



# Bedfordshire and Luton Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Waiting times for Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) Assessment for young people age 13 and over. Current waiting times are up to 12 months for an assessment following initial contact.

**How long is the wait for the first appointment?**

Waiting times for first contact from CAMHS following the first referral is that 97 – 99% of referrals are contacted within 12 weeks of referral. This includes contacts to our Neuro-Developmental Team (NDT) which completes the assessments to find out if a young person has ASC.

**How long is the waiting time for a full ASC assessment?**

- Waiting times for a full ASC assessment to commence - we are now advising that waiting times can be around 12 months. Waiting times depend on a range of factors – set out in the next box. We are reviewing our procedures and looking at ways to bring waiting times down. The simple truth is that since lockdown, we have received so many requests for ASC assessments that waiting times reflect this increased demand.
- In June 2023, there were 250 young people aged 13 plus waiting for an assessment to commence and 68 assessments for ASC were in progress with the team (that is, they are being assessed and we are assembling reports for diagnosis and feedback)

**Why are waiting times for an ASC assessment so long?**

- Factors impacting on waiting times are:
- ASC assessments are complex. It is essential that we get the assessments right as it is a lifelong diagnosis. A full assessment can take around 15 hours of clinical time which includes assessment, observation, review of scores from family and educational setting and multi-disciplinary discussion. The process time taken to complete a full ASC assessment can vary – on average it can take 2 to 3 months. We wait until we have all the information we require to give an assured diagnosis before we give the feedback to the young person and their family.
  - ASC assessments are completed by a small number of staff who work full time on the ASC Assessment pathway. They are supported by other clinicians within NDT who themselves have busy caseloads and who can complete perhaps one or two assessments per month.
  - Staff turnover – there are currently several vacancies in our Neuro-Developmental Team.
  - The number of young people being referred for assessment has increased dramatically since lockdown and the trend continues to show rising numbers requesting assessment.
  - The complexity of the referred cases for ASC assessment. We continue to respond to the individual needs of each young person we are assessing. For example, some young people cannot come into the CAMHS clinic, or feel unable to meet with people either at home or elsewhere. Others will need to meet a CAMHS practitioner several times before they feel able to attend an assessment appointment.
  - Sometimes (albeit not often) young people don't attend for their appointments which impacts on others waiting as we then need to offer a repeat appointments.
  - The caseload of the Neuro-Developmental Team as a whole is becoming more demanding in terms of higher number of cases and greater complexity of cases. This means staff have less time to carry out the assessments, write reports and give feedback.
  - Some young people are just not well enough when their assessment is due to commence and will need to wait until they are more stable and this can extend their waiting time.

**What is being done to reduce waiting lists?**

- We understand the challenges associated with waiting for an ASC diagnosis and we are working really hard to reduce waiting times. We have recently drawn up a contract with a trusted outside specialist agency who will be able to process around 118 ASC assessments for us from May 2023.
- We have recruited two senior members of the Neuro-Developmental Team (NDT) with the specific role of reducing waiting lists.
- A new Principal Psychologist starts with us in August 2023.
- We work closely with colleagues in the wider SEND system – schools, local authorities and other health professionals to support children and young people regardless of whether there is a diagnosis. We aim to work with all our partners to ensure that children and young people have their needs met and achieve their best outcomes. This includes providing input to Education, Health and Care needs assessment to see if a child/young person requires an Educational, Health and Care Plan.
- We have new project underway tracking the experience of YP whilst they are waiting for their assessment. Our aim is:
  - to improve user satisfaction and experience on the pathway
  - finding ways to improve the pathway efficiency
  - looking at new support pathways to reduce re-referral into CAMHS after an ASC assessment
  - looking at other ways to reduce wait times
  - the overall aim of this project is to reduce the time it takes to complete assessment (from referral to diagnosis) by 50%.

**Where can I go for help while we are waiting?**

- There is recognition that the system of support needs to be improved while children, young people and families are waiting for an ASC assessment and following diagnosis. The Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (the organisation which plans and commissions health services) is leading a review of both ASC and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) services together with CAMHS, other health services, social care and parent carer forums are involved.
- Autism Bedfordshire provides support for families waiting for an ASC assessment.
- The Local Authority Local Offers also have details of their SEND Advisory teams/SEN support teams which can provide advice and support and also other local groups including the Parent Carer Forums.
- CAMHS is a member of a working group, which includes the Parent Carer Forums, which is developing a pre-diagnosis information support pack for families.
- The National Autistic Society.
- CAMHS Discovery College provides a range of online and in-person sessions for young people age 13 to 18. All of the sessions have been planned and designed with young people. Any young person in Bedfordshire and Luton can get involved with the Discovery College.