

THE *Cooley* PRACTICE

A GUIDE TO
YOUR CHILD'S
AUTISM
ASSESSMENT



The Cooley Practice

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Autism Assessments at The Cooley Practice

Thank you for choosing The Cooley Practice for your child's autism assessment.

You can be assured that your child's assessment will be completed by a multidisciplinary team (MDT) of professionals with expertise in autism and other neurodivergence. We will hold your family's needs at the centre of the process.

Informed by NICE guidelines, we use evidenced-based assessment tools that are considered 'gold standard' within the profession, offering a valid and reliable assessment to explore and understand your child.



What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autism (also known as 'ASD') is characterised by differences with social communication and interaction, impacting a person's relationships. These social differences are combined with restricted and repetitive behaviours; this may include unusual or intense interests, sensory processing differences, a need for routine, or repetitive body movements known as complex mannerisms. These differences have a persistent and pervasive impact on a child's functioning.

Who can have an assessment?

We are experienced in assessing children from 30-months up to older adults. The approaches we use are different across the lifespan and we have a separate guide for adult assessments. We assess all types of presentation, including children who display 'masking behaviours' that can disguise features of autism.

This guide will take you through each step of an assessment process:

- Step 1 – Initial screening
- Step 2 – Information gathering
 - Information from parent/caregiver
 - Information from educational provider
 - Meeting your child
- Step 3 – Team review
- Step 4 – Feedback and report



Initial screening

The aim of the screening process is to help us better understand the reason for your child's referral and to determine whether a full diagnostic assessment of ASD is recommended.

During the screening process, you may be sent a short questionnaire to gather initial information. You will also be invited to share any existing reports and assessments you may have that document your child's needs. This information will be reviewed by a clinical psychologist, who will advise whether a full diagnostic assessment is recommended. If a full assessment is not recommended, we will provide a letter to outline our reasons for this.



Information from parent/caregiver

Should you proceed with a full assessment, as a parent or caregiver, you will be invited to provide an overview of your child's strengths and difficulties, from birth to present day. During this appointment, we will gather information about family background, medical history, early communication and interaction, and any restricted and repetitive behaviours. We often refer to this information as your child's 'developmental history'.

What can I expect from the developmental history appointment?

Your appointment will usually comprise a telephone call lasting approximately 1-hour. Prior to this appointment, you will be emailed a questionnaire outlining what you will be asked during the phone call. It is helpful for you to complete this and return it to us prior to the appointment, but this is not necessary for the appointment to go ahead.

You may wish for another individual to be present during the phone call, such as another person that knows your child well (NB: the child being assessed is typically not present for this appointment). We can also offer these appointments over video call if preferred.

We recognise that it can be difficult to remember early years information, particularly for older children. There is no need to worry if there are questions that you are unable to recall the answer for. It may be worthwhile to look through your child's 'Little Red Book', or any previous medical reports and letters prior to the appointment to jog your memory.



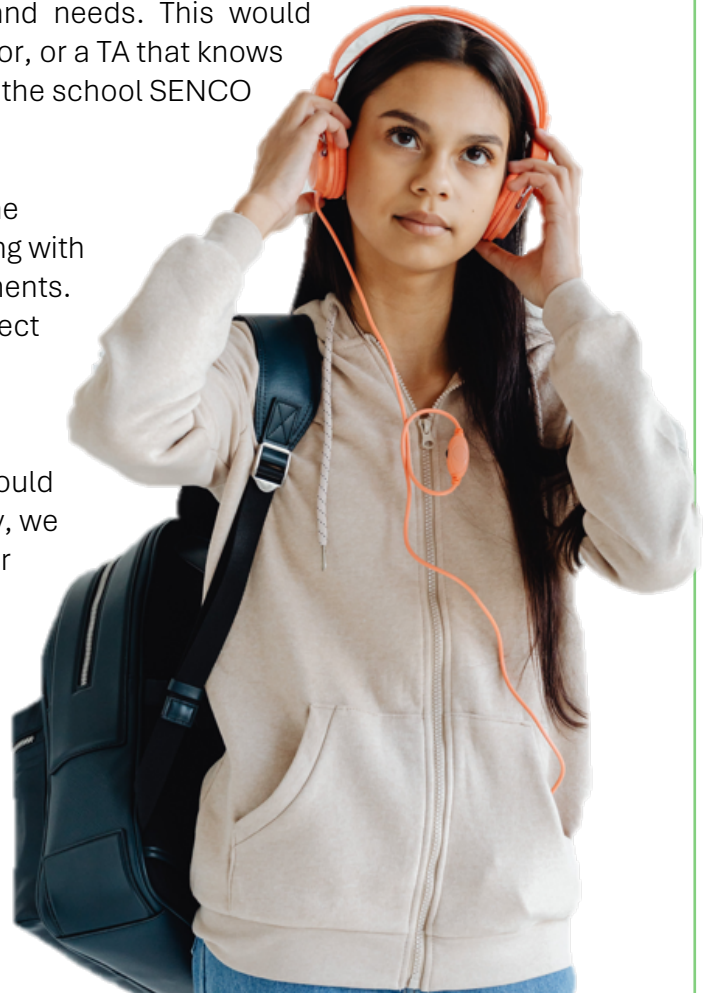
Information from educational provider

An important part of our assessment process is to understand how your child interacts within their nursery, school, or college environment, where there is often high levels of structure and social demand. We will send a questionnaire to your child's school for them to provide details about areas of strength and needs. This would preferably be completed by a teacher, form tutor, or a TA that knows your child well. This may also be completed by the school SENCO if they have worked closely with your child.

You won't need to do anything for this part of the assessment. Our team is experienced in working with schools and will make any necessary arrangements. We do ask that you let your school know to expect contact from us.

Our written questionnaire will occasionally be followed up with a phone call to the school, should we require any further information. If necessary, we will also arrange for one of our team to visit your child's school to carry out a discreet school observation*.

If your child has previously had input from other professionals (e.g., SaLT, paediatrician, occupational therapist, psychologists, counsellor etc.) we may ask your permission to read any associated reports. This provides additional sources for us to gather information.



Additional information

In some cases, we may send parents/carers further questionnaires regarding possible co-existing conditions or to gather additional information. Autism does not always occur in isolation, and traits and symptoms can often overlap or present similarly. Therefore, extra questionnaires can offer further clarity into your child's presentation. Commonly used questionnaires will screen for:

- other forms of neurodivergence such as ADHD
- mental health such as anxiety and low mood
- specific areas of autism such as repetitive behaviours and interests
- masking behaviours used by children to 'disguise' autistic traits from others

* An additional fee of £225 (plus travel) will apply if a school observation is required



Meeting your child

We will meet with your child to complete an interactive assessment known as the 'ADOS'. ADOS stands for Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (Second Edition). It aims to gather information about different aspects of your child's current presentation such as: their behaviours, communication, and strengths, as well as helping to identify any areas in which they may struggle and might benefit from support.

The assessment is carried out by two ADOS trained practitioners, one of whom will be interacting with your child, and the other who will be taking observational notes.

The ADOS is standardised. This means that the outcomes can be interpreted relative to other children of the same age and language ability to help inform the diagnostic process. It is considered a 'gold-standard' tool in the assessment and diagnosis of autism and is widely used in the NHS and is recommended by NICE guidance.



What can I expect during an ADOS?

An ADOS is an interactive assessment comprising different activities depending on your child's level of expressive and receptive language. A practitioner will ask your child to engage in several activities to observe how they approach each one. This might include play-based tasks and/or structured conversations. The ADOS typically takes between 40-60 minutes to complete.

Parents are welcome to remain in the assessment room, particularly if your child is very young; however, we recommend that your child is given the chance to engage with the ADOS independently as much as possible. This is to give the practitioners the best opportunity to get to know your child and how they think, behave, and interact with others. Parents of older children and adolescents may be invited to wait in another room during the assessment, provided that both you and your child feel comfortable with this.

Although this is an assessment, it is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way of completing an ADOS, and there are no 'correct' answers. **It is a priority for us to provide a comfortable and relaxed environment for your child during this appointment.**



Team review



This meeting will comprise clinicians from different backgrounds, such as a clinical psychologist, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist and/or paediatrician. This is so that more than one area of expertise is involved in concluding the assessment.

It takes place soon after your child's ADOS appointment, where the professionals involved review the information gathered across the different contexts. Evidence is compared to the diagnostic criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Following this review meeting, the team may request further information about your child to ensure the outcome is accurate and appropriately evidenced. You will be kept up to date if there is a need for further information, or if additional professionals are asked to join the review. Where autism is clearly evidenced, a formal diagnosis will be given. This diagnosis will be recognised by the NHS and other professional bodies.

Feedback and Report

Once the team review has been completed, one of the practitioners involved in your assessment will be in touch to arrange a date and time for a telephone appointment to discuss the outcome. It will be during this phone call that you will be told whether or not your child is receiving a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, as well as any other recommendations the team has suggested, such as further assessments or specific interventions. This phone call will be scheduled for 30 minutes to allow you time to ask any questions you may have about the outcome.

Following this phone call, you will receive a comprehensive written report outlining your child's assessment, including all the information gathered at each stage, and an explanation of how the team came to their diagnostic decision. This report will also contain the specific recommendations that have been made, and direction to additional organisations and resources that you and your child may find helpful.

Contact the Cooley Practice to book your assessment

Call: 0116 403 0083 | Email: contact@cooleypsychology.co.uk

Full assessment fee: £2000

This includes a £175 initial screening fee that is deducted should you proceed with a full assessment