

FAQ: Glossary of Autistic Terms

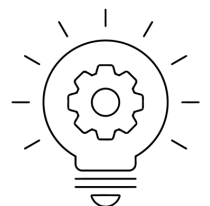
This is a **non-exhaustive glossary** of terms frequently used in autistic spaces. Some terms overlap with broader neurodivergence and are not specific only to autism.

General Terms

- **Allistic** – a non-autistic person; the opposite of autistic.
 - **Autism Spectrum** – describes the wide range of traits and differences that fall under autism. “Spectrum” is not a scale from mild to severe, but a varied profile of strengths and challenges.
 - **Autism (Autistic Disorder)** – a neurodevelopmental condition affecting communication, sensory processing, movement, and social interaction. It reflects lifelong neurology, not an illness to be cured.
 - **Comorbidity** – when one person has two or more conditions at the same time (e.g., autism and ADHD).
 - **Diagnostic Criteria** – official features clinicians use to identify autism, as outlined in the DSM or ICD.
 - **Neurodivergent (ND)** – someone whose brain processes differ from the “typical” standard (includes autism, ADHD, dyslexia, etc.).
 - **Neurodiversity** – the idea that neurological differences are natural human diversity, not defects.
 - **Neurotypical (NT)** – someone whose brain development and processing follow the social norm (not autistic, not ADHD, etc.).
 - **Trait** – a characteristic associated with autism, but not enough for diagnosis on its own.
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Core States

- **Autistic Burnout** – long-term exhaustion and reduced function after chronic stress or masking.
- **Autistic Fatigue** – day-to-day exhaustion from social effort and sensory load.
- **Autistic Joy** – unfiltered happiness from interests, stimming, or sensory delight.



- **Catatonia** – reduced movement, speech, or responsiveness; can appear as freezing or slowing down when stressed.
 - **Eloping** – leaving suddenly during distress to escape overwhelming environments.
 - **Flow State** – deep immersion in a task, often restorative.
 - **Grounded State** – calm clarity when body and environment needs are met.
 - **Meltdown** – outward reaction to overload (crying, yelling, pacing, eloping).
 - **Regression** – temporary or permanent loss of previously acquired skills (e.g., speech, self-care).
 - **Regulation State** – balanced nervous system through stimming, routine, or supportive environment.
 - **Resonance** – alignment with an interest, activity, or person that brings fulfillment.
 - **Shutdown** – inward reaction to overload (withdrawal, silence, immobility).
 - **Stasis / Recovery Mode** – intentional rest and withdrawal to regain energy.
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Cognitive Styles

- **Black-and-White Thinking** – tendency to see rigid dichotomies.
 - **Context Blindness** – difficulty shifting perspective with setting.
 - **Context-free Literalism** – interpreting words only at face value.
 - **Detail Orientation** – strong focus on detail, sometimes missing the big picture.
 - **Hypersystemising** – intense focus on systems, rules, and patterns.
 - **Monotropism** – deep focus on one stream of attention, difficulty switching.
 - **Pattern Recognition Bias** – strong tendency to detect recurring themes.
 - **Perseveration** – getting stuck on a thought, movement, or action.
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Communication & Social

- **Alexithymia** – difficulty recognizing or describing emotions.
 - **Echolalia** – repeating words or phrases, immediately or later.
 - **Hyperempathy** – strong resonance with others’ emotions, sometimes overwhelming.
 - **Hypoempathy** – limited ability to recognize or process others’ emotions (not lack of caring).
 - **Info-dumping** – sharing large amounts of info about a special interest.
 - **Nonverbal** – inability to use spoken language; sometimes misused as “low intelligence,” which is false.
 - **Nonspeaking** – inability to use speech, but other communication (AAC, typing, gestures) may be used. Preferred over “nonverbal.”
 - **Palilalia** – repetition of one’s own words or phrases.
 - **Parallel Play** – side-by-side activity without direct interaction.
 - **Selective Mutism** – anxiety disorder where someone cannot speak in specific contexts.
 - **Situational Mutism** – preferred by some instead of “selective mutism,” emphasizing context-driven speech loss.
 - **Social Hangover** – exhaustion or shutdown after socializing.
 - **Social Scripts** – memorized phrases for conversation.
 - **Special Interests** – deep, enduring passions tied to joy and identity.
 - **Speech Loss / Verbal Loss** – temporary inability to speak due to overload.
 - **Verbal Shutdown** – speech loss triggered by overwhelm; returns with regulation.
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Executive & Time

- **Autistic Inertia** – difficulty starting or stopping tasks.
 - **Body Doubling** – using another person's presence to sustain tasks.
 - **Executive Dysfunction** – breakdown in task initiation, sequencing, or completion.
 - **Hyperfocus** – intense concentration, hard to redirect.
 - **Routine Anchors** – rituals that structure the day.
 - **Task Paralysis** – freeze state when faced with a task.
 - **Time Blindness** – difficulty perceiving or estimating time.
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Sensory & Body

- **Emotional Overflow** – sudden release of strong emotions.
 - **Interoception** – awareness of internal states (hunger, thirst, pain).
 - **Safe Foods** – consistently manageable foods.
 - **Sensory Avoiding** – avoiding certain sensory inputs.
 - **Sensory Overload** – too much input at once, leading to shutdown or meltdown.
 - **Sensory Seeking** – craving input like pressure, spinning, or chewing.
 - **Stimming** – repetitive movements or sounds for regulation.
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Behavior & Coping

- **Demand Avoidance vs Defiance** – nervous system overload vs conscious refusal.
 - **Dopamine Chasing** – seeking stimulation or novelty for regulation.
 - **Immersive Daydreaming** – vivid, creative daydreaming that remains manageable.
 - **Maladaptive Daydreaming** – intense daydreaming that disrupts daily life.
 - **Masking** – suppressing autistic traits to appear neurotypical or stay safe.
 - **PDA (Pathological/Persistent Demand Avoidance)** – extreme resistance to demands.
 - **PDA Masking** – appearing compliant while avoiding demands.
 - **PDA Spiral** – resisting a demand creates guilt, which fuels more resistance.
 - **Shutdown Recovery** – gradual restoration of energy and speech after shutdown.
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Conceptual Frameworks

- **Autistic Pride** – affirmation of autistic identity and strengths.
- **BAP (Broader Autism Phenotype)** – milder autistic traits in family members.
- **Context Switching Lag** – difficulty moving between tasks or environments.
- **Developmental Delay** – milestones like speech or motor skills developing later.
- **Emotional Regulation Strategies** – self-created ways to manage mood.
- **Overwhelm vs Overstimulation** – task/decision overload vs sensory overload.
- **Social Model of Disability** – disability stems from social barriers, not just impairments.
- **Spoon Theory** – metaphor of daily energy as limited spoons.
- **Spiky Profile** – uneven distribution of abilities.
- **Splinter Skills** – isolated advanced abilities alongside deficits.