



How to Get a Diagnosis If You Suspect Your Child May Have SEND in the Early Years

RANi Need to Know Guides | SEND in Early years and young person Advisory sheet 5

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A Practical Guide for Parents and Carers (Ages 0–5)

Why Seek a Diagnosis?

A **diagnosis** can:

- Help you understand your child's strengths, needs, and behaviour
- Open access to the **right support**, interventions, and therapies
- Provide clarity for you, your child, and their early years setting
- Support applications for funding or an **Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan**

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However, **you do not need a diagnosis** to access support in the early years — help should be based on **need, not diagnosis**.

Step-by-Step: How to Start the Diagnostic Process

1. Observe and Record Your Concerns

Make note of:

- Delays in speech or development
- Social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties
- Sensory sensitivities (e.g. to sound, textures)
- Difficulty with routines, transitions, or learning
- Repetitive behaviours or lack of eye contact
- Any unusual physical or health symptoms

Keep a diary or short log, noting examples and how often they occur. Videos or photos can also help.

2. Contact Your Health Visitor or GP

For children under 5:

- Your **health visitor** is often the first professional contact.
 - They can check development using tools like the **Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)**.
 - They may observe your child and refer you for further assessments.

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- If your child is 2 or older, you can also go directly to your **GP**.

Ask for:

- A developmental review
- Referrals to specialists (e.g. paediatrician, SALT, occupational therapist)

Explain your concerns clearly and share your observations.

3. Get Referred to the Right Professionals

Depending on your child's needs, referrals may be made to:

Professional	Area of Support
Community Paediatrician	General developmental assessment, autism diagnosis, ADHD, genetic concerns
Speech and Language Therapist (SALT)	Speech, understanding, communication
Educational Psychologist	Learning, cognition, social communication
Occupational Therapist (OT)	Sensory issues, physical coordination, motor skills
Audiologist	Hearing assessments
CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)	Behaviour, emotions, mental health

You might be referred to a **Child Development Centre (CDC)** or local **Neurodevelopmental Pathway** team.

4. Neurodevelopmental Assessments

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If autism or ADHD is suspected, your child may be referred for a **multi-disciplinary assessment** involving:

- A paediatrician
- SALT
- Psychologist or specialist nurse

This process may take **several months to a year**, depending on local wait times.

Ask your GP or SENDIASS about:

- **Local pathways for diagnosis**
- **Average waiting times**
- **Support available while waiting**

Tip: Keep asking for help even **while waiting** — early intervention can still begin!

5. Talk to Your Nursery, Preschool or Childminder

Settings must:

- Monitor your child's progress
- Involve the **SENCO** if there are concerns
- Provide support through the **graduated approach (Assess, Plan, Do, Review)**

They may involve the local authority's **Early Years Inclusion Team, portage workers**, or an **educational psychologist**.

Share your diagnostic concerns — they may help gather evidence to support your child's case.

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6. Diagnosis Report and What Happens Next

After the assessment, professionals may:

- Give you a **diagnosis** (e.g. autism, global developmental delay)
- Recommend support or referrals
- Provide a written **report** with observations and advice

You can use this report to:

- Update your child's **support plan** in nursery
- Request an **EHC needs assessment**
- Apply for **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** if eligible
- Access **early intervention services** and SEND charities

Important Notes

- **No diagnosis = still entitled to support** based on need
- You **don't need a diagnosis** to request an EHC needs assessment
- **Waiting lists** can be long — seek support in the meantime
- Your **parental concerns must be taken seriously**

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Quick Checklist

- Log your concerns and examples
 - Contact your health visitor or GP
 - Ask for specialist referrals
 - Work with your child's early years setting
 - Keep copies of reports and correspondence
 - Reach out to SEND support services
-

Support and Resources

You can get further support from:

- **RANi** – Help with advice, support and impartial information
- **Local Offer** - Help with advice, support and impartial information
- **SENDIASS** – Local impartial information and advice service for parents and young people www.iasmanchester.org
- **IPSEA** – Independent Provider of Special Education Advice: www.ipsea.org.uk
- **Contact** – A national charity supporting families with disabled children: www.contact.org.uk

If you'd like help preparing your request or understanding your appeal options, RANi can provide guidance and templates.

Remember:

Always keep a copy of all correspondence you send, along with proof of postage or delivery. If you send documents by post, we recommend using a **signed-for** service. If sending by email, request a **read receipt** if possible.

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Get in Touch

If you need more information or have a question, we're here to help.

Email us: info@rani.org.uk

Please include:

- Your name
- Your child's name
- Your child's date of birth
- Your query

Or, if you prefer, you can fill out our online **contact form** and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

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