

Glossary of Psychiatric Terms

Affect: The observed expression or experience of subjective feeling states including emotions, feelings and moods

Affective dysregulation: Inability to regulate expression of moods, feelings and emotions.

Agitation: Restlessness and/or extreme motor discharge usually associated with tension.

Agitated depression: A mood disorder that consists of extreme restlessness, apprehension, self depreciation and despair.

Anhedonia: Lack of ability to feel pleasure.

Anticipatory anxiety: Awareness that a situation will cause anxiety or a sense that the experience of anxiety is impending.

Anxiety: Anticipation of danger or misfortune accompanied by intense worry, somatic symptoms, tension and dysphoria.

Appetitive drives: That aspect within the brain that enables the experience of pleasure and the anticipation of future pleasure.

Catatonia: Reaction of lack of motor activity or extremes of motor activity including negativism.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT): Therapy which focuses on distortions of thinking by replacing the distortions with more salient or realistic thoughts.

Comorbidity: Two or more illnesses present at the same time. They may be related to the same causal agent or just coexist.

Compulsion: Repetitive, ritualistic behaviors that are driven to be repeated even if there is an awareness of their excessive or inappropriate nature.

Cyclomania: A mild form of bipolar disorder which includes hypomania and mild depression.

Delusion (persecutory, grandiose, somatic, etc.): A false belief based on an incorrect view of reality. There are different types of delusions which are categorized according to the content.

Depersonalization: A detachment of oneself from the present experience, as if one is the observer instead of participant.

DSM: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders produced by the American Psychiatric Association and updated periodically. Defines and standardizes diagnostic categories. The categories used in the DSM are accepted by most official organizations including hospitals, insurance companies and other institutions.

Echolalia: Repetitive repeating of words or phrases just spoken by someone else.

ECT (electroconvulsive therapy): A form of somatic therapy where weak electric currents are administered to the brain under very controlled situations to produce controlled brain seizures.

Ego: A concept used to describe certain mental processes including perception, memory, defenses and sometimes thought of as the rational, cognitive functions of the self.

Extrapyramidal Symptoms (EPS): Physical symptoms including tremors, slurred speech, dystonia, and anxiety that are side effects to neuroleptic drugs caused by effects on the basal ganglia and associated structures within the brain.

Externalization: The process of putting internal experiences, thoughts or feelings outside oneself and thus putting the responsibility for these experiences, thoughts or feelings on someone else.

Executive function: A collection of various cognitive capacities which are responsible for motivation, planning and coordination of action.

Flashbacks: A repeat or re-experience of a memory, perceptual experience or feeling from the past.

Flight of ideas: A continuous flow of ideas which goes uninterrupted with changes of topic. Often the associations can be followed but in some instances the ideas may become incoherent and disorganized.

Hallucination: A false perception or experience that is experienced as real. There are different types of experiences of hallucination including visual and auditory.

Homeostasis: A state of constancy or equilibrium.

Hypomania: A mild state of mania where there usually is energy, excitement, productivity and sometimes restlessness. There is often a sense of wellbeing.

Ideas of reference: An incorrect notion that events or ideas have direct reference or meaning to oneself.

Illusions: A misconception or misinterpretation of external stimuli and giving them one's own idiosyncratic meaning.

Interpersonal Therapy (ITP): Therapy which focuses on interpersonal relationships and communication skills. Patient is taught new adaptive skills to improve communication and interpersonal skills thus bolstering self concept.

Irritability: Often associated with mania or an equivalent of mania in which there is increased reactivity and agitation.

Loosening of Associations: A disturbance of thinking which is manifest by ideas which shift from one topic to another without connection or coherence. The speaker is not aware of the disorganization or incoherence of his thoughts.

Mania: An affective state marked by prominent symptoms of elevated and expansive or irritable mood. May have associated with it symptoms of decreased need for sleep, increased goal directed activities, and racing thoughts among others.

Melancholia: A severe depressive state.

Mental Status: A combination of a patient's appearance, behavior, attitude, mood and affect, thought process, thought content, speech, cognition, level of alertness and orientation.

Mixed states: Having a combination of signs and symptoms consistent with both mania and depression occurring at the same time in an individual.

Mood: A persistent and overriding emotion that is present. (e.g., depressed, euphoric, anxious)

Mood stabilizer: A class of medications that are most commonly used to treat bipolar disorder or affective dysregulation due to other conditions, and often include anti-seizure medications (e.g., valproic acid, carbamazepine, lamotrigine, gabapentin), and lithium.

Negative symptoms: Symptoms of schizophrenia that include social withdrawal and blunted affect.

Neurosis: Classically a Freudian term referring to the conflict created within an individual between the primitive instinctual drives and external reality.

"Nervous breakdown": A general term frequently used by patients, which does not correspond to any specific diagnosis.

Obsessions: A persistent thought, idea or feeling that intrudes on conscious awareness, and which are acknowledged as intrusive.

Paranoia: A state of guarded emotion and suspiciousness.

Personality traits: Enduring patterns of behavior.

Personality Disorder: When personality traits are inflexible or maladaptive enough to cause distress or impairment of functioning.

Perseveration: A disturbance of thought form, where responses are seen to focus on the previous thought or response, despite the introduction of a new stimulus.

Pharmacogenomics: The field of science that studies how genetic inheritance affects the way that the body responds to medications.

Pharmacotherapy: The treatment of psychiatric symptoms through the use of medications.

Positive symptoms: Symptoms of schizophrenia that include hallucinations and delusions among others.

Premorbid: Occurring before the onset of illness.

Pressured speech: Rapid speech that is often difficult to interrupt, and increased in amount.

Prodromal: Subtle symptoms or changes that may occur prior to the onset of the full symptom spectrum of a disorder.

Projection: The unconscious perception that one's own unacceptable thoughts and feelings are external to oneself (i.e., believing them to be part of someone else).

Psychosocial stressors: A variety of life events (e.g., moving, change of job, divorce, loss of loved one) that may contribute to a psychiatric presentation.

Psychotropic: Any medication used to treat psychiatric signs or symptoms.

Psychodynamic therapy: A type of therapy where the understanding of past conflicts is used to promote current change. It attempts to understand the role of the unconscious. Major theorists associated with this type of therapy include Freud and Kohut.

Psychosis: Inability to distinguish reality from nonreality.

Rapid cycling: In bipolar disorder, having four or more mood episodes over a 12-month period.

Sign: Something that is able to be observed objectively by a clinician (e.g., restlessness).

Somatic symptoms: Symptoms that are experienced as a physical feeling or sensation.

Suicidal ideation: Having thoughts of taking one's own life.

Supportive therapy: A type of therapy that is focused on providing structure and support for present day issues. Does not focus on the interpretation of the unconscious.

Symptom: Something that is reported subjectively (e.g., a feeling of low energy).

Syndrome: A grouping of signs and symptoms into a recognizable pattern.

Tardive dyskinesia: A side effect of long-term antipsychotic use that manifests as an abnormal movement disorder, most often involving facial muscles. May look like grimacing or tongue thrusting.

Thought blocking: A disruption of thought process that occurs with psychosis. May appear as though the affected patient has difficulty verbalizing, with little speech or long pauses while speaking.