

Diagnosis Guide for Children

01. Take an online test

If you suspect that your child may be autistic, you may like to take a screening test. The results are not a diagnosis, but they may help with your decision to seek a formal assessment. Only a qualified clinician can diagnose your child.

Online tests leave out many things, including things that only a skilled diagnostician will be able to assess. All online tests can do is ask for your opinions about your child's behaviour.

Below are some examples autism screening tests:

[ASDetect](#) - autism detection for children aged 11-60 months.

[Childhood Autism Spectrum Test \(CAST\)](#) - autism detection for school-aged children

[Autism Quotient \(AQ\)](#) - PDF version for adolescents (aged 12-15 years)

02. Meet with your GP

If you would like to access a publicly funded assessment (i.e. free to access), you should book an appointment with your GP to request a referral. If you are already seeing a specialist for other reasons, you may wish to raise the matter with them first.

It would be helpful if the GP you see has an understanding of autism. Consider taking along a copy of the online screening test result, as it may be a helpful guide when discussing characteristics that you think apply to your child. Alternatively, you may like to refer to [the characteristics of autism](#) page of the Autism New Zealand website.

[The New Zealand Autism Guideline](#) outlines the referral and assessment process in the public system for children and young people. Your GP will be able to make a referral for an assessment in the public system.

If the referral is not accepted, your GP may be able to refer you to an autism-experienced Paediatrician, Psychologist or Psychiatrist in the private system. You can also look on the [Community Links](#) page of the Autism New Zealand website to see a list of private diagnosticians in your area.

03. Publicly funded assessment - referral

GPs are able to refer children to a Developmental Paediatrician or another qualified clinician for a publicly-funded assessment for autism. Depending on your area and the age of your child these referrals may go to Paediatrics, the Child Development Service or the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

In some areas referrals for publicly funded assessments can also be made by other health services, such as Well Child/Tamariki Ora/Plunket and education services, such as an early childhood teacher at your child's kindergarten or day care centre.

If the referral is accepted children and young people under the age of 19 years should access a Developmental Services/ASD Coordinator to help with coordination of the autism assessment process and post-diagnostic support services. Depending on your region, the Developmental Services/ASD Coordinator may help before, during, after or throughout the whole assessment process.

04. Publicly funded assessment - appointment

You will be contacted by the organisation you were referred to. This will vary depending on your area, but it may be a public hospital.

You may be placed on a waiting list or provided with an appointment date, which could be weeks or months in the future. You may also be asked for further information before being offered an appointment.

05. Private assessment - select a qualified clinician

Some families choose to seek a diagnosis privately (with a personal cost for the assessment). Qualified clinicians who can provide a diagnosis include autism-experienced Paediatricians, Psychologists and Psychiatrists. You can look on the [Community Links](#) page of the Autism New Zealand website or ask your [local Autism New Zealand Outreach Coordinator](#) for a list of known clinicians in your area.

Most private diagnostic services accept self-referrals and referrals from agencies. Once you have contacted the clinician, they will arrange a time with you for the assessment. Wait times and costs for these assessments vary.

06. Assessment for autism (provided by a qualified clinician)

The clinician may be a Developmental Paediatrician, Child Psychiatrist, or Psychologist. It is recommended that a team of clinicians complete the assessment, which could also include a Speech Language Therapist or Occupational Therapist.

The clinician may need to meet with you more than once to ask you questions and gather the information they need to form a diagnosis. This will include observing your child and they may speak to others, such as educators, about your child. They will then produce a report that outlines their findings and the diagnosis. The diagnosis provided may confirm autism or provide an alternative explanation or guidance.

The content of the report is generally discussed with you prior to being sent through to your GP. Reports prepared via a private diagnosis may not automatically be shared with your GP. You may like to ask who will have access to the report, and request they receive a copy.

It can be helpful to collect as much information as you can about your child starting from birth (e.g. friendships and social situations, communication skills,

behaviours and interests, sensory processing). Include information about family members who have been diagnosed with autism.

07. Additional services referral

Depending on the conclusions in the report, you may be referred for additional services. These could include appointments with a Psychologist or Psychiatrist, speech language therapy, or behaviour support. In some cases you might be eligible for publicly funded services, outlined on the [Understanding Autism](#) page of the Autism New Zealand website.

You can also self-refer to an [Outreach Coordinator](#) at Autism New Zealand. This is a free service provided nationwide and available at any stage of the diagnosis journey. Outreach Coordinators can help you navigate information on autism, advise on educational options, and suggest services available for you and your child.