Exceptional Families
Exceptional Service

Frequently Used Terms Dictionary

for caregivers of young children with special needs

The world of special needs can sometimes seem like it comes with its own language! Use this dictionary to help you decipher & navigate some of the terms that you might run into. If you have any questions, please do not hesitant to contact us. We are here to support you!

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Adaptive Behavior: the ability to adjust new situations or apply skills in different situations.

Adjusted Age (AA): the age of the child minus the number of weeks the child was born prematurely (as compared to *Chronological Age*).

Advocate: someone who speaks on behalf of or supporting another person's interest (such as a parent on behalf of a child).

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): a process that examines and improves behavior using systematic learning principles; sometimes used to refer to discrete trial training (see also *discrete trail training*).

Assessment: gathering and using information by evaluating or testing a child to determine areas of strength and need (see also *Reassessment*).

Assistive Technology: any item that helps a child be successful by increasing, maintain, or improving the child's abilities.

Audiologist: a specialist in hearing (or auditory skills) and hearing disorders.

Augmentative Communication: any method of communicating without speech, such as signs, gestures, picture boards, or devices (see also *PECS* and *communication board/book*).

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): refers to everything that falls under Pervasive Developmental Disorders in the DSM-V manual (see also *DSM-V* and *Pervasive Developmental Disorders*).

Autism: a developmental disability characterized by delays in social skills, communication skills, and repetitive behaviors/interests/activities; a neurological disorder usually diagnosed in the first three years of life; listed in the DSM-V manual under Pervasive Developmental Disorders (see also *DSM-V*, *Pervasive Developmental Disorders*, and *Repetitive/Restricted Behaviors/Interests*.

Babbling: between six to nine months, a child will begin to vocalize repeated consonant-vowel combinations such as "ba ba ba" or "da da da"; babbling is necessary to learn how to talk.

Baseline: a starting point; the beginning skill level of a child

Chronological Age (CA): the actual age of a child determine from the date of birth (as compared to *Adjusted Age*).

Cognitive: involves thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and remembering and understanding information.

Communication Board/Book: a form of augmented communication; a board or book that a person can point to for expressing needs (see also *Augmentative Communication*).

Communication Disorder: difficulty with receptive (understanding) or expressive (speaking, signing, gestures) communication; examples include articulation, voice disorders, stuttering, language disorders.

Communication: referring to a child's ability to understand language (see also *receptive communication*) and express what they think, feel, want, or need (see also *expressive communication*); can be non-verbal (gestures, signs, facial expressions) or verbal (speech, spoken language).

Community Alternatives Program for Children (CAP/C): a Medicaid program that provides case management and home care services to medically fragile children through age eighteen who would otherwise require long-term hospital or nursing facility care.

Community Alternatives Program for Persons with Mental Retardation or Developmental Disabilities (CAP-MR/DD): a Medicaid waiver program that provides community services and case management to individuals of any age who qualifies for care in a facility for the mentally retarded. The focus is to help individuals remain in the community instead of residing in an institution.

Developmental Age: the age at which a person is functioning (as compared to *Chronological Age*).

Developmental Delay: when a child is not reaching developmental milestones at a typical age or developing slower than most other children.

Developmental Milestones: skills that children learn at certain times throughout childhood that are seen as markers or guideposts for parents and professionals to monitor a child's development; examples include sitting, crawling, walking, or talking.

Diagnosis: a conclusion reached by trained professionals; the decision is based on criteria in the DSM-V (see also *DSM-V*).

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V): the main diagnostic reference tool used by medical professionals; lists the characteristics or criteria for many disorders; describes 5 pervasive developmental disorders – Autistic Disorder, Rett's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS) (see also *Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Autism,* and *Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified*).

Discrete Trial Training (DTT): one of many methods for teaching skills in ABA; the skill is broken down into smaller steps that are taught in a highly structured manner (see also *Applied Behavior Analysis*).

Early Childhood Special Education Teacher: a specialist trained in early childhood development to help children learn necessary skills.

Early Intervention (EI): individualized services for infants and toddlers to help them reach developmental milestones; support for families are also provided.

Echolalia (Movie Talk): the repetition of words, phrases, intonation, or sounds of others.

Eligibility: a determination of whether or not a child will qualify for early intervention services or special education services using a set criteria.

Evaluation: tests used by trained professionals to determine a child's eligibility and functioning in the developmental areas: cognitive, social/emotional, physical (including vision and hearing), communication, and adaptive (see also *Assessment*).

Evidence-based: when objectives decisions are made based on data that is taken regularly.

Expressive Language: expressing thoughts, feelings, or needs by gesture, sign language, verbal language, or written language (as compared to *Receptive Language*).

Family Educational Right and Privacy Act (FERPA): a federal law that protects the privacy rights of children and families.

Fine Motor: skills that relies on small muscles, such as turning knobs, using scissors, or buttoning a shirt.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): part of the IDEA federal law that requires all children to have free and appropriate access to public education (see also *IDEA*).

Functional Behavior Analysis (FBA): systematically determining the function of behaviors; behaviors are defined, measured, and analyzed in terms of what happened before and after; performed to develop behavior interventions for inappropriate behavior.

Functional Goals: goals that cover skills which apply to everyday life, such as dressing, eating, or knowing one's name, address, or phone number.

Functional Play: when a child uses objects for the purpose which they were made, such as rolling a ball, stirring a spoon, or brushing hair with a hairbrush.

Generalization: the ability to take a skill learned in one setting and use it in another setting, such as learning how to sort colors at home and then sorting colors at school.

Gross Motor: skills that relies on large muscles, such as crawling, sitting, or walking.

High Functioning: a term used to describe individuals with autism who function at a higher level of ability than others on the autism spectrum.

HIPPA: Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996; a federal law that protects the confidentiality of medical records; limits the use and release of information to the minimum needed, and gives patients the ability to view their records or grant access to someone else to share their medical information.

In Loco Parentis: a legal document that allows someone other than the parent or legal guardian to assume the status and obligation of a parent without being awarded legal custody by a court.

Inclusion: the concept of including individuals with disabilities in all aspects of life, including as education; when services are provided to children with special needs in settings that also serve children without special needs; when children with special needs have a chance to interact with children without special needs.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): a written legal document required by the IDEA for all children in special education above age three that lists the services a child will receive through the public schools, as well as goals, people who will carry out the services, standards and timelines for evaluating progress, and the amount and degree to which the child will be in an inclusive environment (see also *IDEA* and *Inclusion*).

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): a written plan required by Part C of the IDEA for children under three that lists the services a child and family needs; includes goals for the infant and family, criteria, procedures, and timelines to evaluate progress (see also *Early Intervention* and *IDEA*).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): a federal law that requires special services for children with special needs through age 21.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): the educational setting that allows a child with special needs to learn to the best of his or her ability and have as much contact as possible with children without special needs while meeting all of the child's needs; required by IDEA (see also *IDEA*).

Make-Believe Play (Symbolic Play, Pretend Play): when children pretend to do things or pretend to be something or someone else.

Modeling: demonstrating something to teach it to the child.

Multidisciplinary: two or more specialists working together to provide services for a child.

Natural Environment: a setting that is natural or normal for a child's peers who are the same age and does not have special needs. For a child under three, the natural environment is the home.

Neurological: the scientific study of the nervous system and the nervous system structure.

Neurotypical (NT): a term used to describe people without autism spectrum disorders (see also *autism spectrum disorders*).

Obsessions: preoccupations with specific kinds of objects or actions; repetitive behavior that is persistent (see also *Repetitive/Restricted Behaviors/Interests*).

Occupational Therapy (OT): address issues including fine motor control for everyday tasks such as handwriting skills or self-care skills, specific sensory integration disorders, and visual impairment.

Oral Motor: muscles in the mouth area related to sensory or communication issues.

Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD): a category in the DSM-IV that includes Autistic Disorder, Rett's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS) (see also *Autism, Asperger's Disorder*, and *Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified*).

Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS): a diagnosis given to a child who has some but not all the symptoms of autism as outlined by the DSM-IV (see also *DSM-IV* and *Autism*).

Physical Therapy (PT): assists children with balance or gross motor delays or injuries as well as those who are wheelchair or bed bound.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS): a form of augmented communication that involves giving a picture of a desired item to a communication partner in exchange for the actual item (see also *Augmented Communication*).

Procedural Safeguards: rules and procedures that protects the rights of families and children.

Prompt: a verbal, gesture, or action that cues or reminds the child to do something.

Provider: a specialist or agency who provides intervention services for a child and their family.

Reassessment: when a child is re-evaluated to determine progress compared to their baseline (see also *baseline*).

Receptive Language: a child's ability to understand communication and language (as compared to *expressive language*).

Regression: when a child reverts or regresses to a lower or more immature skill level.

Reinforcement: a behavior modification technique to increase the likelihood of a desired response or behavior being repeated; can be positive (rewards) or negative (no privileges).

Repetitive/Restricted Behaviors/Interests: a very strong interest in an unusual specific kind of object, part of an object, activity or action, or topic; repetitive behaviors involve unusual movements with objects or the body (see also *Obsessions*).

Screening: a brief evaluation that determines <u>if</u> a child is at risk for a developmental disability and need additional testing; <u>cannot</u> offer a diagnosis (see also *Diagnosis*).

Self-Injurious Behavior: abnormal behaviors that are harmful to the child doing the behavior, such as head banging or biting or scratching one's self.

Self-Stimulation (Stimming): abnormal repetitive motor or body movements that provide sensory stimulation for the child (see also *Sensory* and Repetitive*/Restricted Behaviors/Interests*).

Sensory: Referring to or having to do with any of the seven senses – sight, touch, smell, sound, taste, movement (proprioception), and balance (vestibular).

Social Skills: related to child's interaction with other people (such as playing) or expressing their emotions (laughing, crying, talking about their feelings).

Special Needs: a term used to refer to children who have developmental delays, disabilities, or other special needs (medical or otherwise).

Spectrum Disorder: refers to when a disorder has a large range of symptoms and functioning.

Speech Therapy: addresses a wide range of disorders from simple sound errors to rare syndromes and head injuries.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): a federal program that provides financial assistance for eligible children under 18 who have a severe disability or chronic illness.

Transition Plan: developed for a child when leaving a program to ensure a smooth transition, such as when a child turns three and "ages out" of the early intervention program.

Trigger: something that happens before, causes, or "triggers" an inappropriate behavior.

Visual Schedule: pictures are arranged in the sequence of an activity to help a child understand and independently perform the activity.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): a program from the Division of Public Health that provides nutrition education, supplemental foods (including formula), breast-feeding support, and referrals to health care for pregnant or nursing women, infants, and children.