Course Brochure

Children and Young People’s Psychological Trainings (CYP PT)

Evidence-based assessment and support for autistic children and young people and/or those with a learning disability

12 March 2024, Version 1.0

# Introduction

The Children and Young People’s Psychological Trainings (CYP PT), formerly known as CYP Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT), are designed to increase access to skilled, evidence-based care by growing and upskilling the workforce delivering child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

This training aims to enhance (i) access to and (ii) quality of assessment and support for neurodivergent children and adolescents, with a particular focus on those who are autistic and/or have a learning disability.

To this end, its three modules draw on the current evidence base to convey contemporary theory and best practice:

* Module 1 is an in-depth, practice-oriented introduction to working with neurodiverse children and young people, focusing on autism and learning disability.
* Module 2 focuses on assessment and psychological formulation.
* Module 3 helps students develop thinking and skills for supporting wellbeing and functioning in neurodiverse children and young people, focusing on those who are autistic and/or have a learning disability.

# Programme aims

Neurodivergent children and young people need clinicians and services that are skilled in understanding their challenges and can provide effective support. Currently, there is a large demand for services that:

* diagnose neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism, learning disability and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
* assess and formulate the needs of neurodivergent children and young people
* design and conduct interventions to enhance the wellbeing and functioning of neurodivergent children and young people

This programme can support these needs by growing and upskilling the workforce for neurodivergent children and young people. To this end, it helps practitioners develop their skills and knowledge in this area, based on the latest evidence and the views of service users.

# Who is the course for?

The full programme is intended for practitioners working specifically in the neurodevelopmental field (including autism or learning disabilities), as well as those involved in the broader delivery of mental health care to neurodiverse children and young people.

It is for people working in a range of roles with neurodivergent children and young people. As such, it is relevant to various professionals working in:

* services specifically targeted at neurodivergent children and young people, such as neurodevelopmental CAMHS
* clinical services where substantial numbers of neurodivergent children and young people are seen, for example both outpatient and inpatient CYP mental health services
* educational settings
* voluntary sector roles supporting neurodivergent children and young people

Former graduates have come from a very broad range of professional roles, including: neurodevelopmental practitioners, assistant psychologists, mental health and learning disabilities nurses, art and drama therapists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, children’s wellbeing practitioners, education mental health practitioners, family support workers, special educational needs co-ordinators, teaching assistants, and special educational needs and disabilities teachers.

# Core values – a neuroaffirmative stance

The curriculum takes a neuroaffirmative stance, located in the neurodiversity approach to understanding autism, learning difficulties and other neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD. This reflects both empirical evidence and the wishes of neurodivergent communities.

All of us are part of a neurodiverse population made up of varied neurotypes; that is, ways of thinking and interacting with the world that reflect diversity in brain development. An axiom of neuroaffirmative practice, and of this curriculum, is that no one neurotype is inherently superior or inferior to others. Accordingly, neurotypes such as autism, learning disability and/or ADHD are viewed as forms of difference, rather than as inherently disordered neurodevelopmental states.

Nevertheless, we fully acknowledge that some neurotypes, including autism and learning disability, under current systems of care, are strongly associated with functional impairment and low wellbeing. Within neuroaffirmative practice this is understood as arising from poor fit between the neurodivergent person and their environment. As such, the difficulties faced by an autistic child or an adolescent with a learning disability are not understood as arising directly from their neurodevelopmental condition, but rather from the mismatch between, on the one hand, their capabilities, limitations, and motivations; and on the other hand, what their environment offers to and expects from them. In this approach, intervention is focused not on ‘curing’ the individual of their neurodivergence, but rather on improving their wellbeing and functioning by enhancing the person–environment fit.

# What will students learn?

**Module 1: Introduction to neurodiversity**

This module provides the theoretical, clinical, ethical, and legislative knowledge that is the foundation for enhancing practice with neurodivergent children and young people. Its focus is on children and young people who are autistic and/or have a learning disability, but the module also provides an introduction to working with a range of neurodevelopmental conditions and mental health problems that are commonly associated with autism and/or learning disability.

It aims to provide knowledge that lays the foundations for students to enhance their practice with neurodivergent children and young people. The module aims to support development of:

* understanding of the neurodiversity perspective and of neuroaffirmative work, and understanding of the strengths and challenges of applying such a framework within existing health, educational and care systems
* clinically relevant knowledge about autism and learning disabilities
* clinically relevant knowledge about neurodevelopmental and mental health conditions commonly associated with autism and/or learning disabilities
* understanding of how factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, sex, gender and sexuality intersect with neurodivergence
* the legal and policy frameworks that shape practice with autistic children and young people, those with a learning disability, and those with other neurodevelopmental conditions

**Module 2: Assessment and formulation**

This module is focused on enhancing knowledge and practical skills for assessment of neurodivergent children and young people. Crucially, it is also designed to help students develop the capacity to make comprehensive case formulations to guide implementation of effective, targeted interventions that enhance wellbeing and functioning.

The module is designed to help students improve their capacity to conduct valid, inclusive, and useful assessments of neurodivergent children and young people, by supporting development of:

* understanding of general principles that should inform the design and conduct of assessments with children and young people
* knowledge of how to adapt assessments to make them accessible for children, young people and their families
* knowledge of how to assess for autism and/or learning difficulty, as well as for other neurodevelopmental conditions (for example, ADHD) and for mental health problems
* the capacity to make comprehensive, on-model formulations that incorporate a range of individual and environmental factors, and which clearly point to how the child/young person and their family should be supported
* an appropriate understanding of the limits of one’s personal competence, including when to seek supervision and when referral to a different service/specialist is needed
* the capacity to explain the results of assessment (including sharing formulations) with children, young people and their families in ways that are comprehensible and useful to them

**Module 3: Interventions to improve wellbeing and functioning**

This module builds upon the learning of Modules 1 and 2 to teach skills and knowledge to inform interventions for autistic children and young people and/or children and young people with a learning disability. It also serves to develop capabilities in students that are relevant to interventions for children and young people with other neurodevelopmental conditions. The module adopts the principles that intervention and support should be based upon an initial assessment and formulation; neurodiversity-affirming; evidence-based wherever possible; and adapted and tailored to the needs of the individual child or young person and their family.

The module is designed to help students enhance their capacity to identify and contribute to appropriate interventions for neurodivergent children and young people by supporting development of:

* understanding of a neuroaffirmative approach to intervention, which includes due consideration of contextual factors, and which emphasises goals that are collaboratively agreed between neurodivergent children, young people, their families and professionals
* the ability to identify, based on assessment and formulation, which interventions are appropriate for each child and young person; and to understand ways to support neurodivergent children and young people in accessing these
* understanding of the student’s own role in delivering support and interventions, including a realistic sense of the limits of their competence in this respect, given their career stage
* knowledge and skills in making adaptations to services and interventions to make them inclusive for neurodivergent children and young people

# The offer

The course is available at no cost to participants, with tuition fees fully funded by NHS England Workforce, Training and Education. However, it is the responsibility of the individual services to ensure uninterrupted operation while their candidates attend the training sessions.

# Summary

This training has been designed by academics, practitioners, and experts by experience to meet the needs of neurodivergent young people and their parents/carers who are seeking support from services. Meeting these needs is a categorical imperative, as well as being a key objective in both the ‘NHS Long Term Plan’ and the ‘NHS Long Term Workforce Plan’.

Training remains a pivotal strategy in introducing new evidence-based practices into children and young people’s mental health services. To fulfil the ambitions articulated in the ‘NHS Long Term Plan’ and to harness the advantages of innovative methodologies, there is an imperative to expand capacity, adapt operational tactics, and bridge projected shortfalls while bolstering labour efficiency. Elevating the skill sets of the workforce is crucial.