Welcome to the latest update about the Children and Young People’s Autism Service in South Staffordshire.

The service update is being issued fortnightly until further notice. Check the Trust’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/mpftnhs or service web page at www.mpft.nhs.uk/services/children-and-young-people-autism-service for the latest news.

We remain committed to continuing to provide as full a service as possible during COVID-19 and would ask that you continue to follow national guidance in relation to staying alert and practicing social distancing. You can find out more at www.nhs.uk/coronavirus.

Extra service capacity secured to provide additional assessments
We recognise there are a number of families who have waited a long time for an autism assessment. Prior to the current COVID-19 crisis, the Trust was in discussion with a number of providers to seek additional assessments and we are pleased to confirm this extra capacity has been secured. Work is underway for this additional face-to-face provision to come on stream as soon as national guidance means it is safe to do so.

The Trust has secured assessments with Staffordshire-based charity Caudwell Children, which has a purpose built centre in Keele for children aged 4-11. This will require families to be able to travel to Keele for assessment and, should the outcome of the assessment be that autism is identified, they will also be offered workshops post-diagnosis by Caudwell Children at Keele.

In addition to this, the Trust has also sub-contracted specialist provider Psicon, which will work in our buildings in South Staffordshire to provide additional capacity. Psicon is used to working across the UK to help reduce backlogs for autism assessment and will be providing multi-disciplinary assessments locally for children and young people between the ages of 5-19, with some of these appointments possibly taking place at weekends.

Our ability to mobilise this additional capacity has been significantly impacted by COVID-19, but we are now in a position to begin to move this forward. We will shortly be contacting those who have been waiting the longest for an assessment or who have been prioritised as having the greatest clinical need, to offer appointments with these providers. We will obtain consent from families wishing to take up this offer and obtain consent to transfer any records we have. Once this consent is acquired we will hand over this information in a secure way to the provider, who will then contact the family to discuss next steps.

For both providers, this will involve obtaining further information from parents and schools prior to offering appointments. We hope that by starting this process now, Caudwell and Psicon will begin obtaining information whilst social distancing measures remain in place.
The ability for these providers to offer face-to-face appointments will be entirely dependent on changes to current COVID-19 national guidance, so we would ask for your patience in relation to exact timescales. However we hope that some of this capacity and any potential change to national guidance re: social distancing will mean that these additional face-to-face assessments will be able to commence as soon as possible.

**Assessments and interventions**

In the current climate, assessments and interventions are continuing to be provided by the team through telephone or video consultation. This work includes conducting Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R) interviews with parents, contacting families to provide structured support, advice and a range of appropriate resources, such as workbooks for children and young people to complete. Care plans are discussed and agreed with parents during the outcome appointment for each diagnosis. We are also continuing to liaise with schools on referrals and appropriate next steps.

Families whose children are now receiving a full or working diagnosis report will be offered the option of a follow-up appointment to discuss the report and any questions or concerns families may have. As previously outlined, for the foreseeable future these appointments will be offered via telephone or via video consultation, where possible.

Families whose child has a diagnosis continue to have ‘open access’ to the autism service and the process remains the same as with the previous provider, wherein a self-referral is required for a new episode of care or support for intervention. For those in receipt of a diagnosis, or working diagnosis a self-referral form is available on request by emailing the team at cypautismservice@mpft.nhs.uk.

Completion of this form enables families to provide information in their own words around the presenting needs of their child and informs the team of the most appropriate support required.

The duty worker remains available to speak to families, while urgent support is accessible by calling 0300 303 0691 (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday) or emailing cypautismservice@mpft.nhs.uk.

The service remains committed to ensuring all children who require a review of their working diagnosis will receive this and we will be in touch in due course to make arrangements to see your child. All families awaiting this review continue to have access to the service.

We welcome consent from those families who are happy to receive SMS text reminders or information via email to help reduce demand on the postal service and to ensure telephone or online appointments are received in a timely manner. Please provide written consent via email to cypautismservice@mpft.nhs.uk where possible, or call 0300 303 0691.
Online Introduction to Autism workshop

Thank you to everyone who has accessed our online Introduction to Autism workshop, available as a podcast-style audio and video session via the service’s web page at www.mpft.nhs.uk/services/children-and-young-people-autism-service under ‘workshops’.

We invite families who have completed this workshop to email us at cypautismservice@mpft.nhs.uk or call 0300 303 0691 to book a virtual Q&A session with the clinical team where we can provide specific advice or an opportunity for parents to raise any questions.

The workshop is suitable for families who have just received a diagnosis, or serves as a refresher for those seeking further advice following an earlier diagnosis. It is approximately one hour and offers a variety of information and advice covering key areas, including:

- Social communication
- Social interaction
- Restrictive, repetitive patterns of behaviour
- Sensory

It also addresses common myths and facts concerning autism and covers other areas, including ‘what is the spectrum’.

NB: Whilst the video resource is available to anyone, the group sessions are exclusive to families in South Staffordshire who have a full or working diagnosis to ensure those in need of immediate support are supported.

Resources

Additional virtual workshops are under development and we are linking with our Learning Disabilities (LD) colleagues within the Trust to produce a joint workshop around autism and LD.

The service web page also includes videos, developed by the team that focus on anxiety and managing behaviour (these can be found under ‘Videos’).

Families in receipt of a full or working diagnosis are welcome to contact the team, who will forward copies of the resources by post or email if they are not currently available on the Trust’s website.

The Trust’s 24/7 urgent NHS mental health service is providing telephone support, advice and triage for all ages. The number to call for people living in South Staffordshire is 0300 555 5001 (NB: this telephone line cannot provide advice on Coronavirus symptoms).
The Trust’s web site includes a range of national links providing advice, guidance and resources relating to the Coronavirus pandemic – these can be found at www.mpft.nhs.uk/service-users-carers/coronavirus-information/coronavirus-resources.

**Referrals**

Any professional, including education and health can make an autism referral for a child or young person where they have concerns around the child’s social communication, interaction and rigidity of thought and behaviour. Specific examples of how these issues manifest are required in order to process the referral.

You are welcome to supply additional verifying information from school where a professional other than from a school is making the referral, which the referrer can attach to their referral. Any professional is welcome to contact the service should they wish to discuss a potential referral by calling 0300 303 0691 (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday) or emailing cypautismservice@mpft.nhs.uk.

The assessment referral form can be found on the service web page at www.mpft.nhs.uk/services/children-and-young-people-autism-service.

**Other news**

Following our recent survey that asked what workshops the service should be providing and when, we will be sharing the results in the next update.

Finally, we are continuing to actively recruit into the team during COVID-19 and hope to be able to provide an update on new posts very soon.

**Contacting the service**

- Telephone: 0300 303 0691 (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday; excluding Bank Holidays)
- Email: cypautismservice@mpft.nhs.uk

More information about the service can be found via MPFT’s website at www.mpft.nhs.uk/services/children-and-young-people-autism-service. The service web page features:

- Referral information (NB: Referrals into the service can only be made by a professional who has met with the child and family)
- Frequently asked questions that provide more information both to current and new users of the service
- Information should urgent help be required
- Contact details for a number of other useful services and organisations
- Workshop information
- Previous weekly updates
Voice for Change session feedback
Resources
Videos.

If you need urgent help between the hours of 9am-5pm from Monday to Friday, you can contact the Single Point of Access directly on 0300 303 0691, or call First Response (social care and health) on 0800 1313 126.

If you need urgent help out of hours (evenings, weekends or bank holidays) please contact:

- NHS 111, who have access to on-call mental health professionals; or the
- First Response Emergency Duty Team on 0345 604 2886
- In the event of a medical emergency please go straight to A&E.

The Trust's 24/7 urgent NHS mental health service provides telephone support, advice and triage for all ages. The number to call for people living in South Staffordshire is 0300 555 5001 (NB: this telephone line cannot provide advice on Coronavirus symptoms).

Should a parent/carer have a specific question relating to the care of their child, we ask that they email cypautismservice@mpft.nhs.uk.

The Trust's Customer Services Team is also available for advice and support and provides information on NHS and social care services. They can be contacted by:

- Email: palsandexperience@mpft.nhs.uk
- Telephone: 01785 783026
- A website form is also available by clicking here