**Autism Assessment Process (Pre-School age Children)**

**What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a condition that affects social interaction, communication, interests and behaviour. In children with ASD, the symptoms are present before three years of age, although a diagnosis is often made after the age of three. There’s no "cure" for ASD, but speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, educational support and a number of other interventions are available to help children and parents and do not require a diagnosis.

**ASD Assessment Process**

**Information We Need**

When we do an autism assessment, we need to know how your child is getting on at home and nursery / education setting. If they have had assessments by other professionals we would like to see their reports.

**Referral**

If you are concerned that your child might have ASD then speak to your child’s Health Visitor. Take with you a list of behaviours and characteristics that make you think your child might be autistic. During appointments with professionals, they will need to ask about your family, the health and mental health of family members and whether your child has had any traumatic experiences. Some parents find this difficult but it is important that we know about issues which could have affected your child’s development. If you want to talk about this without your child hearing the discussion, please mention that when we start to ask you these questions and we will arrange a suitable time to discuss this. At each stage it will be decided if your child meets the criteria for an autism assessment through discussion with the multi-disciplinary team. This includes a Speech and Language Therapist, Paediatrician, Health Visitor, and if appropriate Occupational Therapist and education support services depending on the needs of your child. It may be decided that your child needs some intervention, for example around behaviour or sleep, or a referral to another service first before progressing to the next assessment phase.

**Assessment Phase 1**

Your child’s Health Visitor will carry out an Ages and Stages Questionnaire and, if appropriate, a Wellcomm language screen. They will talk to you about the concerns you have about your child’s development.

**Assessment Phase 2**

Your child’s appointment with the Speech and Language Therapist will be in clinic, at nursery or home. They will assess your child’s communication skills and provide you with advice and strategies on how you can support your child. There may need to be one or several follow-up session to see if there has been progress for your child. Your Speech and Language Therapist will discuss with you your child’s progress. In cases where your child needs further assessments the Speech and Language Therapist will move your child to the Phase 3 of the Autism assessment. If your child has made good progress and the Speech and Language Therapist feels that an Autism assessment is not needed, she will discuss this with you and remove your child from the Autism pathway. In case your experience at home is different and you are disagreeing we are happy to further assess your child using Phase 3 of the pathway. At any time the Speech and language Therapist can approach the multi-disciplinary team for further discussions and advice.

**Assessment Phase 3**

Once all information has been collected from the team of professionals and they feel your child meets the criteria for assessment, a referral will be made to a Pediatrician. As part of this assessment you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and a questionnaire will be sent to your child’s nursery / education provision. Sometimes it is difficult to be sure about whether a child has autism, even after these appointments. If we need a more detailed look at your child’s social interaction we will need to request an ADOS assessment. Once the Paediatrician is sure they will let you know whether your child has an ASD diagnosis or not.

**Waiting for Assessment**

Unfortunately, there is a significant waiting list for assessment because so many children have been referred. We priorities those children who are Looked After or have a Child Protection Plan in place, so if that is the case for your child, please let us know.

**How to help**

We have a pre-assessment parent education session which is “**Pre-schoolers; how to help with challenging behaviour, communication, and** **accessing community resources”** – top tips on supporting your child and information about local services available to help you and your child. Parents can attend this group session whilst you wait for an assessment. This session has had many positive reviews by parents/carers. This session is offered by professionals with many years’ experience working with children with autism.

Call us to arrange your session

02476 961226