

Supporting Adolescents and Parents during the process of Autistic Identification

Open Door's Approach to supporting autistic adolescent mental health

Who is this service for?

Young People aged 12-18, living in Haringey/have a Haringey GP

Diagnosed/identified as Autistic within the last 3 years

Or are waiting for an Autism assessment

And would like to talk to a therapist

Parents/carers who would like support during this time

Autistic Adolescent Mental Health

Adolescence is a complex and challenging period for all young people and their parents.

75% of enduring mental health problems are established by the age of 24 (Mental Health Foundation).

The adolescent task of moving towards adulthood is often challenging for autistic young people and their parents.

We provide a specialist accessible parent service to support the journey.

Adolescence is also a period of rapid change- in which the right support can make significant difference. If we look after the mental health of young people, we look after their whole lives.

We are committed to improving access to the right mental health support for this often excluded group of young people and to improving their mental health outcomes. We know that better outcomes are possible.

How does it work?

You can contact Open Door directly and asked to be referred to the Autism service, or you can be referred via Haringey CAMHS

Young people will be assessed within 4 weeks of referral

Following assessment, added to waiting list for ongoing therapy

Treatment lengths vary depending on need

Parents are offered 6 or 7 sessions to focus on specific goals

- For therapy with autistic young people, we assess their needs and decide with them on a care plan of treatment based on their needs and preference.
- All of our therapy is needs led
- All of our clinical work is evaluated using clinical outcome measures and regularly reviewed.
- **98% of young people who have used our service, said they would recommend Open Door to friends**

‘Therapy helps autistic people’

- feedback from an Autistic girl seen at Open Door for psychotherapy

How can Open Door help young people with autism?

Navigating adolescence for young people who are also discovering that they are autistic can be particularly challenging.

For some young people, autism identification can be a relief.

But many need support to make sense of what it means to them.

They may have experienced exclusion and feelings of inadequacy. They may be struggling with anxiety, depression, anger, self-harm. They may not be accessing the educational and social opportunities that they need.

Individual therapeutic work at Open Door can help autistic young people to process their complex experiences and feelings around 'diagnosis' and to reduce distress and mental ill health.



Some examples of what autistic young people have wanted from therapy at Open Door

- 'I want to speak to someone who understands depression and autism'
- 'I want to be less anxious'
- 'I want to feel more balanced'
- 'I want to understand the autism diagnosis'
- 'I want a space to think about gender dysphoria'

Some thoughts autistic young people have had about their experience at Open Door

- 'I like talking to the same person at the same time, it is regular and steady. It helps'
- 'I always knew I felt like this, but I didn't notice it'
- 'I feel safe here'
- 'Open Door has made me more confident, before I was more shy'
- 'I can ask for help now'
- 'Therapy helps autistic people'

Therapeutic parent work during their adolescent's autism identification process

Help for parents



- **Parent support:**
- For parents we would deliver Open Door's parent work, which is based on our evidence-based model Open Door's Approach to Parenting Teens (APT). We already have a strong evidence base for the effectiveness of this model and are currently part of an RCT to demonstrate this further.
- **Early findings from the research showed that:**
- **87.5% of participants reported that the service helped them to think about their problems in new ways.**
- **96.7% would recommend the APT intervention to other families.**
- **Recent evaluation of this data suggests that these figures are even higher.**

Parent work

This model provides individual families specialist parent/carer support with a trained Open Door therapist.

The therapist and parent(s)/ carer(s) work together on mutually agreed goals, to help them feel more confident and effective in understanding, supporting and communicating with their adolescent child. The work is collaborative, the parents/ carers have the expert knowledge and experience of their child and the therapist has the expert knowledge and experience of understanding and helping adolescents and parents of adolescents. Bringing this expertise together can enable change in a relatively short period of time.

The young person is invited to join a session to give feedback on the work that the parent and therapist team are doing, which is often invaluable.

The approach is evaluated by validated clinical outcome measures and by qualitative feedback. The therapist and parent/ carers review the work and effectiveness throughout.

We find that many of our parents/carers appreciate an individual and individualised space to think about the personal stresses and issues that arise when worried about their children.

Parent work through the autism 'diagnostic' process

When parents have adolescent children who are autistic, are in the process of seeking diagnosis/autism identification or have recently been diagnosed as autistic, the typical stresses that arise for all parents of adolescents are often exacerbated.

We work to help parents to observe closely what happens in their interactions with their child and we look together at what helps and what does not.

We provide some psychoeducation around adolescence to help aid understanding. When working with parents of autistic adolescents we also include psychoeducation about autism and work together to tease out what is an ordinary autistic communication, what is an ordinary adolescent process, and what may be an expression of something that is more concerning. In each case, we work with the parent to help them find their way to navigate this challenging and transitional period of parenting.

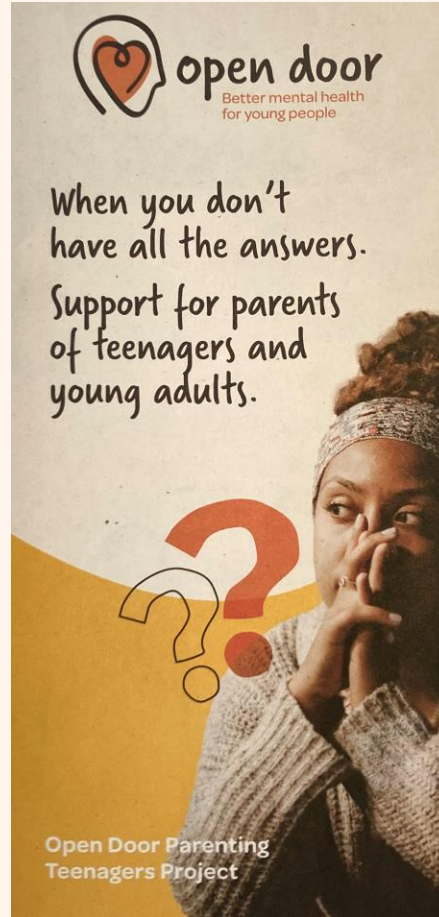
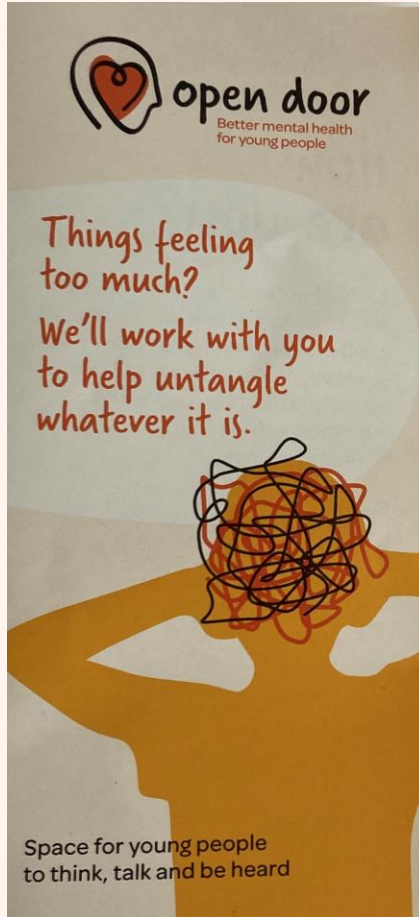
When there is a diagnosis involved, there are many different emotions that can arise for both parents and young people. The time around diagnosis, is a particularly sensitive period, in which getting specialist support can make a significant difference.

We understand and support parents and young people, wherever they are in their process. The diagnosis/identification does not change their child and it does not reduce the parental expertise of parents.

As with all work with parents of adolescents, understanding the fears and difficult feelings, while also reinforcing and developing realistic parental confidence helps to increase hope.

Some examples of feedback from parents- what helped?

- ❖ “These sessions enabled me to support my child better and understand my role as parent better. It strengthened our communication skills and understanding of each other’s needs.”
- ❖ “I can't tell you how helpful it was to spend my sessions with you. I felt that we had a very good rapport and the sessions have been productive and helpful practically.
- ❖ "The opportunity to talk to an experienced professional with relevant knowledge about teenagers with mental health difficulties,autism and gender dysphoria."
- ❖ "Insight in how my daughter maybe feeling and why she reacts in certain ways towards me. I felt the sessions helped me into a new chapter in my daughters growth. I was not prepared for such an extreme change and these sessions gave me more confidence."
- ❖ "Some insights into autistic behaviour. Reminders of the 'things' we were doing well in. Creating space to talk. "



Call or email Open Door to make a referral

0208 348 5947

Appointments@opendooronline.org

Professionals can refer to Open Door via Haringey
CAMHS Access

www.opendooronline.org