



# A GUIDE TO AUTISM TERMINOLOGY

Compiled by Midwest Autism & Therapy Centers



## CONTENTS:

Antecedent .....	1
Applied Behavior Analysis.....	1
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).....	1
Behavior.....	1
Behavior Analysis .....	1
Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) .....	1
Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) .....	1
Center-Based Therapy.....	1
Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT).....	1
Comorbidity.....	1
Consequence.....	2
Developmental Disability.....	2
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5).....	2
Discrete Trial Training (DTT) .....	2
Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention (EIBI).....	2
Early Intervention.....	2
Echolalia.....	2
Elopement.....	2
Executive Functioning.....	2
Fined Motor Skills .....	2
Focused Therapy.....	3
Gross Motor Skills .....	3
Home-Based Therapy.....	3
Identity-First Language.....	3
Individualized Education Plan (IEP).....	3
Individualized Treatment Plan (ITP) .....	3
Intensive ABA Therapy (Comprehensive Therapy) .....	3
Masking.....	3
Negative Punishment.....	3
Negative Reinforcement.....	4
Neurodivergent.....	4
Neurotypical.....	4
Occupational Therapy (OT).....	4
Perseveration.....	4
Person-First Language .....	4
Physical Therapy (PT) .....	4
Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) .....	4
Pivotal Response Training (PRT).....	5
Positive Punishment.....	5

## CONTENTS:

Positive Reinforcement.....	5
Prosody.....	5
Punishment.....	5
Registered Behavior Technician (RBT).....	5
Reinforcement .....	5
Scripting.....	5
Sensory Integration Therapy.....	5
Sensory Processing.....	6
Speech Therapy.....	6
Stimming.....	6
Stimulus .....	6
Transition.....	6
504 Plan.....	6

**ANTECEDENT:**

The situation or event that comes before a behavior; commonly known as the trigger

**APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS:**

An evidence-based therapy method that uses positive reinforcement to help increase behaviors like safe play and communication, while decreasing challenging or unsafe behaviors like self-harm and elopement

**AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD):**

A Neurodevelopmental condition that affects each person differently, but often leads to challenges in child development, behavior, communication, and social skills

**BEHAVIOR:**

Any action that can be observed, counted, or timed

**BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS:**

The science of studying behavior

**BEHAVIOR ANALYST CERTIFICATION BOARD (BACB):**

A nonprofit corporation established in 1998 to meet professional certification needs and protect consumers by establishing, promoting, and disseminating professional standards

**BOARD CERTIFIED BEHAVIOR ANALYST (BCBA):**

A graduate-level certification in behavior analysis; independent practitioners who provide behavior-analytic services; a clinician who develops and oversees clients' individualized treatment plans

**CENTER-BASED THERAPY:**

ABA services provided at a Midwest Autism center, available for children ages 2-5 with an ASD diagnosis, who require a minimum of 20 hours per week

**COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT):**

A type of psychotherapy in which a licensed therapist recognizes negative thoughts and patterns and challenges the patient about those beliefs to alter their behaviors in an effort to reduce painful feelings and problematic behavior

**COMORBIDITY:**

The presence of two or more medical conditions within the same patient



**CONSEQUENCE:**

What happens immediately after, or in response to, a behavior

**DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY:**

A condition caused by an impairment in physical, learning, language, or other behavior areas (examples include: ASD, blindness, and cerebral palsy)

**DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL (DSM-5):**

The official system for classification of psychological and psychiatric disorders, prepared and published by the American Psychiatric Association

**DISCRETE TRIAL TRAINING (DTT):**

A structural component of ABA therapy where a task is broken down into small steps, then later rebuilt to demonstrate the completed task

**EARLY INTENSIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION (EIBI):**

A generic term used to describe ABA interventions that focus on young children who need a more significant number of hours or level of intensity in their treatment programming, could also include the ratio of instructors to the child

**EARLY INTERVENTION:**

Services designed to help children birth to three years old learn important skills, like those required to walk, talk, and interact with others

**ECHOLALIA:**

The unsolicited repetition of words, sounds, and phrases “echoing” another person

**ELOPEMENT:**

Leaving without permission, escaping, or not notifying others before exiting; a dangerous behavior that is a prime concern in the ASD community

**EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING:**

Refers to the mental skills of a working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control (i.e. the skills responsible for paying attention, planning, managing emotions, and understanding different points of view)

**FINED MOTOR SKILLS:**

Movements of the hands and upper extremities in addition to vision (visual motor skills like hand-eye coordination), including reaching, grasping, and manipulating objects with the hands

**FOCUSED THERAPY:**

A less intense option designed to target a specific developmental area, behavior, or goal, rather than a wide range of developmental skills

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:**

Movements of the large muscles of the arms, legs, and torso

**HOME-BASED THERAPY:**

ABA services provided within the client's home environment, typically best suited for those needing less than 20 hours per week, those in school or other programs, and/or those who have graduated from center-based services

**IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE:**

Referring to a person with a description of them in the context of their disability or difference (such as "autistic person") People who use this phrasing see their Autism as part of who they are and identify proudly with it

**INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN (IEP):**

Identifies the special education instructions, supports, and services a student needs to thrive in school (PreK-12)

**INDIVIDUALIZED TREATMENT PLAN (ITP):**

The care plan created for each client through a comprehensive assessment of physical, emotional, and mental health needs, designed to address areas of concern, focus, and goals

**INTENSIVE ABA THERAPY (ALSO KNOWN AS COMPREHENSIVE THERAPY):**

Refers to a treatment regime that is extensive in frequency, duration, or scope

**MASKING:**

The act of suppressing behaviors that may be one's natural responses, or performing behaviors considered neurotypical for the purpose of being accepted by others and fitting in

**NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT:**

A specific clothing item that may be swapped to decrease the likelihood of meltdowns due to fabric sensitivities

### **NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT:**

Often confused with punishment, but is rather, the removal of an unpleasant stimulus to encourage the desired behavior

An example of negative reinforcement would be putting on your seatbelt to stop or avoid the alarm. The alarm is removed or taken away when you perform the seatbelt behavior

### **NEURODIVERGENT:**

A non-medical term used to describe people whose brains develop, function, or process information differently than their peers

### **NEUROTYPICAL:**

Referring to those who do not display atypical patterns or thoughts, like those generally characterized associated with ASD

### **OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY (OT):**

The branch of healthcare addressing physical, sensory, or cognitive deficits working to help an individual gain, or regain, independence in all areas of life

### **PERSEVERATION:**

The constant repeating or persistence of an action or behavior after it has been acknowledged or after the stimulus has ceased

### **PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE:**

Referring to a person with wording that describes them as a person first, followed by a description of their disability or difference (such as “person with Autism”) People who use this phrasing see themselves as whole and complex, despite their diagnosis that may make them different.

### **PHYSICAL THERAPY (PT):**

A branch of healthcare focused on providing care that promotes, maintains, and restores function, movement, and pain management through patient education, physical intervention, and health promotion

### **PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM (PECS):**

An alternative communication system that uses pictures and symbols to construct complete sentences, initiate communication, and answer direct questions

**PIVOTAL RESPONSE TRAINING (PRT):**

(AKA Pivotal Response Treatment) falls under ABA umbrella, a behavior-analytic approach to target communication, social interaction, and independence; starts with finding a variety of ways to motivate a child and giving multiple cues, all to encourage self-management and self-initiation in social settings.

**POSITIVE PUNISHMENT:**

Example: an Autism Chewer may be added to a child's treatment plan to decrease the likelihood of ingesting a nonfood object

**POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT:**

A reward given immediately after the individual engages in the target behavior effectively

**PROSODY:**

The rhythm, tone, and melody of the spoken language which is expressed through pitch, stress, rate, inflection, and intonation

**PUNISHMENT:**

Something to decrease a certain behavior; whereas reinforcement increases a certain behavior

**REGISTERED BEHAVIOR TECHNICIAN (RBT):**

A paraprofessional certification in behavior analysis; the specially trained team members who provide behavior-analytic services one-on-one based on each client's individualized treatment plan

**REINFORCEMENT:**

A primary principle of ABA therapy operating with two degrees: Positive & Negative Reinforcement to alter or achieve a desired goal/ outcome, works to increase a certain behavior

**SCRIPTING:**

Repeating phrases, words, intonations, or sounds that have been produced by others, often including repeating dialogue from movies, books, etc.

**SENSORY INTEGRATION THERAPY:**

The process of the brain organizing and interpreting information through touch, body awareness, movement, smell, taste, vision, and hearing. Sensory integration therapy exposes children with sensory sensitivities to incoming sensory stimulation in a structured, repetitive, yet gradual way in an effort to teach the nervous system how to respond in a different way.



## **SENSORY PROCESSING:**

The effective registration and accurate interpretations of sensory input (i.e. the way the brain receives and responds to oneself and surroundings)

## **SPEECH THERAPY:**

Treatment provided by a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) aimed to improve one's ability to talk, use language skills, and address swallowing disorders, by providing training and education to families, caregivers, and other professionals to work collaboratively for the success of each client

## **STIMMING:**

A self-stimulating behavior or repetitive body movement or noise often used to help regulate or cope with emotions (example: finger-flicking, hand-flapping, rocking back and forth, etc.)

## **STIMULUS:**

A chemical or physical change in the environment that triggers a behavioral change  
Stimuli (the plural) events, things, noises, etc. that provoke a specific functional reaction

## **TRANSITION:**

A change from one environment or activity to another

## **504 PLAN:**

Named for Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act - ensures that students with mental or physical disabilities receive the accommodations (changes in the environment or curriculum) they need in public schools to ensure academic success



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