

The Autism Acronym & Terms Cheat Sheet

Because no one should have to pretend they know what all these letters mean.

If you're new to the autism world, the number of acronyms can be overwhelming. You may hear them at school meetings, therapy appointments, evaluations, or conversations with other parents.

It's okay not to know what they mean. It's okay to ask.

Here's a simple guide to some of the acronyms you're likely to encounter.

A note on Pennsylvania: several terms on this list exist only here. If you search them online, you will find national resources that do not match what your school or county is telling you. Those are marked **PA** below.

DIAGNOSIS AND CLINICAL TERMS

ASD Autism Spectrum Disorder. The current clinical diagnosis. It replaced older separate diagnoses like Asperger's and PDD-NOS in 2013.

DSM-5-TR Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision. The book clinicians use to make a diagnosis. If someone says "he meets criteria," this is the criteria they mean.

PDD-NOS Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified. A retired diagnosis. You may still see it on older paperwork.

ADHD Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. Very commonly co-occurring with autism.

ID Intellectual Disability.

IDD Intellectual and Developmental Disability. An umbrella term you will see all over county and state programs.

DD Developmental Disability.

GDD Global Developmental Delay. A term typically used with young children who show significant delays in more than one area of development.

SPD Sensory Processing Disorder. Not a DSM diagnosis, but widely used by therapists and schools.

PDA Pathological Demand Avoidance. A profile describing extreme avoidance of everyday demands. It is not a standalone diagnosis in the DSM-5-TR in the United States. Some autistic self-advocates use the term Persistent Drive for Autonomy instead. These are different terms used by different communities, not official alternate names for one another.

AAC Augmentative and Alternative Communication. Any tool that supports or replaces speech, from a picture board to a speech-generating device.

SIB Self-Injurious Behavior.

OCD Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

EVALUATIONS AND TESTING

ADOS-2 Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, Second Edition. A standardized assessment involving structured activities and observation that may be used as one part of an autism evaluation.

ADI-R Autism Diagnostic Interview, Revised. A long structured parent interview, often paired with the ADOS.

M-CHAT-R/F Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers, Revised with Follow-Up. The short screener your pediatrician gives at the 18 and 24 month visits. A screener, not a diagnosis.

CARS-2 Childhood Autism Rating Scale, Second Edition.

Vineland-3 Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, Third Edition. An assessment of adaptive functioning, meaning everyday skills such as communication, daily living, and socialization. It is often used as part of evaluations and eligibility determinations.

FBA Functional Behavior Assessment. A process used to understand the function of a behavior and the factors associated with it.

IEE Independent Educational Evaluation. An evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the school. When a parent disagrees with the school's evaluation, they may have the right to an IEE at public expense. Specific circumstances and procedural rules apply.

SCHOOL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

IEP Individualized Education Program. The legally required written plan describing an eligible student's special education, related services, supports, accommodations, goals, and placement.

504 Plan Section 504 Plan. Named for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. It can provide accommodations and other supports to ensure a student with a disability has equal access to education. It is different from an IEP under IDEA.

IDEA Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The federal law behind the IEP.

FAPE Free Appropriate Public Education. The core right IDEA guarantees. Most special education disputes are ultimately about whether FAPE was provided.

LRE Least Restrictive Environment. The requirement that your child be educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate.

PTE Permission to Evaluate. **PA** The process and form used to obtain parental consent for an initial special education evaluation. For school-age students, after the school receives written parental consent, Pennsylvania generally requires the evaluation to be completed within 60 calendar days, excluding the summer break period.

PTRE Permission to Reevaluate. **PA** The same idea, for a child already receiving services.

ER Evaluation Report. **PA** The written report documenting a special education evaluation. Parents must receive a copy at least 10 school days before the IEP meeting unless they waive that timeline in writing. (Watch for context. Outside of school meetings, ER usually means emergency room.)

RR Reevaluation Report. **PA**

NOREP/PWN Notice of Recommended Educational Placement / Prior Written Notice. **PA** A written notice explaining certain actions the school proposes or refuses regarding a student's special education program or placement. Depending on the situation, the form may ask the parent to approve or disapprove the proposed action.

Good to know: You are allowed to take time with paperwork. If you are handed a document during a meeting and you are not ready to respond, you can say you would like to review it before signing. Ask who to return it to and by when.

SDI Specially Designed Instruction. The specific adaptations listed in the IEP. This is the part people skim, and it is the part that actually gets delivered day to day.

ESY Extended School Year. Special education and related services provided beyond the regular school year when a student's IEP team determines they are necessary for the student to receive FAPE. ESY is not limited to summer and is not based only on regression.

Good to know: Pennsylvania places students with autism in what is called the Armstrong target group. For these students, the IEP team meeting to consider ESY is to occur no later than February 28, and the NOREP is to be issued no later than March 31.

BIP Behavior Intervention Plan.

PBSP Positive Behavior Support Plan. **PA** The term PA schools typically use instead of BIP.

MDR Manifestation Determination Review. The meeting held when a student faces significant discipline, to determine whether the behavior was caused by the disability.

LEA Local Education Agency. Usually just means your school district.

IU Intermediate Unit. **PA** A regional agency between the state and your district. Bucks County is served by **Bucks IU (Intermediate Unit #22)**, based in Doylestown. They run Early Intervention for ages 3 to 5 and many specialized programs.

PDE Pennsylvania Department of Education.

BSE Bureau of Special Education. **PA** The PDE office overseeing special education.

PaTTAN Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network. **PA** Free state resource with excellent parent-facing guides and annotated sample forms.

ODR Office for Dispute Resolution. **PA** Where mediation and due process hearings happen.

EI Early Intervention. Birth to 3 runs through the county. Ages 3 to 5 runs through the Intermediate Unit.

IFSP Individualized Family Service Plan. The birth-to-3 version of an IEP. It plans for the whole family, not just the child.

AT Assistive Technology.

MTSS Multi-Tiered System of Supports.

RtII Response to Instruction and Intervention. **PA** Important: a school cannot delay or deny an evaluation because a child is "still in RtII."

AS / LS / ES / SLS Autistic Support, Learning Support, Emotional Support, Speech and Language Support. **PA** These are PA's classroom and service categories. "He's in AS" means autistic support.

PCA Personal Care Assistant. Often what people mean by a "one-to-one."

FERPA Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Your right to see and get copies of your child's school records.

THERAPIES AND PROVIDER CREDENTIALS

OT Occupational Therapy or Occupational Therapist. Fine motor, sensory, and daily living skills.

PT Physical Therapy or Physical Therapist. Gross motor and mobility.

SLP Speech-Language Pathologist. **ST** is speech therapy. SLPs handle far more than articulation, including social communication and feeding.

ABA Applied Behavior Analysis.

BCBA Board Certified Behavior Analyst. Master's level, nationally certified. Designs and supervises ABA programs.

BCBA-D The same credential at the doctoral level.

BCaBA Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst. Bachelor's level.

RBT Registered Behavior Technician. Works directly with the child, supervised by a BCBA.

BSL Behavior Specialist License. **PA** A Pennsylvania state license. Important to know: a licensed behavior specialist is not automatically a diagnostic evaluator.

ESDM Early Start Denver Model. A play-based early intervention approach.

DIR / Floortime Developmental, Individual-differences, Relationship-based model.

PECS Picture Exchange Communication System.

PRT Pivotal Response Treatment.

SI Sensory Integration.

CBT Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

LPC / LCSW / LMFT Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. Common therapist credentials.

DAN / MAPS Older and newer names for a network of physicians using biomedical approaches. Not mainstream, and worth researching carefully.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES IN PENNSYLVANIA

This whole category was renamed in 2020, which is why older articles and even some professionals still use the wrong words.

IBHS Intensive Behavioral Health Services. **PA** In-home, school, and community behavioral health support for anyone under 21. **This replaced BHRS.**

BHRS Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services. **PA** **RETIRED** The old name, also called "wraparound." If someone says wraparound, they mean IBHS.

BHT Behavioral Health Technician. **PA** The person working directly with your child. **Replaced TSS.**

TSS Therapeutic Staff Support. **PA** **RETIRED** Now BHT.

BC Behavior Consultant. **PA** Assesses and writes the treatment plan. **Replaced BSC.**

MT Mobile Therapist. **PA** Provides therapy in your home, school, or community. (Watch for context. MT can also refer to music therapy.)

ITP Individual Treatment Plan. **PA** In IBHS, the written plan listing a child's goals and who is responsible for each one. Note that ITP is also used for transition planning in schools. See the note on repeated acronyms below.

OMHSAS Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. **PA** The state office overseeing IBHS.

MCO Managed Care Organization. The company administering your Medicaid behavioral health benefit.

BSU Base Service Unit. **PA** Your county entry point for mental health services.

INSURANCE, FUNDING, AND WAIVERS

MA Medical Assistance. This is simply what Pennsylvania calls Medicaid. Same thing.

PH-95 Medicaid for Children with Special Needs. **PA** **LEARN THIS ONE** A Medical Assistance category for eligible Pennsylvania children under 18 who meet Social Security's disability standard. Parental income is verified but excluded when determining eligibility for PH-95. The child's own countable income and other eligibility rules still apply. PH-95 can provide Medicaid coverage even when family income is too high for traditional Medicaid categories. You apply through your County Assistance Office. (You may hear other parents call this "the loophole.")

CAO County Assistance Office. Where you file the MA application.

Act 62 Pennsylvania Autism Insurance Act. **PA** A Pennsylvania law addressing insurance coverage for certain autism-related diagnostic and treatment services for eligible children and young adults under 21. Coverage depends on the type of health plan, so not every private insurance plan is subject to Act 62.

EPSDT Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment. The federal Medicaid provision requiring coverage of medically necessary services for children, even when the state plan does not otherwise list them. A powerful tool in appeals.

SSI Supplemental Security Income. Monthly cash benefit through Social Security. Income-tested for children.

ODP Office of Developmental Programs. **PA** The state office administering intellectual disability and autism waivers.

MH/ID County Mental Health / Intellectual Disability office. **PA** You must register here to access waiver services. In Bucks County this is the Department of Behavioral Health / Developmental Programs.

Waiver Shorthand for a Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services program. Waivers pay for supports that let a person live at home and in the community instead of an institution.

P/FDS Person/Family Directed Support Waiver. **PA** A waiver that has an individual annual cost limit on services.

Community Living Waiver **PA** A waiver with a higher individual annual cost limit than P/FDS. It does not include residential habilitation services.

Consolidated Waiver **PA** The most comprehensive of the intellectual disability and autism waivers. It includes residential services and does not have an individual annual service cost limit.

AAW Adult Autism Waiver. **PA** For adults 21 and older with an autism diagnosis. Administered through ODP.

ACAP Adult Community Autism Program. **PA** Worth knowing so you can rule it out: ACAP operates in only four counties (Chester, Lancaster, Dauphin, and Cumberland). **It is not available in Bucks County.**

SC / SCO Supports Coordinator and Supports Coordination Organization. **PA** Your assigned point person for waiver services.

ISP Individual Support Plan. **PA** The waiver world's version of an IEP.

ABLE Account A tax-advantaged savings account for people with disabilities that does not jeopardize SSI or Medicaid eligibility. PA runs its own program.

SNT Special Needs Trust.

ADULTS AND TRANSITION

ITP Individual Transition Plan. Used in the school setting for transition planning, which Pennsylvania requires to begin in the IEP by age 14. Note that ITP is also used in IBHS for a treatment plan.

OVR Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. **PA** State agency supporting employment, job training, and college for people with disabilities. Start early, since there can be a wait.

Age of Majority In Pennsylvania, 18. Educational rights transfer to the student unless other arrangements are made.

SDM Supported Decision-Making. A less restrictive alternative to guardianship where the person keeps legal authority but has a formal support network.

POA Power of Attorney.

Guardianship Court-appointed legal decision-making authority. The most restrictive option, and not the automatic answer at 18.

CIL Center for Independent Living.

SE Supported Employment.

COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, AND ADVOCACY

ND Neurodivergent, or Neurodiversity.

NT Neurotypical.

AuDHD Informal shorthand for autism and ADHD together.

IFL / PFL Identity-First Language ("autistic person") and Person-First Language ("person with autism"). Many autistic adults prefer identity-first. Many parents were taught person-first. Both are used in good faith, and the respectful move is to follow the preference of the person in front of you.

ASAN Autistic Self Advocacy Network. Autistic-led advocacy organization.

AANE Association for Autism and Neurodiversity.

ASERT Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training.  State-funded network behind PAAutism.org and a statewide resource center.

ELC Education Law Center.  Free legal resources and outstanding plain-language guides on special education.

DRP Disability Rights Pennsylvania.  The state's federally mandated protection and advocacy agency.

SAFETY AND FIRST RESPONDERS

CIT Crisis Intervention Team. Specialized training for law enforcement in responding to mental health and disability-related crises.

HWC Handle With Care. A registry program allowing families to share information about a loved one with local police in advance of an emergency.

F.I.N.D.S. A voluntary registry program offered by some Bucks County police departments for individuals who may wander or have difficulty communicating with first responders. Availability and enrollment vary by department, so check with your local police.

Blue Envelope A program providing a marked envelope for vehicle documents that signals to an officer that the driver is autistic, along with guidance for both parties.

Elopement Not an acronym, but the term professionals use for wandering or bolting. If you hear it in an IEP meeting, this is what it means.

SAME LETTERS, DIFFERENT MEANINGS

Some acronyms get reused across settings. If you are not sure which one someone means, it is always fine to ask.

ITP Individual Treatment Plan (IBHS) or Individual Transition Plan (school).

ER Evaluation Report (special education) or emergency room (medical).

MT Mobile Therapist (IBHS) or music therapy.

SI Sensory Integration (therapy) or supported independence.

STILL STUCK?

If a term comes up that is not on this list, ask. You can say it plainly:

"I'm not familiar with that acronym. What does it mean?"

Asking is a normal part of these conversations. A good professional will be glad you did.

Still looking for the right provider?

Bucks County Autism Resources is a free directory of autism providers, therapists, and support services across Bucks County. Search by category, service type, or location, all in one place.

buckscountyautismresources.com

Know a provider who belongs here? You can submit them at no cost.

Compiled by Bucks County Autism Resources. This sheet is for general information and is not legal, medical, or educational advice. Programs and terminology change, so verify current details with the relevant agency.