

## Autism screening questions for referral to Children Specialist Service

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a condition that affects social interaction, communication, interests and behaviour. In children with ASD, the symptoms are present before three years of age.

The below questions is proposed to help GPs to obtain the minimum required information in their 10 minutes consultation slot with patients for referral to the specialist service, hence they are not comprehensive list of questions, please add any extreme problems/ behaviour of the young person in your referral letter.

For a detailed list of symptoms of childhood autism, please click on <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Autistic-spectrum-disorder/Pages/Symptoms.aspx>

The questions in bold print usually are most informative for specialist clinicians when screening ASD referrals.

### Screening questions

#### Communication:

- When did he first use simple words with meaning (that is words other than mama, dada)?
- **When did he first use simple sentences?**
- Are there any difficulties in speech? e.g. repetitive speech, made up words
- **Does the child initiate or sustain conversational interchange (have to and fro chat)?**
- Is there any pretend play, such as the use of toy tea sets, cars (pushing cars along the floor making car noises)?

#### Social interaction:

- Did/ does your child come for a cuddle when upset?
- Did your child turn to look at parents directly in the face when they spoke to him/her when was young i.e. at 24 months old?
- **Does your child have friends? Or play with siblings?**
- Is your child able to read the social behaviour of other people (e.g. reading a story book, can they recognise feelings of surprised, confused, frightened, anger in the story characters)

### Interest, and behaviour

- Does your child show any repetitive patterns of behaviour or very intense interests?

#### Tops tips:

- Most parents do not remember at all accurately when milestones occurred if they were within the normal range, but they are more likely to recall them if they were delayed. When seeking to date milestones, reference should be made to familiar landmarks rather than to ages as such. For example ask whether the child used simple sentences by their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday or when the second child was born.
- It is helpful to gain an overall picture of the child's activities by asking how they spend their time on return from school or at a weekend. Such a description usually provides a life-like portrayal of the bleakness, or richness of the child's inner and outer world, and focuses attention on the activities, and experiences to be asked about in greater detail.
- It is helpful to know whether school share concerns with parents.
- Please, give details of the interventions been employed by parents / school to help the young person, and an indication of the success of these.

#### References:

- Goldberg D, Murray R, The Maudsley handbook of Practical Psychiatry, Fifth Edition
- ICD-10 Classification of Mental and behavioural Disorders
- Autism Team, Integrated Children's Services, Referral for Autism Assessment, Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust

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