Autism & Mental Health: Glossary

Below is a list of the terms that we will be using throughout the course, together with brief definitions.

| Term | Definition |
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| Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) | Developed by Ivar Loovas in 1965, this is a (controversial) method of behavioural therapy which incorporates the use of rewards and punishments as a means of promoting desired behaviour. |
| ASC/ASD (Autistic Spectrum Condition/Autistic Spectrum Disorder) | Diagnostic label, introduced in 2013, which recognised Autism as a spectrum of conditions as opposed to a single condition, thus taking into account that autistic people can develop throughout their lives. It is characterised by difficulties in the following categories:   1. Social Communication; 2. Strongly repetitive behaviour; 3. Difficulties adjusting to rapid and unexpected change; and 4. Unusually narrow interests.   Current estimates suggest that ASDs/ASCs affect around 1 in 100 people living in the UK. |
| Asperger’s Syndrome | A neurodevelopmental condition named after Hans Asperger, who worked with children in the 1930 & 1940s whom exhibited the following characteristics:   1. A lack of empathy, 2. Little ability to form friendships, 3. One-sided conversations, 4. Intense absorption in a special interest, and 5. Clumsy movements   Differs from Kanner’s (Classic) Autism, in that these children did not suffer from delayed language development. No longer used as a diagnostic label. |
| Aspie | Colloquial term used by people diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, often used as a badge of honour. |
| Autism Act (2009) | A law passed in order to necessitate a national strategy for adults with autism, based on 5 areas of statutory guidance:   1. Diagnosis; 2. Employment; 3. Local Services; 4. Support; and 5. Training |
| Autistic Spectrum Conditions Service (ASCS) | A service provided by Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust which offers pre-screening and diagnosis for adults living in West Sussex who suspect they are autistic. It also offers training about Autism, risk assessment, placement reviews and signposting to services for autistic adults. |
| Classic Autism (also known as Autism or Kanner’s Autism) | A neurodevelopmental condition, first published in 1943 by Leo Kanner, describing children whom exhibited:   1. A profound lack of affect or emotional contact with others 2. An intense wish for sameness in routines 3. Muteness or abnormality of speech 4. Fascination with manipulating objects 5. High levels of visuo-spatial skills, but major learning difficulties in other areas 6. Attractive, alert and intelligent appearance.   The definition was later broadened to include delay in the development of spoken language, i.e. no spoken words before the age of 2. |
| Comorbidity | A medical condition which co-occurs with another. |
| Executive Dysfunction | Executive Function is “the ability to control action” (Baron-Cohen, 2008). Executive Dysfunction is linked to autistic people’s inability to “see the bigger picture” and plan accordingly, which results in anxiety. It also means that find it difficult to switch attention when faced with multiple stimuli. |
| Gestalt Perception | The inability to filter foreground and background information, so everything is perceived as a ‘whole’ rather than a combination of different items. Someone with Gestalt Perception will:   * Notice every tiny change in the environment * Become easily frustrated if trying to do something in a noisy, crowded room * Be clumsy, and/or move stiffly * Not seem to understand instructions if more than one person is talking |
| Neurodiversity/Neurodiverse | A movement pioneered online in the 1990s. If someone is Neurodiverse then their brain is considered to be wired differently, but not in a way that is less valid to society. |
| Neurotypical (NT) Syndrome | Term coined by Autism Network International. Defined by Laura Tisoncik in 1998 as a neurobiological disorder characterized by preoccupation with social concerns, delusions of superiority, and obsession with conformity. |
| Social Cues | “Signals that are given, usually consciously during a social interaction, that communicate a person’s thoughts or expected actions at certain intervals of a group’s activity.” They can be verbal or non-verbal, as well as positive or negative. |
| Theory of Mind (ToM) | Theory published by Uta Frith & Baron-Cohen in 1984. It is defined as the ability to see the world from someone else’s perspective. ToM is suggested to be a quality lacked by autistic individuals, thus explaining their social difficulties. |
| Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) | Considered controversial by autistic self-advocates, TEACCH was developed by Eric Schopler in 1972 as a type of behavioural therapy which emphasises the removal of autistic behaviour in order to become more socially acceptable at home and in the community. |
| Triad of Impairments | A list, devised by Wing and Gould in 1979, which categorises the difficulties associated with autism, namely:   1. Social Communication; 2. Social Imagination; and 3. Social Interaction |
| Weak Central Coherence | Central Coherence (Frith, 1989) is “the ability to put smaller chunks of information into a different/abstract whole.” Autistic people generally suffer from weak central coherence, meaning they struggle to “see the bigger picture”, which results in an inability to apply social rules, anticipate the actions of others, and learn from their experiences. |