

Speech, Language, and Communication Glossary

A helpful glossary for parents, providers, and others to provide definitions of words or acronyms used with speech, language, and communication. These words are commonly used or discussed with speech therapy intervention. Words will be listed alphabetically, and based on category.

Profession

Applied Behavior Analysis – ABA is a type of therapy based on learning and behavior, and is used to improve behavior related to basic daily skills, social skills and communication, or academic skills.

ASHA – the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the professional organization associated with speech-language pathologists and audiologists. Professional credentialing in the United States is coordinated by ASHA.

Audiologist – the professional who is trained to diagnose, treat, and manage hearing loss, balance disorders, and other associated conditions.

Board Certified Behavioral Analyst – the BCBA, or behavior therapist, is a professional who is certified in ABA, and conducts behavior assessments to provide intervention for individuals.

Occupational Therapist – the OT is a professional who works to promote participation, health, and well-being through meaningful engagement in everyday activities. They help individuals function effectively in their roles and routines of everyday life.

Physical Therapist – the PT is a professional who works to evaluate and treat disorders of the human body primarily caused by physical means.

Speech-Language Pathologist – the SLP, or speech therapist, is a professional who works to prevent, diagnose, and/or treat speech, language, social communication, cognitive-communication, voice, fluency, and swallowing disorders in children and adults.

Speech and Language

Aphasia – a communication disorder that affects someone’s ability to understand and/or use language.

Apraxia – a motor speech disorder that affects neurological pathways involved in planning the sequence of movements used to produce speech.

Articulation – the formation of sounds used for speech production.

Disfluency – the non-fluencies of speech production such as: a hesitation, use of a filler (e.g., “like” or “uhm”), repeating a sound, word, or phrase.

Dysarthria – a motor speech disorder caused by weakness or muscles used for speech (e.g., tongue, lips, cheeks).

Expressive Language – the language that is produced.

Fluency – the smoothness, rate, and effort in speech production.

Language – the method of human communication. Can consist of eye contact, body language, facial expressions, gestures, spoken language, written or typed language, or other.

Phonology – the speech sound system of a language, and that varies across differing languages.

Pragmatic Language – social communication that is used to communicate with others.

Pre-linguistic Communication Acts – the ways by which we communicate without using words. These might include: eye gaze/contact, facial expressions, gestures, imitation, or joint attention.

Receptive Language – the understanding of language.

Stuttering – the most common fluency disorder. Includes interruption in the flow of speech, and is characterized by disfluencies.

Pragmatics and Social Communication

Joint Attention – when two or more individuals focus on one object or activity jointly.

Pragmatics – how social language is used.

Literacy

Dyslexia – a language-based learning disorder resulting in difficulty interpreting the sound components of language. It impacts reading, spelling, and writing.

Phonemic Awareness – the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words.

Phonological Awareness – the awareness for sound structure or language.

Pre-literacy Skills – the emergent literacy skills that precede reading. These might include: print awareness, letter knowledge, listening comprehension, or motivation to read.

Cognition

Cognition – thinking skills.

Executive Functions – the mental processes that are used for focusing our attention, remembering instructions, planning and organizing for tasks, and multi-tasking successfully.

Processing Speed – the amount of time it takes an individual to do a mental task.

Social Cognition – the ability to recognize and identify emotions, theory of mind, and insight.

Augmentative Alternative Communication

Aided Language Stimulation – aided language input is the use of natural speech while pointing to, labeling, or modeling use of an AAC system.

Aided System – an AAC tool aside from use of the body, that is used for communication purposes.

Assistive Technology – AT is any item, equipment, or system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional participation of individuals with disabilities.

Augmentative Alternative Communication – AAC is a system of communication that is used to supplement or replace spoken communication. Examples include: gesturing, using American Sign Language (ASL), using a high tech communication device or speech generating device (SGD), or using a low tech communication system such as picture exchange.

Core Vocabulary/Core Words – the small percent of words that make up 80% of what we say.

Fringe Vocabulary/Fringe Words – the large percent of words that make up very little of what we say. These words are typically nouns and are context or situation dependent.

High Tech AAC – an electronic device with auditory output that contains advanced processors. It is commonly referred to as a speech generating device (SGD).

Low Tech AAC – a communication method that is not technology based, or “electronic,” but requires equipment outside of an individual’s body. This might include pictures.

Mid Tech AAC – a simplified electronic device with auditory output, and is battery operated. This might include a single button switch with audio recordings.

Speech Generating Device – the SGD is a high tech AAC system with auditory output.

Unaided System – no tech AAC is a form of communication that requires no materials outside of an individual’s body. This might include: facial expressions, gestures, or sign language.

School and Special Populations

Individualized Education Program – the IEP is a written legal document or “plan” which defines the program, supports, services, and/or special education instruction that a child will need to make progress and thrive in school.

Present Level of Performance – the PLOP refers to how a child is performing academically in the present.

Response to Intervention – the RTI is a multi-tiered approach to early identification and supports for students with learning and behavior needs within the general education classroom.

Special Education – SpED is the school based program which serves students with mental, physical, emotional, behavioral, or learning disabilities.