

A Parent's Guide: What to Do if You Think Your Child May Have Autism or ADHD

Many parents are the first to notice that their child might be finding things harder than others – whether it's with concentration, communication, socialising, or managing emotions. If you are concerned, you are not alone and there are clear steps you can take to seek support.

Step 1: Speak to Your Child's School

Schools have a duty under the SEND Code of Practice to use the APDR cycle (Assess – Plan – Do – Review):

- Assess – The school gathers information about your child's strengths and difficulties.
- Plan – Together with you, the school puts a plan in place for support.
- Do – Teachers and support staff put strategies and interventions into action.
- Review – Progress is checked, and the plan is adjusted as needed.

Schools are expected to follow this graduated response before seeking further assessment. You should be included in every stage.

More info: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

Step 2: Speak to Your GP

Your GP is a key point of contact. You can ask your GP to refer your child for an assessment through your local Neurodevelopmental Pathway (NDP) service.

What is the NDP?

The Neurodevelopmental Pathway (NDP) is the NHS route for assessing children and young people who may have conditions such as Autism, ADHD, or other neurodevelopmental differences.

- Each area of the country has its own NDP service, but all follow the principle of providing a multi-professional assessment.
- Referrals can usually be made by your GP, and sometimes by schools, health visitors, or other professionals.
- The NDP looks at your child's needs across home, school, and social settings before deciding whether a diagnostic assessment is appropriate.

- If an assessment is carried out, it is usually led by a team that may include paediatricians, psychologists, and speech & language therapists.

Step 3: Know About Right to Choose

If you are struggling with long waiting lists, you should know about your Right to Choose:

- Under NHS rules, you can ask your GP to refer your child to an NHS-approved provider of Autism or ADHD assessments elsewhere in the country.
- The assessment is still free, and you don't have to stay within your local NHS trust if waiting times are too long.
- Your GP must make the referral if you request it.

More info: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/nhs-choice-of-hospital/>

ADHD UK guide: <https://www.adhduk.co.uk/right-to-choose/>

Step 4: Keep Records

It can really help to:

- Keep a diary of your child's behaviours, strengths, and difficulties.
- Collect any school reports, assessments, or professional letters.
- Note down what strategies help your child and what doesn't.

This information is invaluable for both school and health professionals when deciding on next steps.

Step 5: Ask About Additional Support

- Your child does not need a formal diagnosis to receive support at school.
- Schools can put in place adjustments and interventions as part of their SEND support offer.
- If your child's needs are significant, you have the right to request an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) from your Local Authority.

More info: <https://www.ipsea.org.uk/ehc-needs-assessments>

Helpful Contacts & Resources

- School SENDCo – Your first point of contact in school.
- GP – For referrals to NDP or Right to Choose providers.
- SENDIASS – Free advice service in your area: <https://www.sendiass.info/>
- ADHD UK – <https://www.adhduk.co.uk>
- National Autistic Society – <https://www.autism.org.uk>
- NHS – Autism overview: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/>

- NHS – ADHD overview: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/>

✓ Remember: You don't have to wait for a diagnosis before asking for help. Support should be based on your child's needs, not their label.