

Children's Therapy Services

Autistic Spectrum Disorder Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) Team



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What is Autistic Spectrum Disorder?

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (also referred to as 'autism') is used to describe children and adults who have difficulties in communicating with and relating to other people. This condition also affects how they make sense of the world around them. Every person is unique, but all will have similarities in the way they process information and understand the world.

Not all children who have difficulties with interacting and communicating with others have ASD. Some children can present with social communication difficulties but do not have other features associated with a diagnosis of autism. Sometimes social communication difficulties may be associated with other difficulties, such as language delay.

Getting a diagnosis of autism

If you have concerns that your child may have difficulties with social communication and interaction associated with autism, you can discuss this with the Speech & Language Therapist. We will gather information from you about your child, and share our observations with you.

We can discuss making a referral to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for a multi-agency assessment of autism. This is currently a separate team and has a waiting list. The service accepts referrals from professionals (Paediatricians, CAMHS professionals, Educational Psychologists and Speech & Language Therapists).

The role of the Speech and Language Therapist

The Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) will be able to identify and describe children's difficulties with social communication and interaction.

The speech language therapy service offers input to children with social communication difficulties and those with a diagnosis of autism- **input is offered based on the child's needs and not dependant on if they have a diagnosis of autism.**

The Speech and Language Therapist works with the people that are in the child's environment, such as parents, nursery/ school staff and other people working with the child to gather information about their early developmental history and how they communicate and relate to others. This may also involve observing the child closely in a social environment such as nursery, school or home.

The Speech and Language Therapist can support parents, carers and service users through appropriate advice, strategies and skills to support the child's interaction and communication needs. This may include:

- Supporting adults to adapt the way they communicate and interact with the child
- Supporting adults to make changes to the environment e.g. making it more structured and meaningful for the child
- Providing training and specific information for parents, carers and service users to support their understanding of the child's social interaction and communication difficulties.
- At times it will be appropriate for the SLT to suggest **specific speech and language interventions** that are appropriate for the child's communication needs. This may involve working closely with parents, carers and service users to model strategies and devise programmes of intervention for them to carry out in their everyday life.

Specific Speech and Language Interventions

The Speech and Language Therapist has skills to:

- Identify with the parents, carers and service users appropriate goals and specific strategies.
- We provide support for those working with the child to implement strategies with the child through modelling and training where appropriate.
- It is important that strategies are carried out in the child's everyday environments for them to be fully effective. It is recommended that service users then continue to come back to the Speech and Language Therapy services for next steps and to plan further strategies and interventions.
- More than Words Parent Programme. The SLT service currently provides an intensive parent programme called 'More Than Words' (Hanen). Parents can attend a series of workshop sessions at the clinic to learn about their child's social interaction and communication and learn about highly effective strategies to use with their child. As part of the programme the SLT will provide support to the parent to put these strategies into practice at home. (See 'More than Words' leaflet for more information).
- PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)/ Intensive Interaction. The SLT will identify the child's needs and provide training for staff for these specific interventions. We often provide support for parents and staff to implement these interventions by a SALT Assistant modelling these at home, nursery or school.
- Social Communication groups. If the child is in a nursery or school the SLT service may recommend the child accesses a regular social communication group. We can provide support for staff to set a group up and to plan the sessions. This may include some sessions in the setting from the SLTA to model this.
- Language programmes. Sometimes children with autism or social communication difficulties have needs with language, and the SLT can provide specific advice and interventions as appropriate. This might include vocabulary and narrative programmes.

Making a referral - What will happen?

If you have concerns about your child, either you, or nursery/school can make a referral to the Speech & Language Therapy Service. You can find a copy of our referral form on the Children's Therapy website.

We will invite you to clinic for a first appointment so we can find out about your concerns, gather some information from you about your child's development and carry out some assessment. We will also find out about how your child communicates, plays and interacts with you and others.

If there are indications that your child has difficulties with social communication and interaction, it is likely that we will arrange a visit to your child's school or nursery where we can gather further information and also discuss strategies with those who work with your child.

The Speech & Language Therapist will then work with your child over an "episode of care". This will be as many visits as the SLT feels is necessary to ensure goals and strategies are in place for your child. This may also include you attending a parent programme e.g. More Than Words, or staff from school attending one of our training workshops.

We will make sure that everyone working with your child understands how to implement goals and strategies and understand when to re-contact the SLT Service for the next steps. In the meantime, we would expect both you and other people working with your child to carry out the strategies we have recommended in your child's everyday life.

Re-accessing the SLT Service

We would ensure both you and those working with your child know when to re-access the SLT Service for the next steps if appropriate. This may mean that we will provide another episode of care. Some children may need one episode of care, whereas others may need ongoing episodes of care. You should also re-access the service if you have additional concerns, or feel strategies are not effective.

Re-accessing our service is easy: a phone-call to our team, a request for other professionals to contact us (e.g. nursery/school), a letter, or an email to Children's Therapy Services. Parental consent is needed. Please also see our website for information about our service.

Website: www.cht.nhs.uk/childrens-therapy-services

Please see our Children's Therapy Services website and follow the links to Speech and Language Therapy for information, leaflets, advice and resources.