

# Terminology and Acronyms

**Here are the definitions of some frequently used terms related to Autism:**

**Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA):** ABA is the science of applying learning principles to change behavior. Behaviors are carefully defined in observable and measurable terms, and carefully analyzed to determine what triggers and maintains the behavior. Data is collected to determine if the behavior is changing over time. ABA currently has a strong research base of evidence of effectiveness for people with autism. Examples of ABA interventions include positive behavioral supports, reinforcement, shaping, fading and chaining behaviors.

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**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** A complex developmental disability that affects communication, socialization and behavior. Autism is called a spectrum disorder because it is defined by a set of behaviors and affects individuals differently and by varying degrees. Those on the autism spectrum can have difficulty with language such as understanding language and expressing selves using language, forming and maintaining social relationships, and/or repetitive behaviors or narrow, restricted interests. ASD's include Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified, Rett Syndrome and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder.

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**Asperger's Syndrome:** Asperger's is an Autism Spectrum Disorder that is defined by difficulties in communication and social development and by repetitive interests and behaviors. Unlike typical Autism, people with Asperger's have no significant delay in language and cognitive development.

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**Childhood Disintegrative Disorder:** An Autism Spectrum Disorder that refers to individuals whose development appears normal for the first few years of life, but regresses with loss of skills, especially involving regression in speech.

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**Compulsions:** Deliberate non-functional repetitive behaviors that follow specific, self-imposed rules. Examples include cleaning, counting, or checking.

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**Developmental Milestones:** Skills or behaviors that most children can do by a certain age that enable parents and professionals to monitor learning, behavior, and development. While each child develops differently, delay in reaching developmental milestones may be a red flag for greater concern.

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**Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV-TR):** The official system for classification of psychological and psychiatric disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association.

**Early Intervention Programs (EIP):** A government funded program designed to identify and treat developmental problems for children from birth-age 3.

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**Echolalia (a.k.a. scripting):** The repetition of words, phrases, sounds of others.

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**Functional Play:** When an object is used for its appropriate purpose, like rolling a toy car or truck or brushing a doll's hair with a brush.

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**The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** Federal law passed in 1990 that is the basis for all educational law related to individuals with disabilities.

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**Individualized Educational Program (IEP):** IDEA requires public schools to develop an IEP for every student with a disability who is found to meet the federal and state requirements for special education. The IEP must be designed to provide the child with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The IEP refers both to the educational program to be provided to a child with a disability and to the written document that describes that educational program.

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**Intellectual Disability:** A disability characterized by limitations in cognitive functioning paired with limitations in ability to function in areas of everyday life, which includes self care. Sometimes referred to as a cognitive disability or being mentally challenged.

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**Intellectual Functioning:** General mental capacity, the ability to learn, reason, and problem solve.

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**Mainstreaming:** The placement of a disabled individual with non disabled peers in a regular classroom setting.

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**Nonfunctional Routines:** Specified, sequential, and repeated actions or behaviors that a person engages in, such as lining up toys in a certain order each time instead of playing with them. People with ASD may follow routines that appear to be senseless, but may have significance to them.

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**Nonverbal Behaviors:** Those things people do to convey or exchange information or express emotions without the use of words. These include eye gaze, facial expressions, body postures (movements and positioning of the body in relation to others), and gestures (hand and head movements to signal, such as a give, reach, wave, point, or head shake).

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**Occupational Therapist (OT):** A professional that assists in the development of self-help and fine motor skills. Interventions may focus on sensory issues, coordination of movement, balance, and on self-help skills such as dressing, eating with a fork and spoon, and/or grooming, and issues pertaining to visual perception and hand-eye coordination..

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**“On the spectrum”:** A term used to describe any diagnosis that falls on the autism spectrum.

**Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD):** Refers to a collection of communication, socialization, and/or behavioral features associated with Autism, but may not be varied enough or severe enough to meet criteria for Autism.

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**Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS):** A method used for communication using pictures and symbols.

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**Prosody:** The rhythm and melody of spoken language expressed through rate, pitch, stress, inflection, or intonation. Children with ASD can range from having no functional language to having very proficient vocabulary and sentence structure. Typically, those who talk may have odd intonation (flat, monotonous, stiff, or "sing songy" without emphasis on the important words).

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**Rett Syndrome:** An Autism Spectrum Disorder that is genetic affecting only girls, and often includes regression, classic hand-wringing behavior, and may be accompanied by seizures.

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**Self-Stimulating Behaviors or "Stimming" (stim):** Example of stimming may include rocking, flapping of hands, or humming. For a person with autism, a stim may serve as a regulatory function to calm down, increase concentration, or shut out an overwhelming sound.

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**Sensory Input:** Includes both internal (e.g., heart rate, temperature) and external (e.g., sights, sounds, tastes, smells, touch, and balance) sensations. A person's response to sensory input depends on ability to regulate and understand these stimuli and to adjust emotions to the demands of surroundings.

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**Sensory Integration (SI):** A form of occupational therapy, this supports a person's ability to regulate response to sensory input.

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**Speech Language Pathologist:** An individual who specializes in the area of human communication. The focus is communication to improve the ability to impact and understand the environment. Areas such as understanding and use of language including social aspects of language, feeding/swallowing, and voice all may be addressed by the speech language therapist.

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**Stereotyped Behaviors:** Refers to an abnormal or excessive repetition of an action carried out in the same way over time.

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**Stereotyped Patterns of Interest or Restricted Patterns of Interest:** A pattern of preoccupation with a narrow range of interests and activities.

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**Symbolic Play:** The kind of play typically develops between the ages of 2 and 3 years, where children pretend to do things and to be something or someone else.

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For more information about this initiative  
call 1-888-CHILDREN, ext. 5343

[www.makefriendswithautism.org](http://www.makefriendswithautism.org)

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