

CHILDREN AND AUTISM · 7.3

Paediatric Autism Assessment: What Happens and What to Bring

A paediatric autism assessment is a multi-disciplinary process, not a single appointment. It usually involves a developmental history with parents, a structured observation of the child, and information from school, integrated into a clinical formulation.

FOR

Parents preparing for an autism assessment

AUDIENCE AGE

6-17

REVIEWED

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PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

Paediatric Autism Assessment: What Happens and What to Bring

What the assessment covers

- **A developmental history with parents.** A detailed conversation, often two to three hours, covering your child from infancy onwards. The structured tool most commonly used is the ADI-R. The history is the single most important part of the assessment.
- **A structured observation of the child.** Usually the ADOS-2, which has modules matched to age and language level. It is about 45 minutes to an hour of structured play and conversation, not a test. Equivalent structured observations are also used.
- **Information from school and any additional assessments.** Input from the class teacher or SENCo, by questionnaire, letter or phone. Cognitive, language or occupational therapy assessments where the picture calls for them. The team integrates everything into a NICE-aligned clinical formulation.

What happens and what to bring

- **Bring early records and school reports.** Red book or health visitor records where available. School reports from the earliest year onwards. Any previous reports (speech and language, occupational therapy, educational psychology) and previous referrals.
- **Bring examples of patterns rather than one-off incidents.** Specific situations that feel typical for your child are more useful than a list of all the unusual moments you can remember. A short written summary of your concerns, what you have noticed, and the questions you have, helps the clinician and you.
- **The observation appointment is designed to be doable.** Most children, including autistic children, can sustain it. Tell your child it is an appointment with a clinician who wants to get to know how their mind works. They do not need to perform a particular way.
- **Masking is real and clinicians look for it.** Some autistic children, particularly autistic girls, mask hard in clinical settings. An experienced clinician compares the observation with the developmental history and the school information; one snapshot is not the diagnosis.

What happens next

- **A NICE-aligned report.** It should set out the history, the observation, school information, any additional assessments, a clinical formulation, the diagnostic conclusion, co-occurring conditions and recommendations. A two-page report with a one-line conclusion is not consistent with NICE.
- **The report opens specific support routes.** School can use it for SEN Support or an EHC needs assessment. Local autism pathways and parent training become available. Co-occurring conditions identified in the report often warrant their own next steps.
- **Private assessment where NHS waits are not workable.** NeuroFX offers private paediatric autism assessment for children aged 6 and upwards with the same NICE-aligned framework. Combined ADHD and autism assessment is available where both are being considered, which avoids running two assessments back to back.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP to request an NHS paediatric autism referral. Speak to the school SENCo at the same time; school information forms part of the assessment. Where NHS waits are not workable, private autism assessment with a CQC-registered provider is a legitimate parallel route. Seek urgent help via 111, 999 or A&E for any acute mental health crisis or significant safety concern.

SOURCES

NICE CG128 and CG170; DSM-5-TR; ADOS-2 (Lord et al. 2012); ADI-R (Rutter et al. 2003); Royal College of Psychiatrists; National Autistic Society

NEXT STEPS

Speak to NeuroFX

Private ADHD and autism assessment for adults and children aged 6 and upwards.
CQC-registered. Bedford Consulting Rooms, 4 Goldington Road, Bedford MK40 3NF.

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