

Glossary of Terms

The following are definitions of commonly used terms you may encounter.

Assessment:

Process of gauging the development, strengths and weaknesses of a child/person carried out by trained professionals using internationally recognised assessment tools specific to their discipline in tandem with observation and parental/carers input.

Asperger's Syndrome:

An autistic spectrum disorder where difficulties with social interaction and related communication, rigidity in routine, activities and interests, sensory and stereotypical behaviours exist alongside normal cognitive functioning and language development.

Autistic Spectrum:

A term used to describe the range of abilities and disabilities across the autistic community which can be defined as Severe, Moderate, Mild, High Functioning Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, PDD-NOS.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder:

The diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder means that the person presents with difficulties interacting and communicating and displays stereotypical behaviours eg, hand-flapping or preoccupations of unusual intensity and focus. These difficulties exist across the areas of socialisation, communication and imagination, termed the 'triad of impairment'. The degree to which these difficulties are present will determine where on the autistic spectrum the person is.

Autistic Savant:

An autistic individual who displays incredible aptitude for one or two skills (e.g. amazing musical or artistic ability)

Cognitive functioning:

A term used to define the intellectual capacity of an individual based upon the assessment of a wide range of skill, non verbal practical reasoning skills, memory and processing speed.

Comorbidity:

The presence of one or more disorders (or diseases) in addition to a primary disease or disorder and the effect of such additional disorders or diseases.

Daily Living Skills:

Refers to the skills required by individuals to be used on a daily basis to meet their basic needs. These would include washing and dressing, feeding, cooking, cleaning, shopping and travelling.

Diagnosis:

The recognition of a disability, disorder or condition, as defined by specific characteristics or symptoms.

DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders):

The official system for classification of psychological and psychiatric disorders prepared and published by the American Psychiatric Association.

High Functioning Autism:

Individuals with autism who are not cognitively impaired are called high functioning.

Individual Education Plan (IEP):

A plan that identifies the student's specific learning goals and outlines how the school will address these expectations through appropriate special education programmes and services. It also identifies the methods by which the student's progress will be reviewed. The IEP is a plan which requires input from teachers, resource teachers, SNA's, clinical team members ie, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and behaviour specialists, parents and ideally, the student.

ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases of the World Health Organisation):

A numerical System used to classify diseases and disorders, including autism. Sometimes used in conjunction with DSM criteria. An internationally recognised diagnostic tool for autism.

Multidisciplinary Team:

An team comprising of a variety of professionals of different disciplines. Usually consisting of a Clinical Psychologist, Occupational Therapist and Speech and Language Therapist and may also include an Educational Psychologist and/or a Clinical Psychiatrist. The use of a Multidisciplinary Team for assessment means that a holistic picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual across the different areas of development can be gauged and full and appropriate interventions recommended.

Neurotypical:

Neurotypical (or NT) is a term that was coined in the autistic community as a label for people who are not on the autism spectrum.

Obsessive behaviours:

An impulse to or engagement in an activity or interest to the exclusion of other activities or interests. Obsessive behaviours can have a self-calming or self-stimulatory effect and are not consciously controlled by the individual.

Pathway:

A pathway covers the recognition, referral and diagnosis of a condition in children, young people and adults, and the management of that condition after diagnosis.

Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS):

A severe impairment in the development of social interaction associated with impairments of either verbal or non verbal communication skills or with the presence of stereotyped behaviours, interests and activities. Such criteria are not pervasive and extensive enough to meet the criteria for Autistic Disorder.

Ritualistic behaviours:

The conscious use of a pattern of doing a task or engaging in an activity which often is reassuring to the individual. The break from the ritual can result in anxiety and feeling of loss of control for the individual and may result in undesirable behaviours or SIB's (see below).

Sensory Integration:

Is a neurological process which organises and modulates sensory information from the environment and enables the body to function effectively.

Sensory Integration Dysfunction: a neurological disorder resulting in difficulties processing information from the senses and affecting subsequent learning and behaviour.

Social skills:

People with ASD often have poor social skills. This means that they have problems with social communication (see above), which may result in them invading other's personal space, returning to a point of discussion when the conversation has moved on, talking about a topic to the exclusion of others and not registering the physical cues from others (ie yawning), poor eye contact and non- understanding of intonation, sarcasm and social mores.

Speech delay:

Speech delay refers to the failure to acquire speech and language as would be developmentally expected given the individual's age. This may be due to ASD or to another speech and language disorder.

'Stim' or 'Stimming':

Short for 'self-stimulation', a term for behaviours whose sole purpose appears to be to stimulate one's senses. May serve a regulatory function (ie. calming, increasing concentration or shutting out an overwhelming sound).

Transition:

The movement from one activity to another or from one place to another. People with ASD often find transition difficult and careful preparation of activity schedules or gradual introductions to new environments can help reduce anxieties around transition.