



Child and Family Services Unit
Child Development Centre
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Web: www.bridgewater.nhs.uk

*For parents/carers of children and young people with a recent diagnosis of
Autism Spectrum Condition/Disorder*

Dear Parents/Carers.

We are writing to introduce the Specialist Nursing Team for children and young people with additional needs including Autism Spectrum Condition/Disorder.

Your child or teen will have recently received a diagnosis of Autism. Well done for completing the assessment process; we know this can be an extremely emotional and, at times, anxiety provoking experience.

We have created this pack to give you further information about the diagnosis and our service. Throughout this pack we will be using the term Autistic as this terminology is the preference of the Autistic community. As a service we understand everyone has different preferences and we will always be guided by the terminology you prefer when working with your family.

What happens now?

As a team we work with children and young people until their 19th birthday who have a diagnosis of Autism, ADHD and/or a Learning Disability.

It is important **if you need support** in relation to your child/teens diagnosis that you contact the team on **01925 946773** where you will then be offered an appointment with a member of the team to see how we can support you and your child/teen. You will **not automatically** be contacted by our service and so its **important you let us know** using the above number if you need our support.

Specialist Nursing Team



What is Autism?



Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition. Autism is characterised by differences in an individual's authentic styles of social interaction and social communication. Autistic people also often experience their senses in a heightened way, may show passion for favoured interests and often thrive on routine. This will have impacted your child's everyday life from early childhood.

Social communication is the ability to interpret both verbal and nonverbal language including things such as gestures and tone of voice. This can present as having a literal understanding of things and finding it difficult to understand more abstract concepts.

Autistic individuals may struggle to initiate conversation with others who have a differing communication style to their own. Some Autistic children and young people may repeat back what others say to them or repeat things they have heard elsewhere; this is often their means of establishing 2-way communication and connection with someone.



Social interaction is the ability to recognise and understand the feelings and intentions of others. The person's ability to communicate their own emotions to others and understand 'unwritten' social rules that we all live by in society.

Many Autistic people may seek time alone when they are overwhelmed/overstimulated by the environment and people around them. This can make establishing and maintaining relationships challenging at times. We often see Autistic people seek to talk about their interests, it may appear to others they aren't interested in having 2-way conversations but sometimes talking about these interests is their way of initiating a conversation with others when they don't know how else to do so.

A common myth about Autism is that Autistic people have poor social skills, this isn't true, Autistic people simply have different social skills. While it is important to help Autistic people learn about how people without Autism interact and communicate so that they are prepared and able to manage this, we don't advocate for teaching Autistic people that this is the way they **must** communicate. This is because it often leads to 'masking' and burnout which can contribute to poor emotional wellbeing. Masking is where someone tries to mimic the ways people without Autism behave and interact with the world around them. Masking is very common, particularly among Autistic girls and can be one reason why Autism can be harder to detect in girls.

You may be wondering 'how do I tell my child they are Autistic?' We recommend starting by focusing on your child's strengths and difficulties and then offer a name for this being Autism. Acknowledge everyone has strengths and difficulties and try to talk about Autism in an open and positive way.

Autism and Behaviour

All behaviour has a function and behaviour is often a means of communication. Some behaviours negatively impact on the persons quality of life, and it is therefore important to try and find out what the function of this behaviour is. In doing so we can look at putting things in place to have this need met in a way that doesn't negatively impact on that person's quality of life.

Some behaviours may be the result of sensory differences and/or pain and distress. It is therefore vital that if your child/teens behaviour changes suddenly without apparent reason that physical health causes such as pain caused by constipation and/or tooth ache are ruled out. Your GP can help you to do this.

Stimming is very common in Autistic individuals and usually involves a repetitive movement of some description. There are many types of stimming that can serve multiple functions and stimming when it takes place in a health way is **not** something to be discouraged. Some common reasons for stimming involve to sooth the person when they are distressed and to regulate their emotions as well as to help the person process things around them.

Autistic people may have a special interest in something, this is where they can be hyper focused on a particular topic. Special interests can be a great way to increase a child/young person's engagement and enjoyment in any given activities, including their learning in school.

Autistic children may enjoy play that is repetitive in nature such as lining up toys and feel security in sticking to routes. This can often be a way to make sense of the world around them that at times can be very unpredictable and confusing to navigate. Knowing what is going to happen next can be very reassuring for lots of people including Autistic individuals.





Autism and Diet

Many Autistic individuals have a restricted diet. Different studies have shown that at least 70-90% of parents with Autistic children report eating and feeding issues of varying severities, in comparison to 10-45% of children without Autism.

Children without Autism generally grow out of these difficulties by age 3 but for Autistic people often this can be a lifelong challenge.

We understand that your child's restricted diet can be very worrying, but we encourage you to remember that all foods have some sort of nutritional value and that as long as your child is growing and is fit and well, please do not worry. If you have concerns about your child's growth, please speak to your GP.

We can discuss strategies to try and increase variety in your child's diet. The main emphasis of these strategies is about increasing positive experiences with food without the pressure to eat it. Autistic individuals tend to prefer foods that are familiar to them and therefore spending time playing with food (such as messy play), getting involved in cooking, baking, and shopping are all ways to make you child more familiar with different foods which in turn increases the likelihood they may choose to try them.

Advanced Solutions also offer a workshop on eating difficulties called 'Understanding eating difficulties' ran by occupational therapists which is free to attend. More information can be found on their website.



Autism and Sleep

Sleep is important to us all and we can really suffer when we don't get enough of it! Between 50-80% of Autistic children struggle to fall or stay asleep, compared to 1-16% of children without Autism (Wallis, C. 2017). Sleep deprivation often presents as hyperactivity in children.

As part of our service, we can support you with your child's sleep pattern using behavioural strategies such as establishing routines and sleep hygiene.



For more information on how to improve your child/teens sleep visit '**The Sleep Charity**' website which has lots of great resources to support anyone who is having difficulties with sleep. This includes parents too! The Sleep Charity also runs a **free helpline** anyone can call for advice around difficulties with sleep, more information can be found on their website.

Website: <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/>

The Sleep Charity also run '**The teen sleep hub**' designed specifically for your teenagers to access for support and advice around getting a better night's sleep!

Website: <https://teensleephub.org.uk/>

Ways to support your child/teen

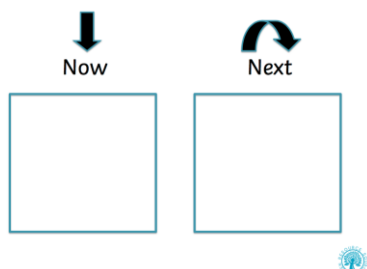
1. Visual schedule

Autistic individuals tend to be **fantastic visual learners** and so you have probably already heard a lot about the use of visuals and might be wondering specifically how to do this! Visual schedules can be great for **easing anxiety around the unknown**, ensuring your child/young person knows what to expect from the day as well as **reducing frustration** they may show at being unsure how to complete a task.

Morning Routine	
	Eat your Breakfast
	Get Dressed
	Brush your Teeth
	Brush your Hair
	Make your Bed
	Shoe & Socks on
	Pack Lunch in Bag
	In the Car with Bag & Hat

Visual schedules also **reduce the need for verbal communication** which you may have noticed to be a trigger for your child or teen at times of stress. Having a visual schedule that explains the steps means you as a parent don't need to keep repeating verbal instructions during what can already be a stressful time!

Examples of visual schedules are; - full visual timetables of their day, schedules which show step by step morning and bedtime routines even down to individual tasks such as getting dressed. Many examples of these can be found by putting 'visual schedules' into google images.



2. 'Now and next' or 'Now, next and then'

Now and next boards are another example of how visuals can be utilised to support your child/young person and ease anxiety. Examples of these can also be found by searching on google images but essentially a Now and next can be great if a more detailed visual schedule is too overwhelming or complex for your child/teen.

3. Social stories

Social stories can also be beneficial to prepare your child/young person for any change, a good example being starting a new school. Lots of examples of these can be found online. The '**Autism Little Learners**' website specifically has premade social stories on multiple topics available to download for free.

4. Processing time

Autistic individuals often need **more time to process** information (**often up to 7-10 seconds**) so don't be afraid of those acknowledge silences, they can be very helpful for your child/teens understanding!

5. Sensory differences

Autistic individuals may show 'sensory seeking' or 'sensory avoidant' tendencies. Sensory seeking is whereby your child/teen seeks out and needs intense sensory experiences, an example is an individual finding deep pressure soothing. Sensory avoidant is where an individual finds a sensory experience distressing, a common example of this is struggling with noise.



For more information on sensory needs visit the below link from **Bridgewater's occupational therapy service** that offers **videos and resources** talking through sensory strategies.

<https://bridgewater.nhs.uk/warrington/paediatricoccupationaltherapy/video-resources/>

It is important to keep the above strategies in place if you find things to improve. Sometimes people remove the above supports after having them in place finding their child/teen is coping better and generally less anxious and therefore it can be a common misconception to think they don't need them anymore. Generally, the very reason the individual is less anxious is because of strategies like this being in place and so it's important to keep these in place!

Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are small changes to help anyone with additional needs to have **equal opportunities**. The law states that reasonable adjustments should be put in place, and it is your right to ask for these.



Often reasonable adjustments apply to **healthcare**, but it is also important to be mindful of the **legal reasonability of schools** to make reasonable adjustments for your child too.



Examples of reasonable adjustments

- Professionals adapting their communication to aid the persons understanding such as using visuals.
- Professionals giving the individual extra time to process information,

Hospital/Health Passports

A sample NHS Hospital Passport form. The title is "This is my Hospital Passport" with the NHS logo. It is intended for people with learning disabilities coming into hospital. The form includes a section for the patient's name, a note about providing important information to hospital staff, and a section for nursing and medical staff to look at before interventions. There are three colored arrows pointing to sections: a red arrow for "Things you must know about me", a yellow arrow for "Things that are important to me", and a green arrow for "My likes and dislikes". At the bottom, there is a list of NHS trusts that use the passport.

Hospital/health passports are designed to help autistic people and their families communicate their needs to health professionals. This can help health professionals to make the right reasonable adjustments for your child/teen. There are lots of versions of these available, a good template and guidance on how to complete this document can be found on the **National Autistic Society's website**.

Frequently asked questions and support services



I would like to meet other parents/carers of Autistic children. Where can I go?

I would like my child to be able to meet other Autistic children. How can we arrange this?

Warrington parent and carers known as WARRPAC run regular support groups for parents/carers of children and young people with additional need by parents/carers.

Website: www.warrpac.org



Warrington branch of the National Autistic Society offers support groups for parents, a Friday youth club for young people aged 14-18 with a diagnosis of Autism, yoga sessions for children and young people as well as 'Chat n play' sessions where parents have the chance to chat to other parents of Autistic children while their children play.



**National
Autistic
Society**

Website: <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/branches/warrington>

Cheshire Autism Practical Support is an organisation that runs a variety of different clubs and groups across the Cheshire area.

Website: www.cheshireautism.org.uk



Spectrum gaming is an online community centred on a common love of gaming created for Autistic young people by Autistic adults. This allows Autistic young people to build friendships and learn about themselves in a safe environment while doing something they love! Spectrum gaming also host face to face meet ups in the Manchester area. For more information about how your child can get involved and to find out how this environment is kept safe visit their website below.

Website: <https://www.spectrumgaming.net/>

Warrington Play and Sensory Centre is a purpose-built activity centre for children and adults with additional needs. They house several different areas great for your child to play and relax in an environment where people understand their needs.

Telephone: 01925 817347 **Website:** www.warringtonsensorycentre.org



Me and/or my child would like to learn more about Autism....

ADDvanced solutions: Offers community-based groups and programmes on a variety of topics in relation to neurodevelopmental conditions.

Website: www.addvancedsolutions.co.uk



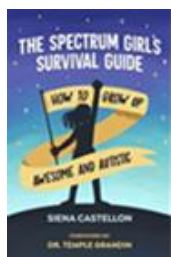
ADDvanced Solutions
Community Network
Supporting you to find the answers

The **National Autistic Society** website also has lots of good information and advice on a host of things in relation to Autism.

Website: <https://www.autism.org.uk/>

The **Autistic Girls Network** offers great information about how Autism uniquely present in girls.

Website: <https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/>



Suggested books

The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide: How to Grow Up Awesome and Autistic.

The Spectrum Girl's Survival Toolkit. The workbook for Autistic girls.

Both by Siene Castellon



We are having problems with my child's school, who should we contact?

SENDIAS: This service provides support and guidance to parents/carers with children/YP with additional needs in educational settings. This can include support in applying for an EHCP.

Telephone: 01925 442978

Website: www.warringtonsendiass.co.uk



I'm concerned my child is socially isolated and lacks confidence. What could they access to make friends in a supported environment?

Warrington Youth Centre offer services which include the buddy up 'befriending' scheme, personal development programmes, mentoring and various clubs.

Website: <https://www.warringtonyouthclub.co.uk/young-people/>

Warrington Wolves run various sports teams including football and rugby for young people with Autism and/or a Learning Disability. This is a way for you to burn off access energy while meeting people who understand you.

Website: <https://warringtonwolvesfoundation.com>





What support can my child access in the local area?

My Life Warrington (previously known as Ask Ollie): Local offer for children in Warrington with additional needs.

Website: <https://www.mylifewarrington.co.uk/kb5/warrington/directory/home.page>



My child's sibling helps support them. I'm worried about the impact of this on them, where can my child's sibling access support?

WIRED Young Carers is Warrington's young carers service. This service may be useful if your child has any siblings who support with caring responsibilities. They offer lots of forms of support for young carers including one to one emotional support as well as respite opportunities where they can meet new friends and have fun!

Telephone: 01925 987 010 **Website:** <https://wired.me.uk/services/warrington-young-carers-service>



My child is still not potty trained, where can I get advice? My child smears, I'm not sure where to turn...



Lots of Autistic children and young people struggle when it comes to using the toilet, there can be lots of reasons for this but for help and advice visit **Eric: The Children's Bowel and Bladder Charity** which offers great advice from anything from toilet training to smearing. The Eric charity also have a **free helpline**.

Website: <https://www.eric.org.uk/>

For further advice around bladder and bowel related problems please seek support from your GP who can advise in the first instance and refer to more specialist services in this area if needed.