

AFTER A DIAGNOSIS

Autism: the next steps

A practical guide from Oxford Psychiatry Group for autistic people, families and carers.

Take this at your pace

Autism is a lifelong difference, not an illness to cure. The aim of support is to understand the person, reduce avoidable barriers and help life work better. Autistic traits, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) traits or any other psychiatric diagnosis should not be assumed from a checklist or from one another; each concern needs an appropriate assessment.

1. Ask for a clear follow-up

Keep the diagnostic report and ask for the findings in plain language. It should describe strengths, needs, any concerns needing separate assessment and practical recommendations. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) says every adult diagnosed with autism should be offered a follow-up appointment to discuss the diagnosis, concerns and future support. [NICE adults](#) | [NHS support](#)

2. Build a support plan

Start with what is working and what is difficult at home, in education or work, in relationships, with health and with daily living. Record communication and sensory needs, helpful adjustments, responsibilities and a review point. For adults, NICE recommends a care plan after comprehensive assessment and says a health passport should be offered. [NICE adults](#)

3. Agree communication and sensory changes

Useful adjustments can include direct language, written information, processing time, a predictable agenda, warning of changes, breaks and a quieter space. Ask the person what helps. Harmless regulating actions, including movement or stimming, do not need to be stopped. [NICE adults](#) | [NICE under 19s](#)

4. Decide what to share

A diagnosis is personal information. An adult usually decides who to tell and may share only what is needed for support, subject to legal duties and safeguarding concerns. Involve children and young people in an age-appropriate way. Use the person's preferred language, for example "autistic person" or "person with autism".

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Support the person, not the label

Support should be based on assessed needs, strengths and personal goals.

Physical and mental health

Pain, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, ADHD, epilepsy and other conditions can occur alongside autism and should be assessed in their own right. Do not assume new distress is “just autism”. Psychological treatment should follow NICE guidance for the condition being treated, with changes such as structure, plain language, visual material, breaks and a chosen supporter where agreed. [NICE adults](#)

Medicines

Medicines should not be offered for the core features of autism. They may be used for a separately assessed condition. If behaviour creates significant risk, first check for pain, illness, mental-health, communication and environmental causes and use psychosocial or environmental approaches where appropriate. Any medication needs a clear target and specialist review. [NICE adults](#) | [NICE under 19s](#)

Children and young people

Speak to the school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) about support under the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system. The local authority can assess whether an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is needed. Support might include preparation for change, clear instructions, a quiet space and help during unstructured times. [GOV.UK SEND](#) | [NICE under 19s](#)

Adults in work and education

Ask for adjustments matched to the barrier, such as written priorities, a consistent contact, predictable rotas, a quieter workspace or extra processing time. Employers must make reasonable adjustments where the legal duty applies. Access to Work can add practical help but does not replace that duty. [Reasonable adjustments](#) | [Access to Work](#)

Daily living, social care and carers

A council needs assessment can consider daily-living and community support. An unpaid carer can request a separate carer's assessment. Benefits depend on eligibility and functional impact, not diagnosis alone. Participation in groups or social-skills work should be a choice; the aim is access and quality of life, not appearing less autistic. [Needs assessment](#) | [Carers UK](#)

NAVIGATION

Find reliable advice and support

Check age range, purpose, safeguarding, confidentiality, cost and accessibility before joining a service.

National and peer support

The National Autistic Society provides information, a services directory, branches and an online community. Autism Central is a National Health Service England-commissioned peer-education programme for families and support networks in England. These services do not provide emergency help or replace clinical assessment. [National](#)

[Autistic Society](#) | [Autism Central](#)

Through Oxford Psychiatry Group

Oxford Psychiatry Group offers specialist psychiatric and psychological assessment and treatment. We can help with diagnostic questions, coexisting mental-health difficulties, treatment planning and practical recommendations. Use the details in your clinical letter or make a new enquiry through our website. [Oxford](#)

[Psychiatry Group](#)

Terms used

National Health Service (NHS); National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE); general practitioner (GP); attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); special educational needs coordinator (SENCO); special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. A carer's assessment is a council assessment of an unpaid carer's own support needs.

When to seek clinical review

Ask for review after a marked change in sleep, eating, self-care, communication, mood or behaviour. Check for physical illness, pain, medication effects and mental-health problems. If someone may be in immediate danger, call 999 or go to accident and emergency (A&E); otherwise use NHS 111 and select the mental health option for urgent mental-health help. [NHS urgent help](#)

Trusted sources used in this leaflet

Clinical guidance: [NICE CG142](#) | [NICE CG170](#)

NHS information: [Autism help and support](#)

Rights and support: [Adjustments](#) | [Council assessment](#)

This leaflet gives general information and does not replace an individual clinical, legal, educational or occupational assessment. Guidance and links were checked on 4 September 2026. External services and availability can change. Service routes described are for England.