



The Centre for Social and Communication Disorders was set up by The National Autistic Society (NAS) in 1991. It was the first Centre in the country to provide a complete diagnostic, assessment and advice service for children, adolescents and adults with social and communication disorders, throughout the UK.

The Centre is not part of the National Health Service and receives no government funding. All the costs of the Centre are covered by the fees payable for its services. The Centre is a non-profit making organisation.

For more information please contact:

**The Services Co-ordinator
The Centre for Social and
Communication Disorders
Elliot House
113 Masons Hill
Bromley
Kent BR2 9HT
Tel: 0181-466 0098
Fax: 0181-466 0118**

**THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL AND
COMMUNICATION DISORDERS**



A service provided by:
The National Autistic Society

PATRON: HRH THE
PRINCESS ROYAL

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DIAGNOSIS, ASSESSMENT and SUPPORT



**THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL AND
COMMUNICATION DISORDERS**



Many parents of children with a social and communication disorder have to cope with years of frustration and disappointment. They want to meet their child's needs, but so often they don't know what these needs are.

The Centre for Social and Communication Disorders helps parents to understand their child's puzzling behaviour and gain access to the educational, health and other services that will make a difference to the child's life and the well-being of the whole family.

Because people with a social and communication disorder, and their families, may face difficulties at any stage in their lives, the Centre sees people of all ages.

The Centre is based in Bromley, Kent, but can provide services for families from any part of the UK.

THE CENTRE OFFERS:

- A detailed diagnosis and assessment of each person's condition, including a full written report that can be used by parents and professionals.
- Ongoing advice and support for parents on liaising with voluntary agencies and statutory organisations that may provide useful services.
- A training and consultancy service for professionals working with people with social and communication disorders, including health workers, social workers and teachers. Training can take place either at the Centre or at a venue decided by the professionals.
- Research opportunities for people interested in social and communication disorders and the needs of people affected by them.

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THE ASSESSMENT?

The assessment aims:

- to analyse the affected person's behaviour by identifying the different elements within it, and how these elements combine to form the whole person
- to find out whether the person has additional physical health problems or learning disabilities that may need investigation
- to outline measures that could help the person to make sense of the world around them, and to identify the services that could provide this help.

What is the Centre like?

The Centre is an ordinary house. This helps the whole family to feel relaxed, and enables the Centre's specialist staff to make observations in an informal 'home' environment.



How long does the assessment last?

Each assessment lasts a whole day. The exact length of time depends on the particular needs of the family concerned.



Can families bring other people to the assessment?

Yes. Families are welcome to bring their other children and relatives. They are also encouraged to bring someone from their local health authority, education authority or social services.

Will there be other families there?

No. On any one day there is only one family at the Centre.

Does the day follow a set pattern?

The way the assessment is carried out depends on the particular needs of the individual and their family. However, there is a general format which is followed.



Who carries out the assessment?

The assessment is carried out by the Centre's own psychologists and psychiatrist. They are leading authorities in the field of social and communication disorders and, between them, have over 60 years' relevant experience.

- The day begins with coffee around the kitchen table which gives the staff and family time to get to know each other.
- The assessment itself consists of:
 - Formal elements such as measuring the individual's ability to perform specific tasks, and
 - Informal elements such as observing the individual's behaviour in particular situations.
- Parents are interviewed to obtain a detailed history of the individual's development from birth.
- If the individual has an underlying medical condition or additional health problem, the Centre can help parents to liaise with medical professionals in their own area so that the condition can be diagnosed and, if possible, treated.



WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE ASSESSMENT?

After the assessment has been completed, the Centre's staff talk to the family about their findings. There will be plenty of time for questions and discussion. The staff then prepare detailed reports which the family and professionals can use to obtain appropriate services. The Centre can also provide ongoing advice and support.

Who pays for the assessment?

The service provided by the Centre is paid for on an individual basis, usually by the person's local health authority or GP. The staff of the Centre will negotiate with the appropriate authorities for the cost of the assessment.

THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

The Elliot House team

Dr Judith Gould BSc MPhil PhD AFBPsS CPsychol

Dr Gould, the Centre's **Director**, has over 20 years' experience as a **Chartered Clinical Psychologist**, specialising in autism and learning disabilities. Before setting up the Centre she worked as a member of the scientific staff with the Medical Research Council and was a Senior Lecturer at the University of London and Institute of Psychology, and has worked as a Clinical Psychologist with a joint funded position within both health and social services.

Dr Lorna Wing MD FRCPsych

Dr Wing is the Centre's **Consultant Psychiatrist**. She has over 30 years' experience in the field of autism and learning disabilities. She has written many books and journal articles on autism for both professionals and parents. Before helping to set up the Centre, Dr Wing spent many years with the Medical Research Council where she was involved in research and clinical work on both autism and learning disabilities.

Dr Sarah Lister Brook BSc MAppSci PhD CPsychol

Dr Brook is a **Chartered Clinical Psychologist** specialising in autism and learning disabilities. Before joining the Centre she worked as a member of the scientific staff of the Medical Research Council and as a Lecturer at the University of London. While at the Institute of Psychiatry, she worked as an Honorary Clinical Psychologist for a local health authority in the area of developmental paediatrics, and also at the Maudsley and Bethlem Royal Hospitals.

Joanne Douglas BA PGCE MSc

Joanne Douglas is a **Developmental and Educational Psychologist** specialising in autism and communication disorders. She has previous experience as a Teacher in a school for children with autism and as Head of a Specialist Unit for adolescents. Working with schools to develop their curriculum and assessment procedures, she continues to act as Consultant to national schools regarding policy issues and the development of individual programmes for children and young people with autism.

Carole Murray

Carole Murray is the Centre's **Services Co-ordinator**, and has been involved in the Centre since it was first set up in 1991. Before this she worked at the School of Nursing at a local hospital, where she was secretary to a number of specialist teams covering biological sciences, health education, and learning disability.

Jane Humphrey

Jane Humphrey is **Secretary** to the Centre's team.

THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

Fees and charges

The current cost of the Centre's assessment and diagnostic service is £2,130.*

This fee covers:

- Gathering background information on the individual, and reading previous reports
- A full day's assessment by the Centre's team of psychologists and psychiatrist
- A detailed written report for the parents and professionals on the findings of the assessment
- Administration costs
- Ongoing support for the family.

* As the Centre has to increase its fees from time to time, you are advised to contact the Centre before making an application for funding, to check that this price is still correct.

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November 1994

THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

The Centre

The Centre for Social and Communication Disorders was set up by the National Autistic Society (NAS) in 1991. It was the first Centre in the country to provide a complete diagnostic, assessment and advice service for children, adolescents and adults with social and communication disorders throughout the UK. It was set up because parents of children with autistic spectrum disorders and other related conditions so often have major problems in finding a diagnosis and explanation for their child's strange behaviour. The staff aim to make a detailed diagnosis and assessment of the skills and disabilities of each person seen and to give advice on services needed.

In addition to diagnosis and assessment, the staff run training courses as a general introduction to the complexities of diagnosis of autism and related disorders for professionals in the field. They are also taking part in comparative research studies in co-operation with research groups both in the UK and overseas.

Referrals

The Centre accepts referrals of children and adults of all ages. Although most of those seen have had autistic spectrum disorders, some have had other conditions. The Centre staff aim to give as much help as they can to all those seen, including those who do not have an autistic disorder.

The Assessment Procedure

(In the following description, 'child' should be taken to refer to adults as well, where appropriate).

Each individual with a social and communication disorder presents a tangled mixture of different features, some relevant to the central impairments and some occurring as additional problems. The essence of the task of diagnosis is to identify separately each of the elements making up the complex picture.

The Centre is in an ordinary family house, with a comfortable atmosphere and a garden with play equipment for the children. Each family is seen for a whole day so that they have plenty of time to talk and do not feel rushed. The children are much more happy and relaxed in a homely rather than a clinic setting. Parents can bring their other children if they wish. They are also encouraged to invite someone from the local health, education or social services who is involved with the child to come along as well. This does happen in about two thirds of cases.

The day begins with tea or coffee round the kitchen table, allowing time to recover from the journey and for the child to explore the house. The psychologist then carries out the assessment of abilities and disabilities. Both formal and informal testing methods are used as appropriate and the psychologist makes the session as enjoyable as possible for the child.

At the same time, in another room, the psychiatrist or a psychologist talks to the parents. The aim is to obtain a detailed history from before birth onward to the present. To do this, a semi-structured interview schedule is used that has been developed by Drs Lorna Wing and Judith Gould over many years of research work in the field.

Investigation of any detectable underlying pathology is an important part of the diagnostic process. It is also necessary to discover if the child or adult has additional disorders such as impaired hearing or vision or motor problems. Such medical investigations need many special facilities that could not be provided at Elliot House, so the staff aim to liaise with physicians in the local community of the person concerned.

After lunch, the staff meet in order to discuss their findings, while the children play with the toys or go with their parents for a walk in the nearby park. If a professional worker from a local service has come with the family, they join in this discussion.

After this brief meeting, the family and staff meet together again while the Centre secretary looks after the child.

Report and Findings

Findings and conclusions are explained in detail. The educational and other services needed are discussed with the parents. There is plenty of time for the families to ask any questions and to discuss any problems. Questions about coping with difficult behaviour are frequent. It is possible to give some general advice, but referrals are made to any local services and to the National and Local Autistic Societies for specific help.

After each day's assessment, detailed reports are written. These are sent first to the parents so that they can correct any points of fact and ask any further questions. The final copy is then sent back to the parents and to the professional worker making the referral. The parents can use the report in their efforts to obtain the best services for the child.

In their relationship with the families, the staff aim to be open and honest especially in regard to the probable prognosis. In most cases, this is much appreciated by the parents. Parents are glad to have a clear idea of the nature of their child's disabilities. The main difficulties are in arranging for the provision of the appropriate educational, health and social services. However, the parents can fight harder for their child's needs armed with the knowledge and the backing of the National and Local Autistic Societies.

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