



Common Terms Related to Early Intervention, Developmental Delays, & Autism

Adaptive Skills- Self-help skills the child uses for daily living (such as feeding, toileting, dressing).

ABA- see Applied Behavior Analysis

Advocacy- Within the intervention community, this term refers to the act of supporting or defending a child's interest and rights.

Applied Behavior Analysis- (ABA) Design, implementation and evaluation of an environment to produce improvements in behavior.

ASD- see Autism Spectrum Disorders

Assessment- The identification of a child's needs, strengths, resources, developmental priorities and concerns, and extent of services needed. Therapists make initial assessments as well as continue assessments throughout the intervention process.

At Risk- A term used to describe children vulnerable to problems with their development.

Audiology- The study of hearing, balance, and related disorders. Services aid hearing impairments and hearing loss prevention.

Autism Spectrum Disorders- (ASD) An umbrella term used to describe an array of neurobiological disorders that affect a child's ability to interact, communicate, relate, play, imagine, and learn. ASD is also known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). The autism spectrum consists of the following disorders: Autistic Disorder or Classic Autism, Rett's Disorder or Rett Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Asperger's Disorder or Asperger Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS).

Babbling- The vocalization that is the precursor to real speech. Children typically begin vocalizing at 6-9 months old.

Behavior Intervention Plan- A plan to manage a child's problematic behavior. Includes fostering positive behavior, environmental changes, reinforcements other necessary supports.

Body Posture- Nonverbal expressions used to show emotion or convey information.

Cognitive- A descriptive term encompassing the mental processes of knowing, perceiving, remembering, judging, and reasoning.

Compulsions- Deliberate, repetitive behaviors or actions with a set of rules for completion. May involve counting or cleaning and can be identified early through restricted patterns of interest.



Developmental- Having to do with the stages and steps involved in the growth of a child.

Developmental Delay- Evidence a child is not functioning at an expected level for his/her age.

Developmental Milestones- Markers of ability used to monitor a child's development. These guideposts consist of skills and behaviors that should be developed by a certain age.

Disability- A physical or mental condition likely to lead to a developmental delay.

Early Childhood Intervention- A support system designed for children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.

Early Intervention Services- The system of coordinated services designed to promote a child's developmental growth and the ability to cope with disabilities.

Echolalia- The repetition of words, phrases, intonation, or sounds of others. Children with ASD use this in the process of learning to talk and serves a communicative purpose for the child.

Eligibility Requirements- A standard a child must meet to qualify for early intervention services. Qualifiers include age, disabilities, and developmental delays.

Emotional Regulation- Voluntary and involuntary responses by a child to internal and external sensory input. The child adjusts emotions and behavior to the surroundings. Many children with ASD have difficulties with adjustments and exhibit abnormal or inappropriate responses.

Evaluation- The process of determining if a child is eligible for early intervention services.

Expressive Language- Verbal behavior or speech. The ability to form sounds into words which can be strung into sentences.

Eye Gaze- Nonverbal form of communication. The act of looking at another individual's face to see what they are looking at and then signal interest in interacting.

Family Training- Services provided to the family by qualified personnel to assist in understanding the needs of the child and helping the child's development.

Functional Analysis of Behavior- Also Functional Behavioral Analysis. The analysis of a child's inappropriate behavior and discovery of its cause. Includes documenting the antecedent (action prior to behavior), the behavior, and the consequence.

Functional Play- The appropriate use of objects in play.

Health Services- Public services to promote, improve, conserve, or restore a child's mental and/or physical well-being.

Healthy Development- The expected physical, mental, and social development of a child in a specific timeframe.

Home Visits- Professional visits to your home in order to plan and provide intervention services.



Hyperresponsiveness- Abnormal sensitivity to sensory input. Many children with ASD are extremely sensitive to commonplace sounds, sights, tastes, touch, and/or smells. Typically, this input triggers a defensive, negative response.

Hyporesponsiveness- Abnormal insensitivity to sensory input. Under-reaction to sound, sight, taste, touch and/or smell. A child may appear to be deaf or have a high tolerance for pain. May lead to aggressive behavior in searching for sensory stimulation.

Idiosyncratic Language- Language with private meaning that only makes sense to those in the situation where the language originated.

IEP- see Individualized Education Plan

IFSP- see Individualized Family Service Plan

Individualized Education Plan- (IEP) An agreement between the parent(s) of a child with special needs and the child's school system that outlines special services and instructional services.

Individualized Family Service Plan- (IFSP) The birth-3 year old equivalent to the Individualized Education Plan. A document created between the parent(s) of a child with special needs and early intervention professionals to outline goals for the child's development.

Insistence on Sameness- Rigid adherence to routines or activities. Disruptions may be described as "catastrophic." Children with ASD may use sameness as a coping mechanism.

Movie Talk- see Echolalia

Nonfunctional Routines- Repeated actions or behaviors that appear to not have a purpose. Children with ASD may place purpose in what appears to be senseless routines.

Nonverbal Behaviors- Acts performed by people in order to convey or exchange information without the use of speech. May include eye gaze, facial expressions, body posture, and gestures.

Occupational Therapist- A professional who evaluates fine motor (small muscle) and self-care skills.

Occupational Therapy- Professional services offered to assist with self-help skills, adaptive behavior, and sensory, motor, and postural development.

PDD - see Pervasive Developmental Disorders. See Autism Spectrum Disorder

Perseveration- Repetition of a behavior with an appearance of "being stuck" in that behavior.

Perseverative Speech- Repetitive use of language or repetitive mention of a specific topic. Appearance of "being stuck" in the need to verbalize specific words, phrases, or topics.

Pervasive Developmental Disorders- Umbrella term to describe Autism Spectrum Disorder.



Physical Therapist- A professional who evaluates gross motor (large muscle) skills, strength, balance, coordination, and mobility.

Physical Therapy- Professional services that help enable bodily movement and helps prevent onset of mobility difficulties.

Positive Behavior Support- Analysis of a child's problematic behavior and identification of the reasons and triggers for the behavior then the teaching of proper and expected behavior.

Pragmatics- Social rules for appropriate, meaningful use of speech and conversation.

Prosody- The rhythm and melody of spoken language. Includes rate, pitch, stress, inflection intonation. Children with ASD that verbalize tend to have odd intonation in their speech, flat, monotonous or sing-songy. Children with ASD that have limited speech tend to make unusual sounds.

Psychological Services- Administering of psychological and educational tests, interpretation of test results, and efforts to understand the neurobiological process that result in cognitive functions and behaviors.

Receptive Language- The ability to understand words and comprehend sentences produced by others.

Regulatory and Sensory Systems- The internal systems that control ability to register and respond to internal sensory input and external stimuli.

Repetitive Motor Mannerisms- Repetition of movements or posturing of the body. May include hand and body movements, and odd postures of body parts. These movements or postures do not appear to have meaning, but are typically significant to children with ASD.

Restricted Patterns of Interest- Limited range of interest that are intense in focus. These interests tend to be narrow and rigid and appear to be obsessions.

Rituals- Repeated behaviors that appear to be meaningless but are repeated by an individual in certain situations or circumstances.

Screening- The process of assessing a child's development and determining if their needs warrant further evaluation.

Scripting- see Echolalia

Self-Stimulating Behaviors- Self-stimulating movements, postures, and/or mannerisms significant to the performer. Typical in children with ASD.

Sensory Input- Internal (heart rate, body temperature) and external (sights, sounds, tastes, etc.) sensations.

Sensory Stimulation- Behaviors performed to stimulate internal response. May be for avoidance, attention requests, or a means of soothing. Appear meaningless to everyone but the person performing the action.

Social Interaction- Verbal and/or nonverbal behavior used to communicate with others.



Social Reciprocity- Back and forth flow of social interaction. A persons behavior influences another's behavior and so forth.

Social-Imitative Play- Acting out typical actions or daily routines in the context of play.

Special Needs- A term that describes a child with a mental or physical disability that requires special services or treatment.

Speech and Language Pathologist- A professional who evaluates a child's ability to communicate.

Speech-Language Pathology- The specialized practice of analyzing communication disorders as well as disabilities pertaining to the mouth, such as swallowing disorders.

Stereotyped Behaviors- Abnormal or excessive repetition of actions.

Stereotyped Language- Abnormal or excessive repetition of words or phrases.

Stimming- see Self-Stimulating Behaviors

Symbolic Play- When a child pretends to be something or someone else and perform actions typical of that person or thing.

Tactile Defensiveness- A strong, negative response to sensations. Specific to touch--touching something or being touched.

Tantrum- The expression of intense frustration. Typical of children that cannot typically express emotions or verbalize needs.

Transition- The process of a child moving from an early intervention program to a preschool program or other support service.

Vision Services- Professional services to aid children's visual disorders or delays.