

AUTISM DIAGNOSIS - WHAT YOUR GP NEEDS TO KNOW TO HELP YOU

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If you believe that either you or a member of your family might be on the autistic spectrum and you need professional or clinical support, you will need to obtain a diagnosis.

Your GP will be able to make a referral to a clinical psychologist or a paediatrician who will carry out an assessment.

The GP will need some information from you. Here are some suggestions of information that will be helpful to them in deciding on the next step. Consider the questions below for the person needing the diagnosis – either you or your relative.

Communication and Social Interaction

Are there difficulties forming relationships with others? Perhaps there are difficulties making friends at school or at work.

Is there any physical aggression? Are there incidents of lashing out at strangers, animals or children?

Is there an understanding of the importance of personal space? For example standing a reasonable distance from someone else and recognising when the other person has had enough of the conversation?

Do you or does your relative understand and have consideration for the feelings of others?

Are you or your relative able to predict responses? For example, understanding that bad news might make someone sad? Can you or your relative express your/their own needs? Can you or your relative communicate verbally or use some form of sign or symbol language?

Can you or your relative express emotions?

Do you or your relative understand jokes, sarcasm or slang?

Do you or your relative pick up on social cues? Can you or your relative recognise body language or facial expressions?

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities

Talk about any rigid behaviour you might have noticed – for example specific routines? Do tasks have to be done in the same order every time?

Do you or your relative become anxious if routines are varied?

Can you or your relative attend to personal care without assistance? For example, washing and putting clothes on but needing to be reminded every time in what order to do things.

How are periods of anxiety manifested? For example, pacing up and down; shouting; resorting to repetitive behaviour; becoming abusive?

Do you or your relative have special interests which could prevent keeping conventional hours? For example, using the computer until late at night causing lack of sleep?

Sensory Issues

Are you or your relative sensitive to the physical environment, such as lighting, strong colours, textures, certain sounds? For example, some individuals will only eat foods with certain textures or colours; or cannot go into a room with a certain kind of lighting.

Support

Do you believe that you or your relative could live independently if offered some support? If you or your relative received coaching in performing household tasks, budgeting, nutrition by people who understand about autism do you think progress could be made?

Will you or your relative always need a high level of support to carry out personal care, to communicate, cope with change or to manage anxieties?

Do you or your relative have a sense of danger?

The Diagnostic Process

Children

If you suspect your child has autism you can obtain a diagnosis when he/she is quite young, possibly as young as 2 years.

It is advisable to go to your GP armed with as much information as possible so make a list of everything which causes concern or that you have observed. Your GP will make a referral to a diagnostic team to assess your child. If your child is already in school it is helpful to talk to the school's special education needs co-ordinator (SENCO).

The diagnostic team usually consists of a psychiatrist, psychologist and speech and language therapist.

Your child will be assessed by each team member separately and they will then meet to discuss their findings. They will also gather reports from other involved parties such as the school or nursery.

Your report, which will follow your appointment, will contain a clear diagnosis and recommendations for future support.

Adults

Many adults have never received a diagnosis even though it has long been suspected that they might have autism. The process is largely the same.

Your GP will need examples of the how the suspected autism affects daily living together with the difficulties experienced. It is useful if the person attending the appointment has some understanding of their rights:

Autism: your rights.

It is also helpful to have some knowledge of autism support services in your area.

Again, a team of professionals will carry out the assessment and ask about developmental history. It is a good idea to attend the appointment with someone who knows you or your relative well and can help with answering the questions.

The report will follow and will contain a diagnosis and recommendations for future support.

For more information regarding the diagnostic criteria and process please see the following sites;

<https://livingautism.com/article/408-diagnosis>

<http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/all-about-diagnosis/changes-to-diagnostic-criteria/qanda-dsm-5.aspx>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/diagnosis/dsm-5-diagnostic-criteria>

If you need help looking for services for an individual with an autism spectrum

condition, we can help. Click below for the Autism Placement Support Service.

**Click here for our
Autism Placement
Support Service**



