

FOI2897

7th February 2025**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – INFORMATION REQUEST**

I am writing to any individual trusts whose CAMHS are identified in the report in relation to a case study (yours is not one of them), but I wanted to get a UK-wide view on existing health service policy concerning autistic children's access to CAMHS. Are there any policies at your trust that would prevent autistic children from accessing CAMHS for specialist mental health services (and perhaps mean they should be referred to an alternative service)? In other words, should autistic children be eligible to access CAMHS as long as there aren't other factors at play that would make their referral inappropriate. To reiterate, I am specifically talking about autistic children who want to access specialist mental health care, including therapy.

Response:

Within the Southern Health & Social Care Trust (SHSCT) there are no barriers that would prevent children with Autism from accessing the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for mental health assessment and care.

In cases where children are known to Autism Services and it has been identified that a child/young person may require a mental health assessment, staff will use a risk screening tool, which was developed by CAMHS and Autism Service, to gather the relevant information and share this with the multi-disciplinary team. Autism Services Coordinator & Operational Manager liaises with CAMHS Assessment Team Management and/or CAMHS Step 3-4 Management, in a timely manner, to discuss the child/young person's presentation and reach a joint decision about in relation to the need for a mental state assessment.. If deemed appropriate, a referral to CAMHS will be made, and the child will be offered an appointment for an initial assessment, which Autism Services will also attend. Following the initial mental state assessment, a plan will be jointly agreed along with the family, on which service will best meet the needs of the child/young person. In some instances, it may be agreed that after initial assessment the child/young person does not require on-going intervention from CAMHS and their needs can be met within Autism Services. However, there are also a number of children in which the outcome of the assessment, is that that Autism Services and CAMHS will effectively co-work together to best support the child/young person. Joint appointments would be offered where appropriate and there would be regular, on-going communication between clinicians and management of both CAMHS and Autism Services.

This arrangement between Autism Services and CAMHS in SHSCT, prevents families having to access their GP Practice to gain a referral to CAMHS, and aims to improve the family's journey and experience in accessing mental health services, when already known to a specialist team such as Autism Services.

Autism Services and CAMHS continue to work in close partnership to provide the best possible care to children and young people with Autism who require mental health support.

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