

Mental Health Terms at a Glance

The words you hear most, in plain English. Look up any of them at shrinktionary.com.

ADHD

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition marked by ongoing patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity that get in the way of daily life.

Amygdala

The amygdala is a small region deep in the brain that helps detect threat and drive fear.

Anhedonia

Anhedonia is the loss of pleasure or interest in things you used to enjoy.

Antidepressant

An antidepressant is a medication used to treat depression and many anxiety conditions.

Antipsychotic

An antipsychotic is a medication used to treat psychosis and to help manage bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

Anxiety

Anxiety is the body and mind's response to perceived threat or uncertainty.

Attachment

Attachment is the emotional bond that forms between a child and their main caregivers.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental difference in how a person communicates, relates to others, and processes the world.

Benzodiazepine

Benzodiazepines are a class of fast-acting medications that calm the nervous system.

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder involving episodes of depression alternating with periods of mania or hypomania, which are times of unusually high or irritable mood and energy.

Borderline personality disorder

Borderline personality disorder is a condition marked by intense emotions, unstable relationships, impulsive behavior, and a shifting sense of self.

Burnout

Burnout is a state of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced effectiveness that builds up from chronic, unmanaged stress, usually at work.

Catastrophizing

Catastrophizing is the thinking pattern of jumping to the worst-case outcome and treating it as the most likely one.

Codependency

Codependency is a relationship pattern where someone's sense of worth and identity gets tied to taking care of, fixing, or being needed by another person, often at their own expense.

Comorbidity

Comorbidity means two or more health conditions occurring in the same person at the same time.

Complex PTSD

Complex PTSD describes the lasting effects of repeated or prolonged trauma, often beginning in relationships a person couldn't escape.

Cortisol

Cortisol is the body's main stress hormone.

Depersonalization

Depersonalization is a feeling of being detached from yourself, as if you're watching your own thoughts, body, or actions from the outside.

Depression

Depression is a persistent state of low mood, loss of interest, and decreased function that goes beyond ordinary sadness.

Derealization

Derealization is the sense that the world around you isn't quite real, as if you're seeing it through glass or in a dream.

Dissociation

Dissociation is a sense of feeling detached from yourself, your body, or your surroundings, as if reality has gone foggy or unreal.

Dissociative identity disorder

Dissociative identity disorder is a condition in which a person experiences two or more distinct identity states, along with gaps in memory.

Dopamine

Dopamine is a chemical messenger in the brain tied to motivation, reward, and movement.

Executive function

Executive function is the set of mental skills that lets you plan, focus, switch tasks, hold information in mind, and resist distraction.

Fight-or-Flight

Fight-or-flight is the body's automatic survival response to a perceived threat.

Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a pattern of manipulation that leads someone to doubt their own memory, perception, or judgment.

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)

Generalized anxiety disorder is persistent, excessive worry across many areas of life that's hard to control and lasts most days for at least six months.

Hyperarousal

Hyperarousal is a state of being constantly keyed up and on guard, as if danger is always near.

Hypervigilance

Hypervigilance is a state in which the nervous system stays on high alert for threats, even when the environment is safe.

Hypomania

Hypomania is a milder, shorter form of mania, with elevated mood and energy that's noticeable but less severe.

Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome is the persistent feeling of being a fraud who will be found out, even when there's clear evidence of your competence.

Intrusive Thought

An intrusive thought is an unwanted, often distressing thought or image that pops into your mind on its own.

Major depressive disorder (MDD)

Major depressive disorder is the formal diagnosis behind clinical depression, defined by at least two weeks of low mood or loss of interest along with other symptoms.

Mania

Mania is a distinct period of abnormally elevated, expansive, or irritable mood along with high energy.

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