

Putting NICE guidance into practice

Implementation pack: Developing a multi-agency local autism team

Local autism team information sheet

This information sheet has been produced by collating the information on local autism teams from the 3 NICE guidelines on autism.

Published: January 2014

Autism diagnosis in children and young people: recognition, referral and diagnosis of children and young people on the autism spectrum. NICE clinical guideline 128 (2011)

Autism: recognition, referral, diagnosis and management of adults on the autism spectrum. NICE clinical guideline 142 (2012)

Autism: the management and support of children and young people on the autism spectrum. NICE clinical guideline 170 (2013)

Role of local autism teams

Local autism teams are multidisciplinary groups that play a key role in the delivery and coordination of autism services. An autism team should have the skills (or access to professionals who have the skills) to carry out a diagnostic assessment, and to offer information about appropriate services and support. The teams should provide (or organise) the interventions and care recommended in the NICE guidelines. This could be a virtual team, depending on what would work best in your area.

You may develop separate local autism teams for children and young people and for adult services. These teams should cooperate to ensure a smooth transition for young people who need to continue treatment and care into adulthood. The timing of transition may vary locally and individually. Variations should be agreed by both child and adult services. If young people present at the time of transition to adult services, child and adult teams should consider carrying out the autism diagnostic assessment jointly, regardless of the young person's intellectual ability.

For children and young people, autism teams should have a key role in:

- providing a specialist assessment and diagnostic service
- overseeing specialist care and interventions for children and young people with autism, including those living in specialist residential accommodation
- providing advice, training and support for other health and social care professionals and staff (including in residential and community settings) who may be involved in the care of children and young people with autism
- advising on interventions to promote functional adaptive skills, including communication and daily living skills
- assessing and supporting the management of behaviour that challenges
- assessing and advising on the management of coexisting conditions
- facilitating access to leisure and enjoyable activities
- facilitating access to and maintaining contact with educational, housing and employment services
- providing support for families (including brothers and sisters) and carers, including ensuring that short breaks and other respite care is offered and provided

- producing local protocols for information sharing, communication and collaborative working among healthcare, education and social care services, including arrangements for transition to adult services
- producing local protocols for shared care arrangements with primary care providers and ensuring that clear lines of communication between primary and secondary care are maintained
- re-assessing needs throughout childhood and adolescence, taking particular account of transition to adult services.

For adults, autism teams should have a key role in:

- supporting the transition from children's to adult's services
- providing help for people with autism to access appropriate mainstream services
- working directly with people and workforce support agencies across the care pathway (including health and social care, education and voluntary sector services) involved in providing mainstream services and support to people with autism
- providing access to local diagnostic assessment
- giving limited post-diagnostic support for all assessed individuals (for example, through structured support groups and individual debriefing sessions)
- providing comprehensive ongoing support for small numbers of people with complex support needs that make it difficult for them to access mainstream services
- liaising with everyday health and social care services to help them make their services more accessible to people with autism, and work more effectively and efficiently with this client group
- providing autism training to frontline staff, including specialist training to identified groups (such as social workers, GPs, psychiatrists)
- facilitating access to a range of low-cost, preventative interventions for people with autism to promote wellbeing and social inclusion, and to minimise reliance on other health and social care services
- providing help for families and carers of adults with autism, to enable them to provide appropriate, sustainable support.

Staffing a local autism team

Local autism teams – core staff	
Children's services	Adult services
Paediatrician or paediatric neurologist and/or child and adolescent psychiatrist	Psychiatrist
	Nurse
Speech and language therapist	Speech and language therapist
Clinical and/or educational psychologist	Clinical psychologist
Occupational therapist	Occupational therapist
Social worker	Social worker
Support staff	Support staff ¹

¹This could be staff supporting access to housing, educational and support services, financial advice, and personal and community safety skills.

Consider including or arranging access for the team to a:

- specialist health visitor or nurse
- specialist teacher.

Commissioners should support plans to increase the personalisation of care to ensure that people with autism can take as much control as possible over their lives and the support they receive.

People with autism should have a designated professional to oversee and coordinate their care and support. In services for children and young people, the longer-term designated professional is likely to be described as a case manager or key worker. They may be a member of the autism team or someone from local community services who is identified by the autism team as suitable for the needs of the child or young person. Adults receiving care from, or services recommended by, the local autism team should also have an identified key worker or case manager. For adults not receiving care from the specialist autism team, mental health or learning disability services, the designated professional should be a member of the social care or primary healthcare team. The role of the designated professional should include ensuring that a care plan is developed for the person covering all the care, support and adjustments they need. The designated professional should also help

them gain access to the services they need and support transitions between services.