Cambridge Lifespan Autism Spectrum Service (CLASS)
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)¹

- This is a medical condition that involves a different pattern of brain development and brain activity.
- It is caused by genetic factors.
- It affects males more often than females (but many females may have been missed or misdiagnosed).
- It occurs in as many as one in 100 people.
- It leads to difficulties in social and communicative development and unusual, strong, narrow, repetitive interests.
- Individuals with ASD may have an average or above-average IQ and excellent attention to detail.
- In ASD, there may be a history of language delay.
- It is not uncommon for ASD to be accompanied by other developmental disorders, e.g., ADHD or Dyspraxia and mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression are quite common.

Benefits of Diagnosis

Diagnosis helps people access different services, as appropriate:

- Relevant information
- Social support groups
- Advice to employers, partners and carers
- Supported employment
- Sheltered housing
- Social skills training
- Management of mental health symptoms
- Disability benefits
- Advocacy and mentoring
- Access to reasonable adjustments when disclosing diagnosis

There is no specific medication for Autism Spectrum Disorders, but when individuals have additional mental health symptoms, medication may beneficial. It is important that any health and social care practitioner supporting the individual post-diagnosis is
adequately informed so that reasonable adjustments can be made, and outcomes can be optimised.

The CLASS Clinic
Cambridge Lifespan Autism Spectrum Service (CLASS) was established in 1999 and continues to offer a clinical service for adults without an intellectual disability (learning disability) who are seeking a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). Since 2013 the clinic has had a dedicated building in Fulbourn, called the Chitra Sethia Autism Centre (just 15 minutes from the Autism Research Centre at the University of Cambridge. This was made possible through collaboration between CPFT, the Autism Research Trust (ART) and the National Autistic Society (NAS) and owing to a generous donation from the N Sethia Foundation in memory of Chitra Sethia. The CLASS clinic is part of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust’s (CPFT) Adult & Specialist Division.

Who we are
CLASS employs a team of psychology, nursing and psychiatry and individuals are generally offered an appointment with one of several clinicians. We are also supported by a small number of sessional clinicians.

Our joint vision is for the centre to be a life-changing resource for people who have autism and their families. It will become a place where people seek support, advice, inspiration and practical guidance, where they are connected with their local community, are accepted and understood, and where they are empowered to live their lives to the full.

CLASS team:
Dr Janine Robinson: Consultant Clinical Psychologist
Dr Andrea Woods: Clinical Psychologist
Dr Gina Gomez de la Cuesta: Clinical Psychologist

Team manager:
Debbie Mason

Where we are:
CLASS Clinic
The Chitra Sethia Autism Centre
The Gatehouse
Fulbourn Hospital
What we aim to do:

- To provide diagnostic excellence through evidence-based multi-disciplinary assessment of autism in adults aged 18 years and over.

- To provide comprehensive reports that detail recommendations of future need and preferences in a highly personalised way beyond diagnostic requirements.

- To undertake collaborative and consultative work with commissioners and others in the development of provision locally.

- To support training and skill-sharing to services and others who work with adults with autism.

- To influence local leadership with regard to providing services to adults with autism and the development of integrated care pathways.

Who can access our service?

- The CLASS clinic accepts referrals for individuals (18 +) whose GPs are based in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Region (currently Royston & Oundle GP referrals are not accepted).

- Assessments are free of charge to patients living in the Cambridgeshire area.

- Individuals who are not eligible for the CLASS service can contact the National Autistic Society to locate similar clinics in their area. Patients cannot fund their own assessment in this clinic.
How to access our service (individuals/families and carers):

Being referred:
If you are struggling with challenges in education, at work or in your day-to-day communication with others and you think that autism may be able to explain these (or some of these)

- Speak with your GP or any other mental health practitioner.
- Please be advised we are unable to accept self-referrals and the clinic cannot accept privately-funded referrals.
- Your GP may refer you to PRISM where a mental health practitioner may ask you some questions and may support you to complete a brief screening questionnaire and find out about your difficulties and the impact on your day-to-day life.
- You do not need to make the appointment. The PRISM team will contact you.
- If your score suggests you may have autism you will be referred to CLASS.

CLASS - the first phase:
- The clinic will consider the referral and if it is appropriate, 3 screening questionnaires and a biographical questionnaire are sent (by post) to the referred individual, who is asked to ask an informant to complete the brief developmental questionnaire. The informant is someone who can provide a reliable developmental history, such as a parent or sibling. It is very helpful to have an informant, to help receive a definitive diagnosis.

CLASS - the second phase:
- Once the completed questionnaires are returned, we review the information and if the information is appropriate and complete, a letter informs the individual and referrer that the individual has now been placed on a waiting list.
- Sometimes the details contained in the returned questionnaires indicate that it is not appropriate to proceed with an autism assessment, e.g., it may be more appropriate to make a referral to a different service.
- Alternatively, sometimes further information is required from the individual or referrer before a decision can be made about the assessment.
• The waiting time is in excess of 12 months and within ~8 weeks of an appointment being available, the individual will be contacted to identify a suitable appointment date.
• Prior to the assessment, we write to the individual’s GP to request any relevant medical notes.

CLASS – what happens in the appointment?
• The assessment itself can last up to three hours and consists of an informal interview with the clinician.
• A diagnosis, if appropriate, is given at the end of the assessment. Occasionally this is not possible for example, due to insufficient information.

CLASS – what happens after the appointment?
• The report, with recommendations, is sent to the individual’s GP. Other professionals involved in their care may receive a copy with the patient’s consent. The patient also receives a copy.
• As we are a primary diagnostic clinic only, we are unable to offer follow-up consultations.

General information relating to referrals
• If referrals are initiated by family members, it is essential that individuals are willing participants in the assessment process.
• Referred individuals should be free of any general learning disability. If they have a learning disability, a referral to their local learning disability service is more appropriate.
• Individuals whose first language is not English we can arrange an interpreter to attend the assessment appointment.
• All information remains confidential to the referred individual, the referrer and the GP, except where there is information suggesting there is significant risk to the individual or to others.
Additional information

- There is free parking available on the Fulbourn Hospital site close to the Chitra Sethia Autism Centre where the assessments take place. A regular bus service from Cambridge also serves the site (citi1 and citi3).

- If you are offered an assessment at the clinic you will be sent further detailed instructions with your appointment details. Missed appointments carry a cost to the clinic. Please therefore contact the clinic if you are unable to attend.

- To improve our service, we invite all referred individuals to provide feedback on their experience in the assessment process in an anonymised online questionnaire.

- All patients are invited to take part in research studies. These take place at the Autism Research Centre (ARC), Cambridge University, with whom CLASS is linked. Taking part in research is voluntary and does not affect your status as a CLASS patient. If your diagnosis is confirmed please register at https://www.autismresearchcentre.com/

Process for referrers

- The CLASS clinic offers assessment, diagnosis and recommendations for adults (18+) referred for possible Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism (no learning disability).
- Patients must be registered with a GP surgery in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CCG.
- Referrals must be made via PRISM, ARC or internally, via CPFT services. Self-referrals are not accepted.
- Patients with additional mental health difficulties may be accepted, but these conditions must be stable.
- For referrals from CPFT inpatient services please contact the CLASS clinic to discuss further.
- Risk issues will be assessed in line with CPFT protocols and this information will be shared with the referrer and GP.
- The clinic operates a waiting list. Patients will generally be assessed in the order in which referrals are received and questionnaires completed. On occasion, referrals may be fast-tracked for clinical reasons.
In order to streamline the referral process, to improve the experience for patients and their families, and reduce waiting times, CLASS has identified the information we require at the initial referral stage to make sure only the most appropriate referrals are progressed to assessment. Once the referral form has been received the clinic operates a two-stage screening process.

Screening for Asperger Syndrome/High Functioning Autism in Adults

Please read the following statements carefully and in discussion with your patient, rate how strongly s/he agrees or disagrees with each (Complete this instead of the regular AQ-10. The Examples column has been included purely for referral purposes and does not alter how the questionnaire is scored.)

Please tick one option per question only:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
<th>Slightly agree</th>
<th>Slightly disagree</th>
<th>Definitely disagree</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I often notice small sounds when others do not</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I usually concentrate more on the whole picture than the small details</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I find it easy to do more than one thing at once</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>If there is an interruption, I can switch back to what I was doing very quickly</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I find it easy to ‘read between the lines’ when someone is talking to me</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>I know how to tell if someone listening to me is getting bored</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>When I am reading a story I find it difficult to work out the characters’ intentions</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>I like to collect information about categories of things (e.g. types of car, types of bird, types of train, types of plant etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I find it easy to work out what someone is thinking or feeling just by looking at their face</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I find it difficult to work out people’s intentions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please note: a score of 6+ alone is not enough reason to refer. Include details & examples. If the individual scores more than 6 out of 10, consider referring them for a specialist diagnostic assessment. This test is recommended in ‘Autism: recognition, referral, diagnosis and management of adults on the autism spectrum’ (NICE clinical guideline CG142). [www.nice.org.uk.CG142](http://www.nice.org.uk.CG142)
# Adult Asperger Syndrome Referral Form (CLASS)

This is a brief form to complete with your patient. The form includes a short screening tool and additional information regarding impact of symptoms on day-to-day life, risk and reason for referral. Please complete this form in order for the CLASS clinic to process the referral as promptly as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient details</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NHS number</td>
<td>Address</td>
<td>GP details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referrer details: Name</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Date of referral</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How does the patient prefer to be contacted?</th>
<th>Landline/personal mobile/email/post/via family member/carer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone number</td>
<td>Can message be left?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Please describe any accessibility issues: hearing/reading or language difficulties/mobility issues</th>
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</thead>
</table>

The clinic may request access to patients’ medical notes from their GP in order to assist in gathering information for the assessment. All patient information will remain confidential and will only be used to inform this assessment.

Does the patient consent to this access to his/her medical notes? Yes No
Please briefly comment on the difficulties the patient is experiencing that have led you to request this assessment for Asperger Syndrome/High Functioning Autism.

The impact of the above difficulties on general functioning and well-being:

The history of these difficulties (are they long-term features/patterns or more recent?):

Please also add a summary of the patient’s view of presenting problem (s) if different to the above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement with mental health services?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes, details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In the past:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Have any risks been identified (to self and other)?

Has the patient been assessed for autism in the past?

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**Relevant links**

National Autistic Society  
[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

Autism Research Centre, University of Cambridge  
[www.autismresearchcentre.com](http://www.autismresearchcentre.com)

National Autistic Society Cambridge (NAS)  
[www.nascambridge.org.uk](http://www.nascambridge.org.uk)

Disability Resource Centre, University of Cambridge  
[www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/disability](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/disability)

Red2Green - a Cambridgeshire charity that provides disability services  
[www.red2green.org](http://www.red2green.org)

Carers Trust – a national charity that provides advice to carers  
[www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org)

If you wish to make a donation, any income funds research at the Autism Research Centre (ARC) at the University of Cambridge. Donations can be made via  
[www.justgiving.com/autismresearchtrust](http://www.justgiving.com/autismresearchtrust)
Leaflet published: November 2018
Leaflet review date: November 2019

Patient Advice and Liaison Service

For information about CPFT services or to raise an issue, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on Freephone 0800 376 0775, or e-mail pals@cpft.nhs.uk

Out-of-hours service for CPFT mental health service users

Please call NHS 111 for health advice and support.

If you require this information in another format such as braille, large print or another language, please let us know.