

Talking to mental health services about the You Need To Know campaign

This information is for anyone who wants to tell their local mental health services about The National Autistic Society's (NAS) *You Need To Know* campaign. You might be speaking to people who work in your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), like psychiatrists, psychologists and occupational therapists. Or you might be speaking to the person who has overall responsibility for CAMHS within the NHS organisation that provides mental health services in your area. This person is often called the 'Clinical Director' or 'Clinical Lead' for CAMHS.

Mental health service providers are responsible for how CAMHS is run on a day-to-day basis. However, the funding they need to run their service is provided by primary care trusts (PCTs), who also tell providers what services they want them to deliver with the funding. If you aren't sure who provides mental health services in your area, the NHS provides a list of all the mental health trusts in England at www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/pages/mentalhealthtrustlisting.aspx

The NAS has produced a FAQs sheet about the campaign which it might be useful for you to read before your meeting. You should also take a copy of the campaign report to give to the person you are meeting. You can order the report from the campaign website www.autism.org.uk/youneedtoknow or by contacting the NAS Campaigns Team, who can also give you any more advice or information you need (see contact details below).

What to tell mental health services about the *You Need To Know* campaign

Many of the mental health service providers that the NAS spoke to said that they were frustrated that they were not able to provide better support to children with autism and mental health problems and their families. So we want mental health services to know two things about the *You Need To Know* campaign:

- We want them to support the campaign and help us to influence the people in PCTs and local authorities who make decisions about mental health services so that children with autism and mental health problems can get the support they need.
- We want them to know about the information and resources available to help them to support children with autism and mental health problems.

There's lots of information here about the campaign. However, if you have personal experience of using CAMHS, or are in contact with other people who have experiences of CAMHS that they are happy for you to share, even anonymously, don't forget to mention that too: it will demonstrate why the campaign is so important.

Explaining the campaign to mental health service providers

In 2009 the NAS carried out research into the experiences of children with autism and their families accessing CAMHS for support with additional mental health needs. We also carried out a survey of clinical directors of CAMHS and a number of site visits where we spoke to frontline professionals about their experiences of working with children with autism and mental health problems. Professionals and parents alike expressed frustration that children with autism were being let down because commissioners did not understand what services were needed.

Based on this research, there are some key points that the NAS is making in its campaign:

- With the right support children with autism can have good mental health, just as anyone else can.
- But as many as 7 out of 10 children do have mental health problems, and they are being let down by a system which cannot meet their needs. Two thirds of parents surveyed by the NAS said CAMHS had failed to improve their child's mental health.
- The NHS *needs to know* how to help children with autism: all CAMHS professionals need to have basic training in autism and there should be specialist autism capacity in every PCT area.
- At a national level, the Government needs to make autism a priority area for reform of CAMHS.
- At a local level, we need commissioners to understand the needs of children with autism and mental health problems and to commission the right services for them.

The campaign asks commissioners in PCTs and local authorities to:

- Include the needs of children with autism in strategic planning tools so they know how many children with autism there are in their area and what their needs, including mental health needs, are.
- Look at data, like waiting times, rates of return and outcomes for children with autism and mental health problems, to see how existing services are performing.
- Have a specific pathway for mental health support for children with autism so that everyone knows what support is available locally and how to access it.
- Involve mental health service providers and children and young people and their families in planning services.
- Make sure that staff in the services they commission have training in autism.
- Make sure that autism specialist services are available in every local area.
- Ensure that local CAMHS have capacity to provide 24-hour emergency support to children and families who need it.

Information about support for CAMHS professionals working with children with autism

The NAS wants to support CAMHS professionals in working with children with autism and mental health problems and will be producing some resources to help with this:

- a guide for CAMHS professionals will be available in the autumn
- a Happiness Heroes scheme highlighting good practice by individual professionals and services in improving the health and emotional well-being of children with autism – there are also some examples of good practice in the campaign report and we'll continue to look for opportunities to highlight more as the campaign goes on, so that it can be replicated in other areas
- online resources, such as an online discussion group for professionals to share experiences and advice and interviews with CAMHS professionals who have experience of working with children with autism on the NAS website later this year
- a CAMHS conference in 2011 for people working and involved in the development of mental health services.

The Department of Health has also commissioned a number of training resources for health and social care professionals in response to the adult autism strategy and some of these may be useful for CAMHS and other children's services staff. They will be published by the end of the year, and will include resources from the British Psychological Society and the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

What mental health services can do to support the campaign

It is commissioners in PCTs and local authorities who make decisions about how much funding CAMHS have and what they should provide. But it would be really useful if you can find mental health professionals who will help you make the case for better support to be commissioned for children with autism and mental health problems. So when you are meeting with mental health services, you can ask them about their service:

- Do they think that they have the training and specialism they need to support children with autism and mental health problems, or do they need commissioners to provide them with more resources to do this effectively?
- What data do they collect about children with autism and mental health problems who access their services (for example, the number of children, how long they wait, how many come back to services following discharge, and what outcomes of treatment are), and is this shared with commissioners? Do they have the opportunity to share their experiences with commissioners at any point in the planning of services?
- Have they carried out a skills audit of clinicians working in their service to see which staff are confident in working with children with autism, and if there are any gaps?
- Do they feel they have enough information about other local services, like schools, social care services, and voluntary organisations, who may also be working with children with autism and mental health problems?

If your mental health services have collected data about children's experiences, or carried out a skills audit, you could ask if they would be prepared to share that information more widely to show what is needed locally and highlight any good practice in their service. If they haven't done the data collection or skills audit, you could ask them if they'd be willing to do this. You could also suggest they make other professionals in their service aware of the campaign and the resources that will be available to them.

If mental health services want more information or have any questions about the campaign that you can't answer, you could suggest they visit the campaign website www.autism.org.uk/youneedtoknow or contact the NAS Campaigns Team (see contact details below).

After your meeting

It's a good idea to write to mental health services after your meeting, thanking them for taking the time to see you and confirming what they agreed to do.

Please also contact the NAS Campaigns Team to let us know how it went. You can contact us by emailing campaign@nas.org.uk or calling 020 7923 5799.