

The Diagnostic Process

What happens in a child's autism assessment?

There is no biological test for autism. Instead, autism is diagnosed through observation and interaction with an individual, in conjunction with background information relating to development, health and behaviours.

No two individuals' experience of autism is the same, and the specific requirements of the autism diagnostic process can therefore vary, depending on need. Similarly, the assessment process is different for children and adults.



Arranging an assessment

After receiving a written referral, the diagnostic team uses questionnaires to gather preliminary information regarding the child's behaviours and interactions in different settings.

One questionnaire is for parents/carers to complete and is about the child's very early development.

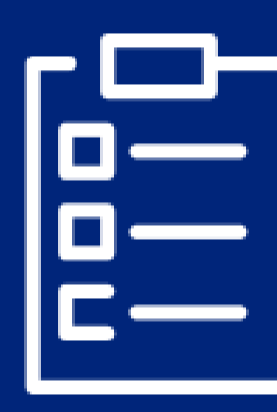
The other questionnaire gathers information about the child's pattern of behaviours in their school setting; parents are asked to give this questionnaire to a staff member who they feel knows their child well.

What happens during a child's assessment?

Observation and interaction are key elements of an autism assessment for a child.

A range of games and toys may be used as part of the assessment, during which we are looking for specific characteristics and behaviours that are likely to indicate whether or not a child is on the autism spectrum.

Assessments may look unstructured, but they are being conducted by very skilled professionals who are looking for very specific patterns of behaviour.



Much of what happens during the assessment will actually be led by the child, and this enables the diagnostician to observe a range of behaviours:

- The toys selected and how a child plays with them;
- What sort of things a child is interested in;
- How a child copes with change e.g., introducing a different toy, or changing the rules of a game;
- Whether a child initiates social interaction;
- How a child responds during interactions;
- The ways in which a child communicates e.g., using language or non-verbally; and
- A child's responses to sensory stimuli, e.g., how they respond to noises, smells, touch, etc.

The interactions and observations made during the assessment, developmental history, plus information gathered during the referral process, are then considered by the Diagnostic Team in light of the criteria for diagnosing autism as set out in DSM-5.

The Diagnostic Team will write a report based on our findings, explaining the outcome and the reasons for it. This will be sent to you between 2 to 4 weeks after your child's assessment, and there is no additional charge for this service.

If you have been referred to Autism SA by another healthcare professional, we will also send them a copy of the report, with your permission. The report will be only be shared with people for whom you give express consent.



My child has been diagnosed with autism – what next?

We will inform the Autism SA My Pathways Team. A Pathways Consultant will then make contact with you directly in order to arrange a Newly Diagnosed Support meeting, where your ongoing needs and options will all be discussed.

This meeting will give you an opportunity to discuss your specific circumstances and needs, and the ways in which Autism SA can support you on your autism journey.



My child has not been diagnosed with autism – what next?

You might feel relieved after having gone through the assessment process that your child has not been diagnosed as having autism, but at the same time this might be accompanied by some confusion and frustration as to what you should do next.

Your report will explain the reasons for the outcome the assessment. We can also provide information about other types of assessment that may be helpful, or make suggestions as to other supports and services you may be able to access

What else do I need to know?

- In some cases, it may be that the Diagnostic Team will also want to observe a child in another setting, such as at kindergarten or at school.
- The time required for an assessment can vary, from between 1 to 2½ hours. Parents and carers will be advised of the length of time it is anticipated will be needed in their appointment letter.
- The cost of a multi-disciplinary assessment for a child under 18 at Autism SA is \$1,000. The charge for confirming a diagnosis for an individual of any age is \$500.



Find out more

Call us on the Autism SA Infoline to find out more about getting a diagnostic assessment:

- 1300 AUTISM (1300 288 476)

Email My Pathways to request a Diagnostic Referral Form:

- mypathways@autismsa.org.au

