% year on year.

**Referral Forms**



For further information or any queries please call 0300 123 6661 and ask to speak with the Autism Assessment Service or email at autismsouthampton@solent.nhs.uk