



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Asperger's Disorder (also referred to as Asperger's Syndrome)

A developmental disorder defined by impairments in social interaction and the presence of restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests and activities. Children with Asperger's Disorder do not have any significant delays in cognitive or language development. Social impairments affect the social use of language (pragmatics).

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

A syndrome with core symptoms including difficulty maintaining attention, cognitive disorganization, distractibility, impulsivity and hyperactivity. These symptoms may vary between children and across different situations and times. Common secondary symptoms include perceptual and emotional immaturity, poor social skills, disruptive behaviours and academic problems. There are three subtypes identified in DSM-IV: ADHD, Combined Type (where both inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity are significant features), ADHD, Predominantly Inattentive Type (where the main feature is inattentiveness) and ADHD Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type (where the main feature is hyperactivity).

Atypical Autism

A disorder that is part of the diagnostic category PDD-NOS in DSM (see below). A general term for conditions that are close to but do not meet the full diagnostic criteria for autism, because of factors such as late age of onset or atypical symptomatology. This term is used in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD, WHO).

Auditory Integration Training (AIT)

An intervention designed to reduce auditory sensitivity and distortions, and to improve the quality of auditory processing. Proponents of AIT report that it encourages the ears to work together in a coordinated manner and can improve the ability to comprehend what is being said or read; to follow directions; or to express thoughts and feelings in words. This has not yet been supported by clinical trials.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

The use of visual aids (objects, photos, pictures etc.) or unaided systems (hand signs or gestures) to help children with language difficulties communicate more effectively. (See PECS for an example of augmentative communication)

Autism

A syndrome consisting of a set of developmental and behavioural features. The core features of autism include impairments in three main areas of functioning: social interaction, communication and restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests and activities. Autism affects the person throughout life.

Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R)

A standardised parent interview schedule for the diagnosis of autism (as defined by DSM-IV criteria) developed by the Medical Research Council in London, England. It assesses four main areas; communication, reciprocal social interaction, play and developmental history. It can be used to assess children and adults with a developmental age of 18 months and over.

Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule-Generic (ADOS-G)

A standardized, direct-observation measure for examining communicative and reciprocal social interaction behaviours that are associated with autism. Its administration involves a semi-structured play session. It takes approximately one hour to complete.

Autistic Savant

A person with autism who shows an extraordinary talent or aptitude for one or two particular skills (e.g. musical or artistic ability).

Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)

This is a term with no formal definition or universally accepted usage. It is now most commonly used in a similar way to the term PDDs and refers to Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder and PDD-NOS.

Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS)

A subjective scale that rates severity of autism symptoms. Scores on the scale are based on direct observation by the examiner. The child is rated in 15 areas with scores rating from 1 to 4. To be in the autism range the person must score 30 or above. The scores reflect the categories of non-autistic, mildly-moderately autistic or severely autistic, however it is NOT a diagnostic tool. The CARS score is currently required by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in Victoria to support applications when a child with autism is seeking integration funding. It is not a stand alone diagnostic instrument.

Childhood Disintegrative Disorder

A syndrome with the core feature of a marked regression in multiple areas of functioning after a period of 2 years of apparently normal development. Other symptoms include difficulties with social interaction, communication and restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests and activities

Chromosomes

Structures in the nucleus of the body's cells that bear an individual's genetic information.

Co-morbid Condition

Having more than one concurrent diagnosis. Another term for this would be "dual diagnosis". Many people with autism have one or more additional diagnoses, such as ADHD, Tourette's Syndrome or Epilepsy.

COMPIC

A set of pictographs (computer drawn line drawings) developed in Australia as a communication resource for people with language difficulties. COMPIC has 1670 pictographs which represent words, objects, activities and concepts. The pictographs are accompanied by the relevant word or phrase. The pictographs provide a visual representation of a word or concept for use in augmentative communication programs. Other pictograph systems are also frequently used in Victoria, e.g. Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) and Boardmaker.

Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA)

The substance contained within chromosomes which encodes an individual's genetic information.

Developmental Behaviour Checklist (DBC)

An instrument that assesses a broad range of behavioural and emotional disturbances in young people (aged between 4 and 18 years) with an intellectual disability. There are parent (primary carer) and teacher report versions of the DBC. The DBC has five sub-scales: Disruptive/Anti-social Behaviour, Self-absorbed, Communication Disturbance, Anxiety and Social Relating. Computer scoring software is available. This also includes the DBC-Autism Screening Algorithm (DBC-ASA) which screens for autism in children aged 4-18 years. (Einfeld & Tonge, 2003). Available from Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology, Monash University. Contact DBC@med.monash.edu.au).

Discrete Trial

A short, teaching sequence which has three parts: a direction, a behaviour and a consequence.

DSM Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (the most recent version is DSM-IV-TR)

The official system for classification of psychological and psychiatric disorders produced by the American Psychiatric Association. DSM is the diagnostic system commonly used in Australia.

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)

ECI describes a range of supports provided to young children with disabilities (0-6 years) and their families. ECI aims to promote child and family well-being and improve the development and functioning of young children with developmental delays and disabilities.

Echolalia

The repetition of words or phrases spoken by another person. The echoing may occur immediately after hearing the word or phrase. This is immediate echolalia. Delayed echolalia can occur days or weeks after having heard a certain word or phrase.

Electroencephalogram (EEG)

A procedure used to record electrical brain activity by placing electrodes on the scalp. It is often used to diagnose seizure disorders or to look for abnormal brain wave patterns.

Epilepsy

A brain disorder in which clusters of nerve cells, or neurons, in the brain sometimes signal abnormally. In epilepsy, the normal pattern of neuronal activity becomes disturbed, causing strange sensations, emotions, and behaviour or sometimes convulsions, muscle spasms, and loss of consciousness. Having a seizure does not necessarily mean that a person has epilepsy. A diagnosis of epilepsy needs to be confirmed using an EEG or brain scan.

Expressive Language

The use of spoken language.

Fragile X Syndrome

A genetic disorder which can cause cognitive impairment and a number of other a number of physical and behavioural characteristics. Some of these behaviours, such as poor eye contact, hand flapping, and poor social skills, also occur in children with autism. While most children with Fragile X Syndrome do not have all the characteristics of autism, about 15% to 33% are diagnosed as autistic. Individuals can be tested for "Fragile X" by having a blood test and having their chromosomes (see above) examined by a geneticist.

Gene

Genes are responsible for the inherited characteristics that distinguish one individual from another. They are made of DNA. Each chromosome carries many genes. Each human has approximately 100,000 genes.

High Functioning Autism

Individuals with autism who are not cognitively impaired (i.e. have an average or higher IQ) are referred to as 'high functioning'.

Hyperlexia

A precocious ability to read words, far above what would be expected for their chronological age. A hyperlexic child may not understand what they are reading and may even have significant difficulty in understanding verbal language.

Hypotonia

Low muscle tone.

Inclusion

The placement of a child with a disability (physical or developmental delay) with typically developing peers in a regular pre-school or kindergarten.

Integration

The placement of a child with a disability (physical or intellectual) with typically developing peers in a regular classroom at school.

Intellectual Disability (ID)

In Victoria, three main factors are used to define an intellectual disability. The first is a significantly below average intelligence (that is, an IQ of 70 or less where the IQ score is obtained from a standardised intelligence test). The second is difficulties with everyday life skills (such as the ability to dress or bath without help or express thoughts clearly. Tests of adaptive behaviour may be used to measure these skills. The third is that both the above factors must be present before the individual turns 18 years of age. More than three-quarters of people with an intellectual disability have a mild intellectual disability. The remainder have either a moderate, severe or profound intellectual disabilities.

Intelligence

A broad concept made up of a large number of widely different yet specific skills. Its measurement through the use of intelligence tests attempts to assess these skills in order to provide a global score representative of an individual's level of functioning. Scores on intelligence tests relate a child's performance on the test to that of other children of the same chronological age.

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

A standard score derived from intelligence tests. It represents the intellectual age of the child (that is the age at which the average child would perform at a given standard) divided by the child's chronological age at the time of testing. The scores are organised such that 100 is an average score (i.e. when the intellectual age and chronological age are the same) but any score between 90 and 110 is considered average.

International Classification of Diseases (ICD) of the World Health Organization

A system used to classify diseases and disorders. It is the main diagnostic system used in Europe. The most recent edition is ICD-10.

Individualised Educational Plan (IEP)

A written plan that identifies a child's academic, physical, social and emotional needs and sets goals for meeting these needs. Used primarily for children with special needs. The IEP is written by the child's teacher in conjunction with parents, special education teachers or therapists.

Landau-Kleffner Syndrome

A rare form of childhood epilepsy which results in severe language disorder. It is characterised by a progressive loss of the ability to understand language and use speech, following a period of normal speech development. It is usually diagnosed using an EEG taken while asleep. The cause of the condition is unknown.

Macrocephaly

A condition where the head circumference is two standard deviations above average (i.e. greater than the 97th percentile).

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)

A diagnostic procedure that uses the magnetic qualities of chemicals in the body to produce an image of the brain.

Makaton

A communication system using simple hand signs. It is commonly used with children and adults with complex communication needs. It can be used in conjunction with other communication programs, such as PECS.

Microcephaly

A condition where the head circumference is two standard deviations below average, producing an abnormally small head, and a congenitally small brain.

Neuroleptics

A group of drugs referred to as anti-psychotics or major tranquillisers (although not all neuroleptics have a tranquillising effect). There are two broad types: typical and atypical. Typical neuroleptics are older and have a greater impact on positive psychotic systems (hallucinations, delusions and thought disorder etc) while atypical neuroleptics are newer and more likely to have an impact on both positive and negative (lack of motivation and flat mood) psychotic symptoms. There is some evidence that they are of use in people with developmental disorders to reduce hyperactivity, aggressiveness, distractibility, temper tantrums and stereotypes.

Neurologist

A doctor specialising in medical problems associated with the nervous system, specifically the brain and spinal cord.

Neurotypical

A term used for neurologically and cognitively normal individuals.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

A disorder characterised by obsessions (recurrent persistent thoughts, impulses or images) and/or compulsions (repetitive behaviours such as checking or mental acts such as praying, or counting). The obsessions are distressing to the individual and often the aim of the compulsion is to reduce this distress. For example, if the obsession is fear of germs, a person may frequently wash their hands.

Occupational Therapist (OT)

Health professionals trained to assist people to overcome physical limitations caused by injury or illness, psychological or emotional difficulties, developmental delay or the effects of aging. Their aim is to assist each individual to move from dependence to independence. In young children, OT's work with both children and families and focus on promoting normal development and stimulating learning.

Perseveration

Repetitive movement or speech or sticking to one idea or task, which has a compulsive quality to it.

Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)

A term that encompasses autism and related disorders. It specifically refers to the following five disorders listed in the DSM-IV: Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Retts Disorder.

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

A diagnostic category that is used when there is a severe and pervasive impairment in the developmental of reciprocal social interaction or verbal and non-verbal communication skills or when stereotyped behaviours, interests and activities are present, but the criteria are not met for a specific Pervasive Developmental Disorder.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

An augmentative communication system. PECS teaches people with language difficulties to exchange a picture of a desired item with a teacher/parent, who immediately honours the request. Allows people with language difficulties to initiate communication.

Pragmatics

The use of language in social contexts (for example, knowing what to say, how to say it and when to say it).

Proprioception

The ability to sense the position, location, orientation and movement of the body and its parts.

Psychoeducational Profile – 3 (PEP-3)

A standardised observational assessment instrument based on a developmental approach. The PEP-3 was specifically designed for use with non-verbal or language delayed children. The developmental framework of the PEP-3 provides a way to describe and understand the characteristic uneven learning patterns exhibited by children with autism or related developmental disorders. It provides both standard scores and age equivalencies.

Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist is a qualified medical doctor who has obtained additional qualifications to become a specialist in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illness and emotional and behavioural problems. A psychiatrist is qualified to prescribe medication because they have completed medical training.

Psychologist

Professionals who are experts in human behaviour. Some psychologists specialise in treating mental illness, while others help mentally healthy people find ways of functioning better, for example, helping people to handle stress and family problems. Psychological therapies are also widely used by groups and organisations. Psychologists cannot prescribe medication. Their treatments are based on changing behaviour without medication.

Psychopathology

Clinically significant emotional and behavioural problems.

Receptive Language

The understanding of language.

Regressive autism

Regression in autism spectrum disorders is well documented. Approximately 25–30% of children with autism stop speaking after beginning to say words. Most examples of autistic regression concern loss of words at about 18 months of age. Some children lose social development instead of language; some lose both. After the regression, the child follows the standard pattern of autistic neurological development. Usually, age-appropriate autistic symptoms are clear from birth. The apparent onset of regressive autism is distressing to parents. The pattern of symptoms has led to suspicions that postnatal environmental factors trigger autism; frequently, the apparent factor cited by parents is the possibility of vaccine injury. In particular, because obvious symptoms often start just after children receive multiple vaccinations, such as the MMR vaccine or the MMRV vaccine (MMR plus varicella (chickenpox) vaccine), some people perceive a causal link between vaccination and autism, especially if accompanied by a fever, rash, and rapid skill loss. Although controversy has escalated since the earliest reports of a possible link began to surface in the 1980s, no link has been found with vaccines (see other ACT NOW factsheets).

Rett's Disorder

A disintegrative disorder where after a period of normal development, between the ages of 5 and 48 months, head growth decelerates and there is a loss of previously acquired skills. Other symptoms include stereotyped hand movements, uncoordinated movement and language difficulties. Only reported in females.

Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)

A class of drugs used as antidepressants. They increase the levels of serotonin in the body. These drugs should only be taken as advised by a medical practitioner/psychiatrist as they can have some side-effects and can be dangerous if mixed with other medications. Some examples of SSRIs are Prozac and Zoloft.

Self-stimulation

A term for behaviours whose sole purpose appears to be to stimulate one's senses. Many people with autism report that some self-stimulation serves a regulatory function for them (ie. calming, increasing concentration, or shutting out an overwhelming sound).

Sensory Integration (SI)

The ability to take in information through senses (touch, movement, smell, taste, vision, digestion and hearing), put it together with prior information, memories, and knowledge stored in the brain and make a meaningful response.

Serotonin

A neurotransmitter. In conjunction with other neurotransmitters, it is believed to be key in the control of mood and emotional behaviour. Also implicated in the behavioural- physiological processes of sleep, pain and sensory perception, motor function, appetite, learning and memory.

Special Developmental School (SDS)

An educational setting from pre-school to high school for children with IQ of less than 50.

Special School

An educational setting for children and adolescents with IQ's between 50 and 70.

Speech Pathologist

A professional who assesses and treats people with communication disorders or physical problems associated with eating or swallowing.

Stim

Short for 'self-stimulation'.

T.E.A.C.C.H. (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children)

A therapeutic approach broadly based on the idea that individuals with autism more effectively use and understand visual cues. It focuses on promoting independence by using items such as picture schedules to break down tasks step-by-step, enabling individuals to better comprehend and perform tasks independently.

Theory of Mind

The ability to understand that other people have beliefs, desires and intentions that are different from one's own.

Tourette's Syndrome

An inherited, neurological disorder characterised by repeated and involuntary body movements (tics) and uncontrollable vocal sounds. Involuntary symptoms can include eye blinking, repeated throat clearing or sniffing, arm thrusting, kicking movements, shoulder shrugging or jumping. In a minority of cases, the vocalisations include socially inappropriate words and phrases - called coprolalia. These outbursts are neither intentional nor purposeful. Onset occurs before the age of 18. The condition occurs in all ethnic groups with males affected 3 to 4 times more often than females.

Tuberous Sclerosis

A complex genetic disorder affecting individuals with different degrees of severity. It derives its name from the tuber-like growths on the brain which calcify with age and become hard or 'sclerotic'. Abnormal TS growths can affect almost any other organ of the body (including the skin, eyes, heart, kidneys and lungs) but they rarely cause problems. Common symptoms include skin problems (white patches on skin or rash), developmental delay, epilepsy and hyperactivity. It occurs in 1 in 8000 births.

Vineland Adaptive Behavioural Scales (VABS)

A scale designed to assess handicapped and non-handicapped persons from birth to adulthood in their personal and social functioning. The VABS is organised around four Behaviour Domains: Communication, Daily Living Skills, Socialisation, and Motor Skills

Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-III, also the WISC-IV has been recently released)

An individually administered clinical instrument for assessing the intellectual functioning of children aged 6 to 16 years 11 months. The individual's performance on various sub-tests is summarised in to three main components – Verbal IQ, Performance (non-verbal) IQ and an overall IQ score.

Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence – Third Edition (WPPSI-III)

A clinical instrument designed to assess IQ which is similar to the WISC-III but for children ages 2 years 6 months to 7 years 3 months.