

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



ADDvanced Solutions
Supporting you to find the answers

Autism - Common Terms:

Asperger's Syndrome

See HFA (High Functioning Autism).

Autistic Spectrum

Autistic spectrum refers to the wide range of different abilities and difficulties covered by the term 'autism'. This is illustrated well by this extract from the current NICE guidelines: The clinical picture of autism is variable because of differences in the severity of autism itself, the presence of coexisting conditions and the differing levels of cognitive ability, which can range from profound intellectual disability in some people to average or above average intellectual ability in others.

Autistic Savant

Autistic savant is the term used for someone with ASD who has a special talent, for example, drawing, maths or playing an instrument. One possible reason could be the single minded concentration a child with ASD can give to one subject to the exclusion of all others, but it appears to be more of an automatic ability and due to a difference in processing in the brain. Probably the most well-known example of a savant is the character played by Dustin Hoffman in the film 'Rainman'. Only about 10% of individuals with ASD will have this special ability.

DSM-5

the 5th version of the American diagnostic manual (updated in 2013) used to classify and diagnose mental health disorders. It is used widely in the UK.

Echolalia

Some children may directly echo or copy another person's words or phrases (including from TV, videos and other sources). Echolalia is sometimes used when a child is aware that they are expected to say something, but they don't have the word-finding skills to express themselves, and so they 'borrow' words. This may lead adults to have a false impression of a child's language ability. Echolalia often masks comprehension problems. Often as children develop in their language skills echolalia reduces.

Expressive Language

Expressive Language is the language we use to communicate to others. This is not always just the use of speech but will also include general communication skills. Often there is a difference in the levels of receptive and expressive language in children with social and communication difficulties.

HFA (High-Functioning Autism)

This diagnosis means that the individual has the characteristics of autism – social communication difficulties along with rigid thought patterns – and is at the more able end of the spectrum cognitively. HFA broadly replaces the term **Asperger's Syndrome**, and is the result of years of intense debate. Most teachers and clinicians will use the two terms interchangeably.

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Individuals with HFA tend to have average or above average intelligence and have fewer difficulties with language. They often speak fluently, but their language can sound formal or stilted. They often wish to appear sociable but find it difficult to say and do the socially acceptable thing. They often also have some aspects of dyspraxia (coordination difficulties). Although Asperger's syndrome is no longer used as a separate diagnosis, it may still be used as a descriptive term.

Hyperlexia

This is a condition that includes the ability to read at a very early stage, but without understanding the words. Children with hyperlexia usually also have significant social communication difficulties, and are often fascinated with words and numbers. They are not always on the autistic spectrum but there is a significant overlap.

Literal Interpretation

Children with ASD often take what is spoken to them literally. Some children will look at their fingers in surprise if they enjoy gardening and are called green fingered. This is a result of their inflexible thinking, and can cause distress and confusion. Autistic children don't understand sarcasm, which can leave them vulnerable to misunderstanding and teasing by other children.

PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

Picture Exchange Communication System is a way to encourage two way communication using picture cards. Children who struggle with verbal communication learn from simply exchanging a picture symbol for something they want to initiate communication and answer question. The aim is to facilitate two-way communication and, where possible, to help children to learn to communicate without the cards.

Receptive Language

Receptive Language is our ability to understand the words that we hear. Children with ASD often have difficulty understanding what is being said to them, especially if the language used is too difficult or hard to follow, so they are said to have a deficit in receptive language.

Sensory Integration (SI)

This is the way the brain processes sensory stimulation or sensation from the body and translates it into specific, planned and coordinated motor activity.

Theory of Mind

This is the ability to understand or the awareness that your own beliefs, thoughts and intentions are different and separate from those of others.

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