

Social communication difficulties in children under eight years old: the pathway to diagnosis

This leaflet explains more about what happens after your GP, school or a professional has referred your child for assessment of their social communication difficulties. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What happens first?

Your child has been referred by your GP, their school, or another professional. The referral will be both to St George's and a Multiagency Complex Needs Panel (MACNP). Please give your consent to both these referrals, to prevent any delays.

We will write to you and the school special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) if we need to ask for any more information to help us decide which is the best service to help your child.

Please send this information in as soon as you can so we can make the decision.

Once a decision has been made the MACNP will write to you to let you know.

Why has my child been referred?

Children are usually referred because they have difficulties in communicating and interacting with other children and these difficulties are not just with their speech and language.

They may find friendships hard and may have some repetitive behaviours and intense interests, which may affect their life in other ways.

To try and help children in Wandsworth with these difficulties, we have made something called a 'pathway'. This is not a physical pathway, but a series of checks and appointments which should help us to understand your child and their difficulties.

We should then be able to give the most accurate diagnosis, letting you know why your child is having these difficulties, and what we may be able to do to help.

One of the most common diagnoses is an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

What happens next?

If we feel we need to explore your child's social communication, interaction and behaviours more fully, we will put them on a list for further checks.

Within six weeks an ASD adviser will get in touch with your child's school or nursery and ask for information about your child's strengths and difficulties. If your child is not in nursery you may be contacted by the parent and child development team.

A speech and language therapist will also be in contact to assess your child (even if their speech and language seem OK).

You will also be invited to attend a paediatric neurodevelopmental assessment with your child.

Once these assessments have taken place, we should have a clear idea of your child's needs and strengths.

If there is no clear medical reason for your child's difficulties, a diagnosis will be unlikely. A member of our team will explain why and what we can do to help with your child's needs.

If a diagnosis of a social communication disorder is likely, you and your child will be invited for a multidisciplinary assessment (an MDA), where we look at all the information about your child's difficulties from all the assessments that have happened before. This will then be used to decide on a diagnosis.

Where do I need to go?

Depending on which check or appointment your child is having you may need to attend at St George's Hospital or the Early Years Centre. Your child may also be assessed at the school he or she attends.

What do I need to bring with me?

Please bring with you copies of any assessments and any questionnaires that you were asked to fill in and your child's red book.

Useful sources of information

www.wandsworth.gov.uk/localoffer

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the Early Years Centre on 020 8871 8866 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) or St George's developmental team appointment line on 020 8725 4854.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111