

Waltham Forest Parent Forum



CAMHS Parent Expectations Survey

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April 2026

Purpose

This survey gathered parent carer views on expectations following referral to CAMHS, including triage and the neurodevelopmental (ND) pathway. The aim is to share lived experience to support service improvement and strengthen co-production.

Headline Summary

Parents are not expecting immediate assessment.

They are expecting:

- Clear communication from the point of referral
- Transparency around waiting times and process
- Ongoing contact while waiting
- Practical support during the waiting period

Where these are not in place, anxiety and dissatisfaction increase significantly.

Key Findings

1. Initial Contact After Referral

Parents consistently expect:

- Confirmation that referral has been received
- Clear explanation of next steps
- Indicative timelines
- In some cases, a preference for phone contact rather than written communication

Insight

The initial response sets the tone. Lack of clarity at this stage creates early uncertainty.

2. Support While Waiting

Parents identified the following as most helpful:

- Support and understanding within school
- Practical strategies for home
- Access to local support services
- Community and peer support

Additional feedback highlights:

- Support is expected regardless of diagnosis status
- Families need help managing day-to-day challenges (e.g. sleep, behaviour)

Insight

Waiting periods are experienced as active and often difficult. Parents expect a support offer, not just placement on a list.

3. Communication During Waiting Period

Preferences vary, but consistent expectations include:

- Regular updates (many suggested monthly, but flexibility is acceptable)
- Clarity on position in the process
- Updates when timelines change
- Reassurance that the referral is progressing

Insight

The issue is not frequency alone, but predictability and transparency.

4. Information Following Referral

There is strong support for a structured information pack, including:

- What CAMHS does
- What happens next

- Where to access support while waiting
- How schools and other services can help

Insight

Information needs to be practical and clearly written. Generic signposting alone is unlikely to meet need.

5. Neurodevelopmental (ND) Pathway

Parents expect:

- Confirmation of being on the pathway
- Clear explanation of stages
- Understanding of timelines
- Clarity on what each stage involves

Insight

The pathway is not well understood by families and would benefit from clearer communication.

6. Support While waiting for ND Assessment

Parents would value:

- Practical strategies and guidance
- Workshops or webinars
- Help understanding their child's needs
- Better coordination with schools

Insight

There is strong demand for early help and understanding, rather than waiting for diagnosis.

7. Key Area of Concern

The most consistent concern across responses:

- Lack of communication during waiting periods

This is closely followed by:

- Long waiting times
- Lack of clarity about process

Insight

While waiting times are a known pressure, communication is the factor most likely to improve parent experience in the short term.

Parent Voice (Selected Comments)

- “More transparency re waiting times and what they mean”
- “One phone call before official assessment... I had no contact”
- “Support from school although your child isn’t diagnosed yet”
- “Support with main day to day issues such as sleep”
- “The lack of contact for long periods of time”
- “Contact with the school of what support can be put in place”

Alignment with CAMHS Issues Tracker

The feedback aligns with existing themes within the forum’s CAMHS tracker:

- Communication with professionals
- Neurodevelopmental assessment pathway
- Mental health support access
- Cross-service working (particularly with schools)

This survey provides additional qualitative evidence to support these themes and highlights communication during waiting periods as a priority area.

Opportunities for Development (for consideration)

- Standardised initial contact following referral
- Clear, accessible pathway information for families
- Regular update system (including low-resource options such as automated updates)

- A defined “waiting support offer” (strategies, workshops, signposting with context)
- Strengthened links with schools during waiting periods

Next Steps

The forum will:

- Incorporate these findings into the CAMHS tracker from April 2026
- Continue to gather parent feedback
- Share follow-up insights in quarterly reporting

We welcome the opportunity to explore these findings further and support co-produced improvements where helpful.