

Autism and Neurodevelopment Glossary

A practical reference for autistic people, families and professionals

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How to use this glossary

This glossary explains terms commonly encountered in reports, appointments, schools and research. Entries follow English alphabetical order; each includes the Arabic equivalent for cross-language search. Read the definition and the practical note together. Autistic people have varied experiences and support needs.

Use Find (Ctrl+F or ⌘F) in Word or PDF and type either the English or Arabic term.

Editorial note

Respect each person's preference for identity-first or person-first language. Definitions are educational and do not replace individual assessment or advice. Formal terms, procedures and rights vary by jurisdiction.

68 terms | A definition and a practical note for every entry

Glossary entries

Accessibility | إتاحة الوصول

Designing information, spaces and services so people with different communication, sensory and cognitive needs can use them.

In practice Ask which format or adjustment works for the person.

Adaptive functioning | الأداء التكيفي

Everyday skills used in real settings, such as communication, self-care, safety and managing routines.

In practice A test score alone does not describe daily support needs.

ADHD | اضطراب نقص الانتباه وفرط الحركة

A neurodevelopmental condition involving persistent difficulties with attention and/or activity and impulse regulation across settings.

In practice It may co-occur with autism; assessment considers each condition separately.

Anxiety | القلق

Worry or fear that may become persistent and interfere with daily life; it can occur alongside autism.

In practice Explore triggers and suitable support rather than assuming all distress is autism.

Assessment | التقييم

A structured process of gathering history, observations and relevant information to understand strengths, needs or a possible diagnosis.

In practice Ask what questions the assessment will answer and who will take part.

Augmentative and alternative communication AAC | التواصل المعزز والبديل

Communication approaches that supplement or replace speech, including gestures, pictures, communication boards and speech-generating devices.

In practice Access to AAC does not require someone to stop using speech.

Autism | التوحد

A diverse neurodevelopmental condition associated with differences in social communication and interaction and restricted or repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities.

In practice Abilities and support needs vary widely between people and across situations.

Autism spectrum disorder | اضطراب طيف التوحد

A diagnostic term used in clinical classification for autism; “spectrum” refers to varied profiles, not a simple line from mild to severe.

In practice In everyday language, follow the person’s terminology preference.

Autistic burnout | الإنهاك المرتبط بالتوحد

A term used for sustained exhaustion and reduced capacity after prolonged demands, stress or masking; it is not itself a formal autism diagnostic criterion.

In practice Consider workload, recovery, health and mental health together.

Baseline | خط الأساس

A description or measure of a person's current skills, participation or needs before a support plan is started.

In practice Compare later progress with the person's own starting point.

Caregiver | مقدم الرعاية

A family member or other person who provides ongoing practical or emotional support.

In practice Include the autistic person in decisions to the greatest extent possible.

Co-occurring condition | حالة مصاحبة

A separate condition present alongside autism, such as ADHD, anxiety, epilepsy or sleep problems.

In practice New symptoms deserve assessment in their own right.

Communication profile | ملف التواصل

A practical description of how someone understands and expresses messages across speech, writing, gesture and AAC.

In practice Document the best way to share choices, pain and consent.

Consent | الموافقة المستنيرة

A voluntary decision made with understandable information about what will happen, its choices and possible consequences.

In practice Use accessible formats and check understanding; capacity is decision specific.

Developmental history | التاريخ النمائي

Information about early development, learning, communication, health and changes over time.

In practice Family accounts, records and the person's own account may all help.

Developmental monitoring | متابعة النمو

Ongoing observation of how a child learns, plays, speaks, moves and relates over time.

In practice A concern can prompt discussion even before a scheduled screen.

Developmental screening | الفحص النمائي

A brief, structured check, often a questionnaire, to identify children who may need a fuller assessment.

In practice A positive screen is not a diagnosis; a negative screen does not erase concerns.

Diagnostic assessment | التقييم التشخيصي

A qualified clinical evaluation of developmental history and current characteristics against diagnostic criteria.

In practice No blood test alone establishes an autism diagnosis.

Dysregulation | صعوبة التنظيم

Difficulty regulating attention, emotion, arousal or behaviour in a particular situation.

In practice Consider unmet needs, pain, overload and environmental demands.

Early intervention | التدخل المبكر

Support provided in the early years to address identified developmental and family needs.

In practice Support can begin while a diagnostic assessment is pending, subject to local services.

Echolalia | المصاداة الكلامية

Repeating words or phrases heard from others, immediately or later; it may serve communication or self-regulation.

In practice Look for what the repeated phrase means in context.

Educational accommodation | التكيف التعليمي

A change to teaching, environment or assessment that enables access without changing the underlying learning goal.

In practice Examples include written instructions or a quieter testing space.

Elopement or wandering | الابتعاد غير الآمن

Leaving a supervised or expected place without awareness of, or ability to manage, associated risks.

In practice Use an individual safety plan and address why the person leaves.

Epilepsy | الصرع

A condition involving recurrent unprovoked seizures; it can co-occur with autism.

In practice Suspected seizures need medical assessment.

Executive functioning | الوظائف التنفيذية

Mental processes supporting planning, starting, switching, remembering steps and controlling impulses.

In practice Break tasks into visible steps and adjust the environment.

Fine motor skills | المهارات الحركية الدقيقة

Small movements used for tasks such as writing, fastening clothing and manipulating objects.

In practice Difficulty may affect access even when understanding is strong.

Functional communication | التواصل الوظيفي

Communication that helps a person express needs, choices, opinions and social connection in everyday life.

In practice Accept speech, typing, gesture or AAC according to the person.

Generalization | تعميم المهارة

Using a learned skill with different people, places or materials beyond where it was first taught.

In practice Practice in meaningful daily settings, not only in a clinic.

Gross motor skills | المهارات الحركية الكبرى

Large-body movements such as walking, balance, running and climbing.

In practice Motor concerns can be assessed separately from autism.

Hyperresponsivity | فرط الاستجابة الحسية

An unusually strong response to sensory input, such as ordinary sound, light or touch.

In practice Reduce or modify the input with the person's agreement.

Hyporesponsivity | انخفاض الاستجابة الحسية

A less noticeable response to sensory input that others detect more readily.

In practice Check safety needs without assuming the person feels nothing.

Individualized support plan | خطة دعم فردية

A written set of agreed goals, adjustments, responsibilities and review dates tailored to a person.

In practice Include the person's priorities and measurable participation goals.

Intellectual disability | الإعاقة الذهنية

Significant limitations in intellectual and adaptive functioning that begin during development; it is distinct from autism.

In practice Autism does not by itself establish intellectual disability.

Interoception | الإحساس الداخلي

Awareness of internal body signals such as hunger, thirst, temperature or the need to use the toilet.

In practice A person may need explicit ways to notice and communicate bodily needs.

Joint attention | الانتباه المشترك

Sharing attention with another person toward an object or event, for example by showing or pointing.

In practice It may be expressed through gaze, gesture, words or another modality.

Language delay | التأخر اللغوي

Language skills developing later than expected for age; possible causes vary and require appropriate assessment.

In practice A language delay alone does not diagnose autism.

Masking or camouflaging | إخفاء السمات أو التمويه

Consciously or unconsciously hiding autistic traits or copying expected social behaviours to fit a setting.

In practice Outward appearance may understate effort or support needs.

Meltdown | الانهيار المرتبط بالإرهاق

An intense, often involuntary response when demands or sensory and emotional input exceed coping capacity.

In practice Prioritize safety, reduce demands and review triggers afterward.

Motor planning | التخطيط الحركي

Planning and carrying out a sequence of movements needed for an action.

In practice Difficulty following a gesture-based instruction may be motor, not comprehension.

Neurodevelopmental condition | حالة نمائية عصبية

A condition related to differences in brain development that affects functioning during development.

In practice The category includes autism and ADHD, among other conditions.

Neurodivergent | متنوع عصبيًا

A broad, non-diagnostic term for someone whose neurocognitive functioning differs from a socially typical pattern.

In practice Ask which identity language the person prefers.

Neurodiversity | التنوع العصبي

The natural variation in how human brains develop and function across a population.

In practice It describes a population; a person may be called neurodivergent.

Neurotypical | نمطي عصبيًا

A non-diagnostic term for someone whose neurocognitive functioning is broadly aligned with common expectations.

In practice It does not mean a person has no difficulties.

Occupational therapy | العلاج الوظيفي

A profession that helps people participate in meaningful daily activities through skill development, adaptation and environmental changes.

In practice Goals should relate to the person's daily life and priorities.

Person-centred care | الرعاية المتمحورة حول الشخص

Planning support around the individual's goals, preferences, strengths, context and informed choices.

In practice Involve the person directly, with communication support when needed.

Pragmatic language | الاستخدام الاجتماعي للغة

How language is used in context, including turn-taking, implied meaning and adapting a message to a listener.

In practice Differences do not imply lack of interest in relationships.

Predictability | قابلية التوقع

Knowing what will happen, when and how; clear routines or advance information can reduce uncertainty.

In practice Preview changes and offer a workable alternative.

Proprioception | الحس العميق

The sense of body position and movement from muscles and joints.

In practice It may affect movement, posture and comfort in activities.

Reasonable adjustment | الترتيب التيسيري المعقول

A practical change that reduces a barrier to using a service, school or workplace; legal duties depend on jurisdiction.

In practice Examples include quieter space, extra processing time or written information.

Receptive language | اللغة الاستقبالية

Understanding messages conveyed by spoken, written or other language.

In practice Understanding and spoken expression can differ substantially.

Regression | فقد مهارة مكتسبة

Loss of a skill previously used consistently, such as words or social engagement.

In practice Discuss new or marked loss of skills promptly with a clinician.

Restricted or repetitive behaviours | الأنماط المقيدة أو المتكررة

Repetitive movements, speech or activities, insistence on sameness, focused interests or sensory differences within autism criteria.

In practice Understand function and context before trying to change a behaviour.

Routine | الروتين

A familiar sequence of activities that can provide structure and reduce uncertainty.

In practice Prepare for unavoidable changes with clear advance information.

Self-advocacy | المناصرة الذاتية

Expressing one's preferences, rights, needs and choices, independently or with communication support.

In practice Make room for disagreement and a meaningful choice.

Self-injurious behaviour | سلوك إيذاء الذات

Behaviour that may cause physical harm to oneself and has many possible contributors, including pain, distress or communication barriers.

In practice Seek timely assessment and a safety plan; avoid assuming a single cause.

Sensory overload | الإرهاق الحسي

A state in which sensory input exceeds what a person can comfortably process at that time.

In practice Offer a quieter space, fewer demands and recovery time.

Sensory profile | الملف الحسي

A description of sensory preferences, sensitivities and supports across different settings.

In practice Profiles can vary by fatigue, stress and environment.

Sensory seeking | البحث عن مدخلات حسية

Seeking movement, touch, sound or other sensations to meet a sensory need.

In practice Offer safe, acceptable ways to meet the need.

Shutdown | الانغلاق المرتبط بالإرهاق

A response to overwhelm that may involve withdrawal, reduced movement or temporary difficulty communicating.

In practice Reduce pressure and allow time; check for medical causes if symptoms are new or concerning.

Social communication | التواصل الاجتماعي

The use and interpretation of verbal and nonverbal messages in interaction with others.

In practice Communication styles differ; adapt both sides of the interaction.

Special interest | اهتمام خاص أو مركز

A particularly deep or sustained interest that may bring enjoyment, expertise and connection.

In practice Use it as a strength while respecting balance and choice.

Speech-language therapy | علاج النطق واللغة

Professional assessment and support for communication, language, speech and related participation needs.

In practice Goals may include AAC and understanding, not only speech production.

Stimming | حركات أو سلوكيات التنظيم الذاتي

Repetitive movements, sounds or actions that may help regulate emotion, attention or sensory experience.

In practice Do not suppress harmless forms simply because they look unusual.

Strengths-based approach | نهج يركز على نقاط القوة

Support that identifies abilities and interests as well as barriers and needs.

In practice Strengths do not cancel real support needs.

Support needs | احتياجات الدعم

The assistance or adjustments a person needs to participate, communicate, stay safe and pursue chosen goals.

In practice Needs may change across tasks, environments and life stages.

Transition planning | التخطيط للانتقال

Preparing for a change in service, school, employment or life stage with the person and relevant supporters.

In practice Start early, clarify responsibilities and check the new setting.

Visual schedule | الجدول البصري

A sequence of pictures, symbols or written steps showing what comes next.

In practice Choose a format the person understands and can update.

Working memory | الذاكرة العاملة

The ability to hold and use information briefly while completing a task.

In practice Written steps can reduce the need to remember several instructions.

Important distinctions

Screening and diagnosis

Screening identifies who may need further evaluation. Diagnosis is a clinical judgement based on developmental history, observation and applicable criteria.

Autism traits and co-occurring conditions

Anxiety, pain, sleep problems or epilepsy may need separate assessment. Do not attribute every difficulty to autism.

Communication and speech

A person may understand more than they say and may communicate effectively through writing, gesture or AAC.

Regulation and behaviour

Consider sensory conditions, stress, pain and communicative purpose before making a behaviour support plan.

Core references

These sources informed conceptual checks. The concise definitions here are original editorial wording, not quotations.

World Health Organization — Autism fact sheet

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders>

منظمة الصحة العالمية — التوحد

<https://www.who.int/ar/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders>

CDC — About autism and screening and diagnosis

<https://www.cdc.gov/autism/about/index.html>

CDC — Developmental monitoring and screening

<https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/about/developmental-monitoring-and-screening.html>

ASHA — Autism practice portal

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/autism/>

ASHA — Augmentative and alternative communication

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/augmentative-and-alternative-communication/>

NICE — Autism in under 19s support and management CG170

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg170/chapter/recommendations>

NICE — Autism in adults diagnosis and management CG142

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg142/chapter/Recommendations>

NHS Leicestershire Partnership — Meltdowns and shutdowns

<https://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/autism-space/health-and-lifestyle/meltdowns-and-shutdowns/>

NHS Children and Family Health Devon — Glossary of autistic terms
<https://childrenandfamilyhealthdevon.nhs.uk/glossary-of-autistic-terms/>

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