

Multi-Agency Response to Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder

September 2022

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North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) carried out a deep dive multi-agency audit into Multi-Agency Response to Children with a Diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The Audit examined four children who were referred for safeguarding concerns to North Yorkshire County Council between September 2020 and August 2021 who were identified as having Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

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Children and young people who have Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Autistic Spectrum Disorder is a condition which people are born with and first manifests when they are very young. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. One in one hundred people are on the autistic spectrum and it is estimated there are around 700,000 autistic children and adults in the United Kingdom.

Autism is a spectrum condition which affects people in different ways. People with autism can have:

- Social communication and social interaction challenges
- Repetitive and restrictive behaviour
- Over or under sensitivity to light, sound, taste or touch
- Highly focused interests or hobbies
- Extreme anxiety

When everything becomes too much for an autistic person, they can become completely overwhelmed by their current situation and temporarily lose behavioural control. Another response may be that the person becomes unresponsive.

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What actions are taken by agencies and professionals?

When considering safeguarding of autistic children, professionals need to consider a number of issues and actions to take, these may include but are not limited to:

- Autistic children and young people may find it difficult to tell someone that they are experiencing abuse, particularly if they have communication difficulties
- If the child or young person does have communication difficulties, professionals need to consider how they can understand the “voice of the child” as part of the safeguarding process
- Consider the language and understanding of language by the child – just repeating words or phrases does not necessarily mean that the child has understood the meaning
- Some possible indicators of abuse, such as withdrawal from social situations may be misinterpreted as a consequence of a young person being autistic
- Professionals should consider that a change in behaviour may be indicative of a child who is distressed or upset for some reason
- Whether professionals have the appropriate skill set to communicate and work with a child or young person who is on the autistic spectrum
- Whether to use an intermediary to support the work with the child or young person
- Some children and young people on the autistic spectrum may have multi-agency plans, (e.g. EHCP or CIN) already in place and these need to be considered as part of the process
- How are the specific needs of the child addressed in the safeguarding process?

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What did the audit find – areas working well?

The Multi-Agency Audit Group identified good practice across cases including:

- **Timeliness:** Prompt and timely multi-agency responses to concerns when raised.
- **Working with the Family:** Good practice was recognised in working with families and keeping parents informed and reassuring parents of the next steps if a re-referral was required.
- **COVID-19:** Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face visits were carried out, albeit respecting the wishes of the family and ensuring appropriate arrangements for social distancing, etc. (e.g. meetings taking place outside).
- **Single View of a Child:** Information provided within the audit from Children and Families did highlight a piece of work currently ongoing to look at the join up around different plans for children through the Local Authority's systems.
- **Multi-disciplinary Working:** Good multi-disciplinary working across Health partners for the assessment of autism.
- **Multi-agency Working:** Evidence of good practice with Health partners working with nursery and schools. Also some evidence of good liaison between Early Help and the Inclusion Service at the point of elective home education.

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What did the audit find – areas for development?

The Multi-Agency Audit Group identified the following areas for development across cases including:

- **Professional Curiosity:** Practice supervisors need to be more curious during 10 day discussions with workers, to ensure a range of multi-agency views and specialist information have been sought for children with additional needs, and will be included within the assessment.
- **Inclusion of all Relevant Partners in Meetings:** It is important to ensure that all relevant partners are included in strategy discussions, assessment and planning processes in order to ensure meeting are informed and appropriate actions are identified, e.g. where a child attends a special school ensuring that the specialist school nurse is included and invited to meeting.
- **Recording of Information:** Recording on local agency case management systems and in related documents including minutes of meetings were not always clear about which agencies have contributed to assessment and planning and their level of contribution to processes.
- **Children Invisible to Services:** Where a child on the Autistic Spectrum is Electively Home Educated they may become “invisible” to services if none are being provided. It is important for organisations to have clear records of their involvement with the child and ensure that this is shared appropriately.
- **Training and Support for those working with children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder:** Assess and supported year (ASYE) Social workers need to access information and training around Autistic Spectrum Disorder to ensure they are better equipped to support parents and children. It was noted that as part of the ASYE there is a session on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and there are courses for Autism Awareness and Unlocking Autism, this includes a webinar and a two-day session.
- **Impact of moving to a large mainstream school:** It was noted that the move from a small specialist school to a large mainstream school for a child with Autism would be significant and may feel overwhelming for a child and the need to ensure that they are appropriately supported for the transition was highlighted.
- **Schooling Options:** Schools should explore different options with parents for supporting children to meet their needs in different ways which may include options other than elective home education.
- **Missing fathers:** The need to ensure that assessment processes include the views of missing/absent fathers.

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What has the NYSCP done with these findings?

- A report with recommendations has been presented to the Learning and Improvement Subgroup (LIS).
- The approved actions have been transcribed to the LIS Action Plan and are monitored through the subgroup on a quarterly basis until completed.
- The LIS will use the learning from this audit to identify any further actions required and develop appropriate guidance as required.

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Next steps

- All agencies involved in the audit will feedback specific good practice and areas for development identified for their service during the audit day discussion.
- The NYSCP Learning and Improvement Subgroup will monitor implementation of the actions to review how learning has been translated into practice.

Resources

[Framework for decision-making: Right help, at the right time by the right person](#)

[Worried about a child?](#)

[NYSCP Standards and Criteria](#)

[NYSCP Guidance on Professional Curiosity](#)