

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The answers to these frequently asked questions (FAQs) have been provided by the Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust (CWPT) Neurodevelopmental Service (health) in partnership between Education, parent/carers and commissioners of services.

We hope these FAQs are helpful. You can find out more about the Neurodevelopmental Services team at: <https://cwrise.com/neurodevelopment-service>

What are the waiting times for Autism assessments in my area?

The waiting times for Autism assessment in Coventry and Warwickshire are around four years and, whilst we recognise this is not acceptable, they are in line with waiting times across the country.

Why can't I have an exact timeframe for my child's Autism assessment?

We are sorry but we are unable to provide a precise timeframe for this as timescales may change whilst your child is on the waiting list. This is due to the prioritisation process we have in place, which impacts on the number of routine assessments that the service can provide.

What is being done about the waiting times?

We recognise that the current waiting times are too long; however, we are pleased to be able to share that Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust (CWPT) has secured additional funding and we are working with several external partners to provide additional assessments to reduce the waiting time. At the time of the assessment, you may be contacted by our service and/or one of our partner organisations to start the assessment process.

I have been contacted by another company stating they are going to complete my assessment on behalf of Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust. Is this ok and will a diagnosis be recognised if it comes from this company?

Yes, Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust (CWPT) has secured additional funding and we are working with several external professional organisations to provide additional assessments to reduce the waiting time. This means you may be contacted by one of our partner organisations to start the assessment process, but please be reassured your diagnosis will be recognised by the NHS.

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Why do you have prioritisation criteria?

We use prioritisation criteria to ensure we undertake assessments for the most 'at risk' children as soon as possible. These criteria are based on research and clinical evidence which identifies certain situations or times in a child's life where they may be more vulnerable. Currently we prioritise children who are a Looked After Child (LAC), are under Child Protection, where an adoption process is at risk of breakdown, are receiving services for child sexual exploitation, are actively involved in Youth Offending services and older adolescents (16+) who are reaching transition to adulthood.

Can I go privately for an Autism assessment?

Yes, you can go privately, however:

- a. The NHS is unable to contribute to the cost of this private assessment
- b. We recommend the assessment is undertaken by qualified and registered professionals and follows NHS guidance

[How to get diagnosed with autism - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

For more guidance you can visit at the National Autistic Society website link <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/diagnosis/pre-diagnosis/parents-and-carers>

- c. The assessment/report will need to be verified by the NHS in order for a private diagnosis to be recognised by education professionals across Coventry and Warwickshire. Please send the assessment/report you would like verified to the Neurodevelopmental Team, Paybody Building, c/o City of Coventry Health Centre, Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry CV1 4FS. The Neurodevelopmental Team will look at the assessment/report and inform the family, through a letter, whether or not it has been accepted.

If you would like information about where to find a qualified and registered professional who can complete a private assessment, please contact the National Autistic Society Helpline on 0808 800 4104 or look on their website www.autism.org.uk

Will my child get the help he or she needs in school without a diagnosis of Autism?

A diagnosis does not tell you what help a child may need at school, so it is important you speak to your child's school about how they support autistic children and social communication needs. As soon as the possibility of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) are identified, support should be put into place by the school.

The majority of schools in Coventry and Warwickshire have access to additional training on supporting autistic students and social communication needs. All children are unique

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individuals in terms of their strengths and needs, and those with social communication difficulties are no different. School and other Special Educational Need services can provide the right help, by assessing the child's autism and learning needs and putting in place strategies based on these.

Children do best when schools and parents work closely together – the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) is usually the main point of contact between parents and schools.

Does my child need a diagnosis of Autism to have an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA)?

No. All schools receive extra funding to help provide special educational provision for children with additional needs including autism and social communication difficulties. EHCNA's were introduced into the Special Educational Needs system to support children and young people with significant additional needs, **regardless** of whether or not they have a diagnosis.

The local authority must carry out an EHC Needs Assessment if they are of the opinion that both:

- Your child has or may have a special education need.
- Your child may need special educational provision to be made through an EHC plan.

It is unlikely that a diagnosis alone would indicate that both these statements are true. This is normally based on the needs the young person is showing in their educational setting and the type of provision needed

Coventry – www.coventry.gov.uk/sendiaass

Warwickshire - www.kids.org.uk/warwickshire-sendiaass-front-page

Does having a diagnosis of Autism mean that my child can't be excluded from school?

No, it does not, but we acknowledge that children with SEND are disproportionately likely to be excluded. Decisions to exclude a pupil are not made on the basis of whether or not a child has a diagnosis, but on a wide range of factors. Schools are required to support children with additional needs by making reasonable adjustments such as adapting the curriculum and learning environment.

There is statutory guidance on the exclusion of pupils from school, which sets out the legal responsibilities of schools, governing bodies, and local authorities. Rigorous processes

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are in place and parents/carers have the right of appeal against the decision to exclude, including access to an independent review panel with the involvement of a Special Educational Needs expert.

However, it is important to acknowledge that some children with a diagnosis may be excluded and it may be that the school environment (for example physical, social, sensory factors) is not appropriate for them. If the school are following the Code of Practice, that child should never get to the point of exclusion because an EHCP would have been put in place; and if the setting was not meeting their needs, an emergency review should be called and a more appropriate placement found.

Will a diagnosis of Autism be the key to receiving lots of support?

No, as most agencies no longer require a diagnosis of Autism in order to accept referrals. School based support from SEN services is now open to all and is based on need and not diagnosis. For information about support and services in your area please review the SEND local offer (see below).

Your child will be the same child after the assessment as before, with the same individual strengths, personality and challenges. Getting the right support can help improve outcomes. Every person will have a unique experience of autism; the main focus following a diagnosis is therefore to enable children/young people and their families to understand how Autism impacts on their daily lives and how to use strategies to support them more effectively.

If children need ongoing services, it is typically due to additional needs, such as mental health concerns often associated with Autism, for example anxiety, depression. Parent-led groups in most areas are a valuable support. The CWPT Neurodevelopmental Service will offer advice both before and after diagnosis.

Coventry - www.coventry.gov.uk/sendlocaloffer

Warwickshire – www.warwickshire.gov.uk/send

What support is available whilst I am waiting for an Autism assessment?

With your acknowledgment of referral, we have included details of our how to help sessions, online resources and Dimensions Tool all of which can be accessed before the assessment.

Can I claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) without an Autism diagnosis?

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DLA for children and PIPs are awarded based on a person's needs in comparison to another person of the same age. There are set eligibility criteria and thresholds which apply, regardless of a diagnosis. It is worth checking the criteria to see if your child might qualify given his or her individual circumstances. Since it is not backdated, it is particularly important to make sure that parents/carers apply as soon as they can.

The following website provides further information:

www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children

What if I am concerned about my child's mental health whilst waiting for an Autism diagnostic assessment?

We acknowledge that children with neurodevelopmental disorders often present with additional mental health concerns. If you are concerned we suggest the following:

1. Review the self-help resource that is available – information on local mental health services can be found the RISE website (<https://cwrise.com>).
2. Discuss your concerns with the school who may be able to refer your child to the Mental Health in Schools Team.
3. If you remain concerned please make an appointment to see your local GP to request a referral into the Specialist Mental Health Team.
4. For urgent help, for children and young people who are experiencing a mental health crisis, contact the **Rise Crisis team** on Freephone 08081 966798 (select Option 2).

What happens next?

Your child is on our waiting list for assessment. We will contact you when we are in a position to offer them an appointment by sending you our pre-assessment pack. This will include forms for you and school to complete to provide the clinician with up-to-date information before the assessment. If your child is no longer school aged or is home educated, just note this on the forms and return them to us. You can find out information about what happens in the assessment here: <https://cwrise.com/your-autism-assessment>.