

## Getting a Diagnosis for a Child

As a parent you know your child better than anyone else. If you have any concerns at all about development, behaviours, communication, learning abilities then it is better to try to get to the bottom of it as soon as possible so that appropriate understanding, strategies, interventions and support can be put in place. However, if it is your first child you may not be so aware of any differences and difficulties compared to 'typically developing' children until perhaps a friend or school teacher mentions them to you.

Most children develop and meet certain milestones at certain ages in their life.

This is a guide from the NHS to typical child developmental milestones:  
[www.nhs.uk/Tools/Documents/Birth%20to%205%20development%20timeline.htm](http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Documents/Birth%20to%205%20development%20timeline.htm)

### Things to think about

It would be advisable to keep a diary of your child's behaviours or development which are giving you cause for concern. In the diary it is worth recording the behaviour, what happened and who was involved prior to this behaviour (the antecedent), what happened immediately afterwards and any outcomes from a later discussion about the behaviour. This might best be done on a chart with those main headings and any others you feel would be relevant. This can help as supporting evidence when trying for a diagnosis but can also help you start to see a pattern to the problems and perhaps put in some strategies to try to prevent or lessen future incidents.

It would be helpful to also write out a 'potted history' of your child recording the differences you noticed in general development, physical abilities, speech and language, behaviours, social skills, friendships issues, obsessions and anything else that you feel is relevant.

Read through the Cambian information sheets on various special needs conditions and syndromes to see if you recognise your child in any of them, some conditions can co exist and so your child may fit more than one. Print the sheets out and highlight all the things that you see reflected in your child.

It is also advisable to refer to any letters from nursery/school/professionals which also state difficulties your child was/is having. Ask for any information or concerns about your child to be put in writing. This is because it seems that some settings will give verbal information to a parent and then when it comes to a meeting they may say that there are no problems. So, for example, if the school phone you, or tell you verbally face to face, something about your child's behaviours or any difficulties they have been having, write to them (emails are fine) stating something like 'Following our talk today, this is what I understand from what was said ...' It helps build up a record and a better picture of any difficulties your child is having.

It may also be helpful to video your child's

behaviour/reactions so that you have something to show your GP and/or other professionals who may not believe or see the behaviours that may be happening at home.

### Considering an Autism Spectrum Condition?

People with autism have difficulties in 3 main areas, known as the Triad of Impairment – Socialisation, Communication and Inflexibility of Thought. They can also have problems in other areas such as sensory issues. Most children would have followed a normal development pattern but perhaps with some speech delay and then behaviours, communication, play etc would have started to regress around the age of 2. In most cases they will have a below average IQ.

People with Asperger Syndrome, which is part of the autism spectrum, will have difficulties in 3 main areas, known as the Triad of Impairment – Socialisation, Communication and Inflexibility of Thought. They can also have problems in other areas such as sensory issues. They will however have average or above average IQ, good verbal language but cannot always communicate appropriately with others around them and will find the social side of life extremely confusing.

(High Functioning Autism presents the same as Asperger Syndrome but with delayed speech or early speech problems)

Cambian has information sheets on autism and Asperger Syndrome, please download them to find out more in depth information.

### What to do next

Talk to the school or nursery to see if they have the same concerns. The school can refer a child to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team, school doctor or LA Educational Psychologist (latter can usually only assess and not diagnose).

Speak to your GP about your concerns and show him/her the evidence that you have gathered as suggested above. (If your child

is under 5 a Health Visitor is usually a good source of advice and can carry out some simple assessments and speak to your GP on your behalf). Make sure you have an appointment with enough time to discuss everything in depth. If you are both agreeing there are concerns then ask for a referral to a child assessment/development centre or a consultant paediatrician. Don't be surprised if the GP says to come back in say three months time, as children are constantly developing and changing, but if you are convinced there is something not right then stand your ground. Once you have a referral be prepared for possibly a considerable wait before you get your initial appointment and there then may be further waiting to see a particular specialist relating to your child's suspected condition.

The third option is to pay for a private assessment or diagnosis at a private clinic or with an independent educational/clinical psychologist. Parents choose this route usually when they have become frustrated about NHS waiting times or need evidence more quickly to get extra support or a Statement of SEN in place. Going private can be much quicker and you can usually get more follow up advice and support but take note that it can cost from £1000 for an assessment report from one specialist and up to £3,500 for a full diagnosis with a team of specialists, depending on the condition being diagnosed.

Be aware – if you feel your child needs extra support in class, a school will not always take notice of a private report and will still have to refer your child on. Extra support, especially in a Statement of Special Educational Needs, is funded by the Local Authority and the LA may take the view that if a parent has paid for a diagnosis the report will say what the parent wants and the authority will still insist on carrying out their own assessments.

Cambian has a list of private assessment and diagnosis clinics and psychologists – please download it from the website.

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### Diagnosis

You may just see one professional but in some cases, multi-disciplinary teams (teams made up of a number of different health professionals) may be involved in diagnosing your child, especially if your child presents as quite complex or with a range of issues. It is important to ensure that whoever sees your child has a good knowledge of the suspected condition.

- paediatrician
- psychiatrist
- clinical psychologist
- educational psychologist
- speech and language therapist
- occupational therapist

### Autism:

New guidelines for GPs and health professionals were issued in September 2011 relating to recognising and diagnosing autism in children and young people. They are from NICE – the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. This is the quick reference guide version and it talks about recognising the symptoms, why not to dismiss asd, diagnosis, keeping parents informed and involved, follow up support etc. <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/13572/56431/56431.pdf>

Autism: Recognising the signs in young children. Web: [www.mugsy.org/pmh.htm](http://www.mugsy.org/pmh.htm)

The National Autistic Society has information on all aspects of the diagnostic process for parents and professionals at this link: [www.autism.org.uk/About-autism/All-about-diagnosis/Diagnosis-the-process-for-children.aspx](http://www.autism.org.uk/About-autism/All-about-diagnosis/Diagnosis-the-process-for-children.aspx)  
Helpline: 0808 800 4104

### Other conditions:

Contact A Family has an informative booklet for parents entitled 'About Diagnosis'. It covers How we can help; Support for parents; What is developmental delay; Understanding behaviour; Getting a diagnosis; What if we don't get a diagnosis; What is a genetic condition; Rare disorders; Sources of medical information; Concerned about your child; Practical and financial help.

Web: [www.cafamily.org.uk/media/351994/aboutdiagnosisgettingadiagnosis.pdf](http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/351994/aboutdiagnosisgettingadiagnosis.pdf)  
Helpline: 0808 808 3555

The Cambian information sheets on individual learning disabilities have a description of each condition and a list of contacts who will be able to advise on how to get a diagnosis.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Cambian has provided the details in this document in good faith and for information only and has not verified details provided by third parties. Nothing in this document implies any recommendation or endorsement of any course of action or service and you must ensure that anything you proceed with is appropriate for your requirements. Cambian accepts no responsibility for any loss or damage you sustain by taking action or dealing with third parties as set out in this document.

All the information sheets are checked and amended annually. Please ensure you have the current version.



Cambian is the largest provider of specialist residential education and care for young people with Autism, Asperger Syndrome and other associated complex needs in the United Kingdom. Cambian is trusted by hundreds of parents and over 70 Local Education Authorities. [www.cambiagroup.com](http://www.cambiagroup.com)

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