



## **Autistic Spectrum Assessment & Diagnostic Information Sheet**



### What does it mean to be on the autistic spectrum?

Being on the autistic spectrum means that there is a neurological difference in the way in which the brain is wired. This leads those with this neurological difference to see and relate to the world differently from those who are not on the autistic spectrum who are called 'neurotypicals'. There have been various terms used to describe this difference, e.g. autism, autistic spectrum conditions (ASC), autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and Asperger's Syndrome (AS).

This neurological difference is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to other people and the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that while all people on the autistic spectrum share certain areas of difficulty, their condition will affect them in different ways.

All individuals with ASD have impairments in the same key areas:

- Difficulties with social communication
- Difficulties in social interaction and relationships
- Difficulties in flexible and abstract thinking
- Difficulties coping with change and unpredictability

In addition to the above, some may have a preference for routine and repetitive activities and have hypo- or hyper-sensory sensitivities.

### Recognising Strengths and Abilities

While people on the autistic spectrum experience significant difficulties in key areas of functioning, unique abilities and strengths associated with the neurological difference are also increasingly recognised. Some people on the autistic spectrum have been outstanding achievers, usually because of their original and creative thinking style. With the right support and understanding, adults on the autistic spectrum can succeed in higher education and the workplace, as well as enjoy meaningful relationships.

### How could a diagnosis benefit me?

Receiving a formal diagnosis can give individuals, their friends and family a better understanding of the person's needs and abilities. It could also prevent common misdiagnoses, such as Schizophrenia and Personality Disorder, and inform appropriate treatment plans for people who have more than one diagnosed condition.

A diagnosis can help individuals access support to help them cope with difficulties associated with being on the autistic spectrum. This often includes preventing or managing mental health

conditions that are commonly experienced by people on the autistic spectrum, such as anxiety and depression.

Many of the non-statutory agencies set up to help people on the autistic spectrum require a diagnosis before they can offer support. In addition to being able to access community support, individuals with a diagnosis can also apply for benefits and are entitled to reasonable adjustments within places of education and employment.

## **Diagnostic Assessment**

### What will the assessment involve?

There is no definitive test to diagnose whether someone is on the autistic spectrum such as brain scans or blood tests. Instead, the assessment requires a skilled clinician to gather as much information about you, including about your early development as a child, which will need to be obtained from a parent or carer who knew you as a child growing up if possible. All the information will be gathered using in-depth interview schedules, questionnaires, exercises as well as gaining information from school reports if you have them.

Once the information has been gathered a diagnosis is made through clinical judgment of the number of traits a person presents that have caused difficulties for them across the lifespan. If a significant number of traits is present, a person can be classified as being on the autistic spectrum.

### How long will the assessment take?

Session 1: As part of the assessment, I will want to meet you for an initial session to go through some pre-diagnostic counselling with you. Here the discussion will be around things like, the reasons for seeking an assessment/diagnosis; the pros and cons of having a diagnosis; what support you will need to help you through the process and to answer any questions you might have. This itself will take approximately one 1hr session.

Session 2: The diagnostic assessment as described above can take at least 3 hours, maybe more depending on the complexity of a person's presentation and history. This can be done in one long session or over several smaller sessions, whichever feels more comfortable for you. This can be discussed in the first initial session. When obtaining your developmental history from your parent/carer, if they are available<sup>1</sup>, you can be in attendance as well or not. Again, this is entirely your decision. This part of the assessment can take approximately 2hrs.

Session 3: Once all the information has been gathered, it will be analysed. You will then be invited for a post diagnostic session where I will go through the outcome of the assessment with you. This session will give you the opportunity to discuss your feelings about this, where next and to answer any questions you may have. This will take 1 hour. By all means you can ask a friend/advocate to come along with you to help you understand the results.

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<sup>1</sup> If a parent/carer is unavailable to obtain a developmental history, it does not mean a diagnostic assessment cannot be made, but may need to find alternative sources of historical developmental information.

In summary:

Session 1 (1hr):	Initial session to go through pre-diagnostic counselling
Session 2 (3hrs+): (this can be done in smaller separate sessions)	Developmental history with parent/carer (2hrs) Individual: exercises, interview, questionnaires (1-1+hrs)
Session 3 (1hr):	Assessment feedback and post diagnostic counselling

#### Will I get a report after the assessment?

Yes, approximately 2 weeks after the final post-diagnostic session, you will receive up to 4 printed copies of a detailed report (minimum 6 pages). I will not automatically share the outcome of the assessment with your GP and will leave the decision to you as to who you share this information with.

#### How much will the assessment cost

The starting cost of an assessment is £850, depending on the complexity of a person's history and presentation. I suggest attending the initial session in the first instance to discuss your needs and decide if you wish to continue with the assessment. In this session I will hopefully be able to gain an idea of how complex your presentation is and how much the whole assessment will be. This initial assessment will need to be paid for at the time (£100) and if you decide to continue with the assessment, the rest of the cost (from £750) will need to be paid in full prior to the assessment session.

#### My experience of assessing and diagnosis adults on the autistic spectrum

I have had many years (7 years) experience of assessing adults (without a learning disability) on the autistic spectrum. This has been within my role as a Counselling Psychologist in Mental Health teams in the NHS as well as in private practice. I have been trained in using the Diagnostic Interview for Social and Communication (DISCO), which is classed as one of the gold standard tools to assess and diagnose people on the autistic spectrum. Although I may not use the full version of this interview schedule to assess someone, the training and knowledge of the tool informs my thinking and knowledge about the condition. As well as this training, I have attended various professional development courses in this field to increase my skills in the area.