

Glossary

Note: Visit the Autism Speaks Video Glossary at [AutismSpeaks.org/what-autism/video-glossary](https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/video-glossary) to see video of the items in blue.

A

Absence Seizure, see *Seizures*.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is the US law that ensures rights of persons with disabilities with regard to employment and other issues.

Angelman Syndrome is a genetic disorder causing developmental delays and neurological problems, often accompanied by seizures. Children often display hyperactivity, small head size, sleep disorders and movement and balance disorders.

Anticonvulsant is a type of drug used to prevent or stop seizures or convulsions; also called antiepileptic.

Anxiety Disorder is a disorder that affects an estimated 30% of individuals with autism and includes social phobia, separation anxiety, panic disorder and specific phobias. An individual suffering from anxiety may experience strong internal sensations of tension such as a racing heart, muscular tensions and stomachache.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a style of teaching using series of trials to shape desired behavior or response. Skills are broken into small components and taught to child through a system of reinforcement.

Asperger Syndrome is a developmental disorder on the Autism spectrum defined by impairments in communication and social development and by repetitive interests and behaviors, without a significant delay in language and cognitive development. The diagnosis is no longer used in DSM5, but DSM5 indicates that individuals with a “well-established diagnosis” of these conditions “should be given the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.”

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a disorder that affects approximately 1 in 5 children with autism. Symptoms include chronic problems with inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Audiologist is a professional who diagnoses and treats individuals with hearing loss or balance problems.

Auditory Integration Training, or sound therapy, is used to treat children with difficulties in auditory processing or sound sensitivity and involves the individual listening to electronically modified music through headphones during multiple sessions.

Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) is a test considered to be current gold standard for diagnosing ASD and, along with information from parents, should be incorporated into a child’s evaluation.

Autism Speaks Insurance Link is a tool to help families in the autism community determine whether an individual is entitled to coverage for the treatment of autism under their health insurance plan.

Autism Speaks Toddler Treatment Network (TTN) supports a consortium of research sites studying behavioral interventions appropriate for children under 18 months of age.

Autism Spectrum Disorder and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. With the May 2013 publication of the DSM-5 diagnostic manual, all autism disorders were merged into one umbrella diagnosis of ASD.

B

C

Casein is protein found in milk, used in forming the basis of cheese and as a food additive.

Celiac Disease is a disease in which there is an immunological reaction within the inner lining of the small intestine to gluten, causing inflammation that destroys the lining and reduces the absorption of dietary nutrients. It can lead to symptoms of nutritional, vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

Childhood Disintegrative Disorder is a disorder in which development begins normally in all areas, physical and mental. At some point between 2 and 10 years of age, the child loses previously developed skills. The child may lose social and language skills and other functions, including bowel and bladder control. The diagnosis is no longer used in DSM5, but DSM5 indicates that individuals with a “well-established diagnosis” of these conditions “should be given the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.”

Chronic Constipation is an ongoing condition of having fewer than three bowel movements per week.

Cognitive Skills are any mental skills that are used in the process of acquiring knowledge; these skills include reasoning, perception and judgment.

Colitis is inflammation of the large intestine.

Complete Blood Count (CBC) is a lab test reporting number of white blood cells, red blood cells, platelets, hemoglobin, hematocrit and other values reflecting overall blood health.

Compulsions are deliberate repetitive behaviors that follow specific rules, such as pertaining to cleaning, checking or counting. In young children, restricted patterns of interest may be early sign of compulsions.

Computed Axial Tomography (CT) examines organs by scanning with X rays and using computer to construct series of cross-sectional scans. Called “CAT” scan.

D

Declarative Language is used to communicate what the mind is producing. It is what is most common in conversation, whereas Imperative Language is used to ask questions, make commands or give instructions.

Developmental Disorder refers to several disorders that affect normal development. May affect single area of development (specific developmental disorders) or several (pervasive developmental disorders).

Developmental Individual Difference Relationship (DIR) is a type of therapy, known as Floortime, that seeks to move the child toward increasingly complex interactions through mutually shared engagement.

Developmental Milestones are skills or behaviors that most children can do by a certain age that enable the monitoring of learning, behavior and development.

Developmental Pediatrician is a medical doctor who is board-accredited and has received sub-specialty training in developmental-behavioral pediatrics.

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) is the official system for classification of psychological and psychiatric disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association in 2013 that, among other changes, established new criteria for an autism diagnosis, eliminated the previously separate subcategories on the autism spectrum, including Asperger Syndrome, PDD-NOS, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder and Autistic Disorder and added a new category called Social Communication Disorder (SCD).

Discrete Trial Training (DTT) is a technique incorporating principles of ABA, including positive reinforcement used to teach behaviors in one-to-one setting. Concepts are broken down into small parts.

E

Early Autism Risk Longitudinal Investigation (EARLI) is a network of research sites that enrolls and follows a large group of mothers of children with autism at the start of another pregnancy and documents the newborn child's development through three years of age.

Early Intervention (EI) is a state-funded program designed to identify and treat developmental problems or other disabilities as early as possible. Eligibility for EI is from birth to three years of age.

Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) is a comprehensive behavioral early intervention approach for children with autism, ages 12 to 48 months, that uses a developmental curriculum that defines the skills to be taught at any given time and a set of teaching procedures used to deliver this content.

Echolalia is repeating words or phrases heard previously, either immediately after hearing word or phrase or much later. Delayed echolalia occurs days or weeks later. Functional echolalia is using quoted phrase in a way that has shared meaning, for example, saying "carry you" to ask to be carried.

Electroencephalogram (EEG) is a test using electrodes on scalp to record electrical brain activity. For diagnoses of seizure disorder or abnormal brain wave patterns.

Epilepsy (seizure disorder) is a pattern of repeated seizures, causes include head injury, brain tumor, lead poisoning, genetic and infectious illnesses. Cause is unknown in 50% of cases.

Esophagitis is inflammation of the esophagus, the soft tube-like portion of the digestive tract connecting the pharynx with the stomach.

Expressive Labeling is the communication of a name for an object or person, see expressive language.

Expressive Language is communication of intentions, desires or ideas to others, through speech or printed words and includes gestures, signing, communication board and other forms of expression.

Extended School Year (ESY) Services are provided during breaks from school, such as during summer vacation, for students who experience substantial regression in skills during school vacations.

F

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) means that education must be provided to all children ages three to twenty-one at public expense.

Floortime is a developmental intervention for children with autism involving meeting a child at his current developmental level and building upon a particular set of strengths.

Fragile X syndrome is a genetic disorder that shares many of the characteristics of autism. Individuals may be tested for Fragile X.

G

Gastritis is inflammation of the stomach.

Gastroenterologist is a doctor specializing in diagnosis and treatment of disorders of GI tract, including esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, pancreas, liver, gallbladder and biliary system.

Gastroesophageal Reflux is the return of stomach contents back up into the esophagus which frequently causes heartburn due to irritation of the esophagus by stomach acid.

Gastrointestinal pertains to the digestive tract, including the mouth, throat, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine and rectum.

Geneticist refers to a medical doctor who specializes in genetic problems. Genes are the unit in the chromosome that contain the blueprint for the transmission of inherited characteristics.

Gestures are hand and head movements, used to signal to someone else, such as a give, reach, wave, point or head shake. They convey information or express emotions without the use of words.

Global Developmental Delay is diagnosis in children younger than 5, characterized by delay in two or more developmental domains, sometimes associated with mental retardation.

Gluten is a protein present in wheat, rye and barley.

Grand mal seizure, see Seizures.

H

High Risk Baby Siblings Research Consortium (BSRC) is a joint venture between Autism Speaks and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development that is focused on making discoveries that will help researchers develop new ways to treat or even prevent debilitating symptoms by intervening at an early age.

Hyperlexia is the ability to read at an early age. To be hyperlexic, a child does not need to understand what he or she is reading.

Hyperresponsiveness, hypersensitivity, see *Sensory Defensiveness*.

Hyporesponsiveness, hyposensitivity, is abnormal insensitivity to sensory input. Could be exhibited by a child who appears to be deaf, whose hearing is normal, is under reactive to sensory input, may have a high tolerance to pain, may be clumsy, sensation seeking and may act aggressively.

I

Incidental Teaching teaches a child new skills while in their home or community, in natural context or “in the moment,” to help make sense of what they learn during formal instruction and generalize new skills.

Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed by a multidisciplinary team including family as primary participant. Describes child’s level of development in all areas; family’s resources, priorities and concerns, services to be received and the frequency, intensity and method of delivery. Must state natural environments in which services will occur.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) identifies student’s specific learning expectations, how school will address them with appropriate services and methods to review progress. For students 14 and older, must contain plan to transition to postsecondary education or the workplace or to help the student live as independently as possible in the community.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the US law mandating the “Free and Public Education” of all persons with disabilities between ages 3 and 21.

Inclusion involves educating all children in regular classrooms, regardless of degree or severity of disability. Effective inclusion takes place with planned system of training and supports; involves collaboration of multidisciplinary team including regular and special educators.

J

Joint Attention is the process of sharing one’s experience of observing an object or event, by following gaze or pointing gestures. Critical for social development, language acquisition, cognitive development. Impairment in joint attention is a core deficit of ASD.

K

L

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is setting that least restricts opportunities for child with disabilities to be with peers without disabilities. The law mandates that every child with a disability be educated in a Least Restrictive Environment.

M

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is a diagnostic technique using powerful electromagnets, radio frequency waves and a computer to produce well defined images of the body’s internal structures.

Mainstreaming is where students are expected to participate in existing regular ed classes, whereas in an inclusive program classes are designed for all students. May be gradual, partial or part-time process (e.g., student may attend separate classes within regular school or participate in regular gym and lunch only).

Melatonin is a hormone produced by pineal gland, involved in regulating sleeping and waking cycles. Sometimes used for chronic insomnia. Consult your child's physician before giving melatonin; it is not recommended for all patients with sleep problems.

Modified Checklist of Autism in Toddlers (MCHAT) is a screening tool for identifying young children who may be referred to specialist for further evaluation and possible Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis.

Motor deficits are physical skills that a person cannot perform or has difficulty performing.

Motor function (or motor skills) is the ability to move and control movements.

N

Neurologist refers to a doctor specializing in medical problems associated with the nervous system, specifically the brain and spinal cord.

Nonverbal Behaviors are things people do to convey information or express emotions without words, including eye gaze, facial expressions, body postures and gestures.

O

Obsessions are persistent and intrusive repetitive thoughts. Preoccupations with specific kinds of objects or actions may be an early sign of obsessions.

Obstructive Sleep Apnea breathing disorder interrupting breathing during sleep when air flow cannot flow through the nose or mouth although efforts to breathe continue. Throat collapses during sleep causing snoring and gasping for breath. May cause daytime sleepiness. May increase risk of hypertension and heart problems.

Occupational Therapy assists development of fine motor skills that aid in daily living. May focus on sensory issues, coordination of movement, balance and self-help skills such as dressing, eating with a fork, grooming, etc. May address visual perception and hand-eye coordination.

Occupational Therapist helps minimize impact of disability on independence in daily living by adapting child's environment and teaching sub-skills of the missing developmental components.

Operant Conditioning is the modification of behavior through positive and/or negative reinforcement.

P

Perseveration is repetitive movement or speech or sticking to one idea or task, that has a compulsive quality to it.

Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) is group of conditions involving delays in development of many basic skills, including ability to socialize with others, to communicate and use imagination. Includes Autism, Asperger Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Rett Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified. Persuasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) a category of PDD referring to children having significant problems with communication and play and some difficulty interacting with others, but are too social for diagnosis of autism. The diagnosis is no longer used in

DSM5, but DSM5 indicates that individuals with a “well-established diagnosis” of these conditions “should be given the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.”

Petit Mal Seizure, see *Seizures*.

Physical Therapy uses specially designed exercises and equipment to help patients regain or improve their physical abilities.

Physical Therapist designs and implements physical therapy programs and may work within a hospital or clinic, in a school or as an independent practitioner.

Pica is persistent eating or mouthing of non-nutritive substances for at least 1 month when behavior is developmentally inappropriate (older than 18-24 months). Substances may include items such as clay, dirt, sand, stones, pebbles, hair, feces, lead, laundry starch, wood, plastic and more.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is an alternative communication system using picture symbols taught in phases starting with simple exchange of symbol for desired item. Individuals learn to use picture symbols to construct complete sentences, initiate communication and answer questions.

Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT) is a therapeutic teaching method using incidental teaching opportunities to target and modify key behaviors related to communication, behavior and social skills.

Pragmatics are social rules for using functional spoken language in a meaningful context or conversation. Challenges in pragmatics are a common feature of spoken language difficulties in children with ASD.

Prevalence is the current number of people in a given population who have a specific diagnosis at a specified point in time. As of May 2014, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated autism prevalence as 1 in 68 children, including 1 in 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls.

Prompts for Restructuring Oral Muscular Phonetic Targets (PROMPT) is an approach used in speech-language therapy that manually guides an individual's jaw, tongue and lips through a targeted word, phrase or sentence to develop motor control and proper oral muscular movements, while eliminating unnecessary muscle movements such as jaw sliding.

Proprioception is the receiving of stimuli originating in muscles, tendons and other internal tissues.

Prosody is the rhythm and melody of spoken language expressed through rate, pitch, stress, inflection or intonation. Some children with ASD have unusual intonation (flat, monotonous, stiff or “sing songy” without emphasis on the important words).

Psychiatrist is a doctor specializing in prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness who has received additional training and completed a supervised residency in specialty. May have additional training in specialty, such as child psychiatry or neuropsychiatry and can prescribe medication, which psychologists cannot do.

Psychologist is a professional who diagnoses and treats diseases of the brain, emotional disturbance and behavior problems. May have a master's degree (M.A.) or doctorate (Ph.D.) in psychology. May have other qualifications, including Board Certification and additional training in a specific type of therapy.

Q

R

Receptive Labeling, see *receptive language*.

Receptive Language is the ability to comprehend words and sentences and begins as early as birth and increases with each stage in development. By 12 months of age, a child begins to understand words and responds to his or her name and may respond to familiar words in context. By 18 to 20 months, a child identifies familiar people by looking when named (e.g., Where's mommy?), gives familiar objects when named (e.g., Where's the ball?) and points to a few body parts (e.g., Where's your nose?). These skills commonly emerge slightly ahead of expressive language skills.

Reinforcement or reinforcer, is any object or event following a response, increasing or maintaining the rate of responding. Positive reinforcer may be produced by or added after a response.

Relationship Development Intervention (RDI) is a therapeutic teaching method based on building intelligence competencies of social connection – such as referencing, emotion sharing, coregulation and experience sharing – that normally develop in infancy and early childhood.

Respite Care is temporary, short-term care provided to individuals with disabilities, delivered in the home for a few short hours or in an alternate licensed setting for an extended period of time. Respite care allows caregivers to take a break in order to relieve and prevent stress and fatigue.

Rett Syndrome is a very rare disorder in which patients have symptoms associated with PDD along with problems with physical development. They generally lose many motor or movement skills – such as walking and use of hands – and develop poor coordination. The condition has been linked to a defect on the X chromosome and as a result, almost always affects girls.

S

Seizure refers to uncontrolled electrical activity in the brain, which may produce a physical convulsion, minor physical signs, thought disturbances or a combination of symptoms.

Seizure, absence, takes the form of a staring spell as the person suddenly seems “absent” and has a brief loss of awareness. May be accompanied by blinking or mouth twitching. Absence seizures have very characteristic appearance on EEG. Also called a petit mal seizure.

Seizure, atonic, is a seizure marked by the person losing muscle tone and strength and unless supported, falls down. Atonic means lack of muscle tone and strength.

Seizure, subclinical (Electrographic Seizures) are visible on the EEG, but the patient does not exhibit clinical symptoms. Electroencephalography often detects subclinical seizures during sleep.

Seizure, tonic clonic, involves two phases – tonic phase when body becomes rigid and clonic phase of uncontrolled jerking. May be preceded by aura and is often followed by headache, confusion and sleep. May last for seconds or continue for several minutes.

Self-Regulation and self-control are related but not the same. Self-regulation refers to both conscious and unconscious processes that have an impact on self-control, but regulatory activities take place more or less constantly to allow us to participate in society, work and family life. Self-control is a conscious activity.

Sensory Defensiveness is a tendency, outside the norm, to react negatively or with alarm to sensory input which is generally considered harmless or non-irritating to others. Also called hypersensitivity.

Sensory Input, *see sensory stimuli*.

Sensory Integration is the way the brain processes sensory stimulation or sensation from the body and then translates that information into specific, planned, coordinated motor activity.

Sensory Integration Dysfunction a neurological disorder causing difficulties processing information from the five classic senses (vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste), sense of movement (vestibular system) and positional sense (proprioception). Sensory information is sensed normally, but perceived abnormally. May be a disorder on its own or with other neurological conditions.

Sensory Integration Therapy is used to improve ability to use incoming sensory information appropriately and encourage tolerance of a variety of sensory inputs.

Sensory Stimulus Agent, action or condition, internal (e.g., heart rate, temperature) or external (e.g., sights, sounds, tastes, smells, touch and balance) that elicits physiological or psychological response. Response depends on ability to regulate and understand stimuli and adjust emotions to demands of surroundings.

Sleep Hygiene a set of practices, habits and environmental factors critically important for sound sleep, such as minimizing noise, light and temperature extremes and avoiding naps and caffeine.

Social Communication Disorder (SCD) is a new diagnostic category established in the DSM-5 that applies to individuals who have deficits in the social use of language, but do not have the restricted interests or repetitive behavior you see in those with autism spectrum disorders.

Social Communication/Emotional Regulation/Transactional Support (SCERTS) is an educational model of treatment that differs notably from the focus of “traditional” ABA by promoting child-initiated communication in everyday activities.

Social Reciprocity is back-and-forth flow of social interaction. How behavior of one person influences and is influenced by behavior of another and vice versa.

Social Stories, developed by Carol Gray, are simple stories that describe social events and situations that are difficult for a child with a PDD to understand. For example, a social story might be written about birthday parties if the child appears to have a difficult time understanding what is expected of him or how he is supposed to behave at a birthday party.

Social Worker is a trained specialist in the social, emotional and financial needs of families and patients. Social workers often help families and patients obtain the services they have been prescribed.

Special Education is specially designed instruction, at no cost to families, to meet unique needs of child with disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions and in other settings and instruction in physical education.

Speech-Language Therapist or Speech Language Pathologist, specializes in human communication. The focus is on communication, not speech, to increase child's ability to impact and understand their environment.

Speech-Language Therapy is provided with the goal of improving an individual's ability to communicate. This includes verbal and nonverbal communication. The treatment is specific to the individual's need.

Spoken Language (also referred to as expressive and receptive language) is the use of verbal behavior or speech, to communicate thoughts, ideas and feelings with others. Involves learning many levels of rules - combining sounds to make words, using conventional meanings of words, combining words into sentences and using words and sentences in following rules of conversation.

Stereotyped Behaviors refer to an abnormal or excessive repetition of an action carried out in the same way over time. May include repetitive movements or posturing of the body or objects.

Stereotyped Patterns of Interest or restricted patterns of interest refer to a pattern of preoccupation with a narrow range of interests and activities.

Stimming or "self-stimulating" behaviors, are stereotyped or repetitive movements or posturing of the body that stimulate one's senses. Some "stims" may serve a regulatory function (calming, increasing concentration or shutting out an overwhelming sound).

Subclinical Seizure, see *Seizures*.

Symbolic Play is where children pretend to do things and to be something or someone else. Typically develops between the ages of 2 and 3 years. Also called make believe or pretend play.

Syndrome is a set of signs and symptoms that collectively define or characterize a disease, disorder or condition.

T

Tactile Defensiveness is a strong negative response to a sensation that would not ordinarily be upsetting, such as touching something sticky or gooey or the feeling of soft foods in the mouth. Specific to touch.

TEACCH is a therapeutic approach broadly based on the idea that individuals with autism more effectively use and understand visual cues.

Tonic-clonic seizure, see *Seizures*

Typical Development (or healthy development) describes physical, mental and social development of a child who is acquiring or achieving skills according to expected time frame. Child developing in a healthy way pays attention to voices, faces and actions of others, showing and sharing pleasure during interactions and engaging in verbal and nonverbal back-and-forth communication.

U

V

Verbal Behavior is a method of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) for teaching children with autism, based on B.F. Skinner's description of the system of language.

Vestibular System refers to the body's system for maintaining equilibrium.

W

X

Y

Z