**Early identification and support for girls with a diagnosis of autism in Early Childhood**

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Girls are often overlooked for a diagnosis of autism because their identifying behaviours can be different to those of boys. Without a diagnosis, girls can struggle with extreme stress, leading to mental health issues, problem behaviours, school refusal or other outcomes which impact on their quality of life.

Traditionally, autism diagnosis has demonstrated a ratio of 1 girl to 4 boys. Evidence has shown that the diagnostic instruments used are ‘blunt’, male orientated, and do not adequately illuminate the female profile of Autism.  Collaborative work across a range of disciplines (education, psychology, neuroscience), with families, and with girls and women has captured new information and understanding which has strengthened the support and interventions now available for girls with a diagnosis of autism. (Carpenter et al, 2019).

However, whist girls are being diagnosed more of late, it is often a middle childhood / adolescent diagnosis. Why did we miss the girls in Early Childhood? What did their profile of need look like then?

This is the focus of new research, with preliminary findings recently reported (McMullan ,Carpenter, & Coughlan, 2022).

This presentation will provide information on why it is important for girls to receive an earlier diagnosis, explore the impact of a late diagnosis on their quality of life and provide strategies on how to improve observations and enhance engagement.

References: -

Carpenter, B., Happé F., and Egerton ,J. (2019**)** **Girls and Autism;**Educational, Family and Personal Perspectives ,

London : Routledge .

McMullan, B., Carpenter, B., Coughlan,B. Cues and Clues: Early indicators of Autism in Girls . Paper to the International Society of Early Intervention, Chicago , USA, October, 2022.