

## Psychiatric & Psychological Definitions

### *Mental Health Interpreter Professional Development*

✎ Working in the mental health setting as part of the clinical team requires specialized knowledge. Clinicians often use specialized language when describing patient's symptomatology or behavior. This is frequently heard within medicine management appointments, psychiatric intakes, inpatient team meeting appointments and discussion in general. Please find the below list of terminology used within the psychiatric setting to aid in your competency while participating in pre & post conferencing with clinicians.

**abreaction** - vivid return of painful emotion from past circumstances  
**abstract thinking** - ability to use symbolic logic  
**acalculia** - complete loss of mathematical ability  
**acrophobia** - intense, unreasonable fear of heights  
**acting out** - overt expression of one's impulses  
**aggression** - behavior which attacks, threatens, or intimidates  
**agitation** - severely restless activity driven by inner tension  
**agnosia** - inability to interpret sensory stimuli  
**agoraphobia** - fear of public places, usually in proportion to crowdedness  
**agraphia** - complete loss of ability to write  
**akathisia** - very uncomfortable muscular tension and restlessness  
**alexia** - complete loss of ability to read  
**alexithymia** - inability to read one's own emotional state  
**altruism** - unselfish giving, may help to establish one's own self-worth  
**ambivalence** - inability to choose between incompatible goals  
**anergia** - lack of energy for everyday activities  
**anhedonia** - lack of pleasurable feelings during activities one used to enjoy  
**anomia** - marked difficulty naming things and persons  
**anorexia** - pathological lack of appetite  
**anosognosia** - inability to perceive one's own physical handicap  
**anterograde amnesia** - inability to recall what happened after a traumatic episode  
**anticipation** - emotional rehearsal for possible future situations  
**anxiety** - a feeling of dread or worry, often with autonomic arousal  
**apathy** - pronounced lack of interest  
**appropriate affect** - a full range of normal emotion  
**apraxia** - loss of a basic skill such as walking or dressing oneself  
**asceticism** - a form of self-discipline based on the virtue of renunciation  
**astasia-abasia** - exaggerated staggering and falling behavior without injury  
**astereognosis** - inability to perceive the shape of an object through touch alone  
**ataxia** - difficulty in muscular coordination  
**auditory hallucination** - hearing something that isn't there  
**aura** - brief perceptual disturbance created by brain dysfunction  
**autistic thinking** - logical structures supporting a totally private view of reality

**automatic obedience** - mechanically following instructions

**automatism** - repetitious behavior with a secret meaning

**bizarre delusion** - a fixed, false belief that couldn't possibly be true

**blackout** - amnesia for events which occurred while one was drunk

**blocking** - cessation of thought to avoid confronting an unpleasant idea

**blunted affect** - striking poverty of emotional response

**bradykinesia** - marked slowing of movement

**cataplexy** - unusual immobility of posture

**cataplexy** - abrupt loss of postural control without decreased consciousness

**catatonic excitement** - extreme agitation unresponsive to verbal intervention

**catatonic rigidity** - stiff posture which cannot easily be modified

**catatonic stupor** - extreme immobility without evidence of decreased consciousness

**chorea** - abrupt, purposeless, patternless involuntary movements

**circumstantiality** - citing excessive details which distract from the central theme

**clanging** - words are chosen for their related sounds rather than meanings

**claustrophobia** - unreasonably intense fear of confined spaces

**clouded consciousness** - inattention, lack of usual clarity in reasoning or perception

**cluttering** - disturbance of speech rhythm compromising intelligibility

**coma** - total unresponsiveness to stimuli; even severe pain is

**compulsion** - a ritual used repetitively to reduce anxiety

**concrete thinking** - lack of ability to deal with abstract concepts

**confabulation** - elaboration of false recollections in severe organic amnesia

**confusion** - inappropriate responses due to misperceptions and illogic

**controlling** - efforts to govern the actions of others, serving one's own needs

**coprolalia** - speaking filthy words, especially when it feels involuntary

**coprophagia** - eating of excrement or other loathsome material

**declarative memory** - ability to recall facts

**decreased libido** - lack of accustomed interest in sex

**delayed recall** - remembering something after several minutes of distraction

**delirium** - severe inattention, misperceptions, confusion, disorientation

**delusion** - unshakable belief in a theory which peers consider absurd

**delusion of control** - fixed belief that one's behavior is totally directed by others

**delusion of grandeur** - fixed, false belief of possessing superior special qualities

**dementia** - general loss of adaptive learning capability in adulthood

**denial** - ignoring unpleasant aspects of external reality

**depersonalization** - sense of alienation from one's normal identity

**depression** - mood which is negative and unhappy beyond reason

**derailment** - a peculiar change of topic in otherwise logical speech

**derealization** - false sensation that one's surroundings have become unfamiliar

**dereism** - markedly irrational beliefs

**disorientation** - inability to identify current time, place, situation, own

**displacement** - an insoluble conflict in one sphere is resolved in another

**dissociation** - loss of ordinary connectedness of psychic contents

**dissociative amnesia** - memory failure following gross emotional trauma

**dissociative identity disorder** - sensation of having two or more distinct persons inside one body

**distortion** - elaboration of a more attractive version of reality

**distractibility** - inability to sustain a single focus of attention

**diurnal variation of mood** - a pattern of feeling worse during a particular part of the day

**dysarthria** - markedly diminished verbal fluency

**dyscalculia** - decreased mathematical ability

**dysdiadochokinesia** - lack of skill in performing rapidly alternating movements

**dysgraphia** - reduced ability to write

**dyskinesia** - rhythmic writhing movements in certain neurological disorders

**dyslexia** - diminished ability to learn reading

**dysphoria** - an unhappy mood

**dysprosody** - markedly abnormal tonal patterns in speech

**dystonia** - severely increased tone of a group of voluntary muscles

**дїжа entendu** - false sense of familiarity when hearing something new

**дїжа ву** - false sense of visual familiarity in a situation

**дїжа вїцу** - jamais vu false sense of unfamiliarity about a scene

**echolalia** - meaningless repetition of another person's words

**echopraxia** - pathological imitation of another person's behavior

**ecstasy** - the most intense elevation of mood

**egomania** - excessive focus on the importance of self

**eidetic memory** - unusually vivid visual recall

**elation** - unusually elevated mood without grandiosity or rapture

**elevated mood** - sustained feeling of success, confidence, and well-being

**erotomania** - fixed, false belief in some powerful person as a secret admirer

**erythrophobia** - fear of being seen to blush

**euphoria** - intensely elevated mood, beyond realistic happiness

**euthymia** - a mood neither elevated nor

**expansive mood** - emotional expression unaffected by others' reactions

**externalization** - a general term encompassing projection, acting out, emoting, etc

**fear** - a state of unpleasant arousal in situations of real threat

**flat affect** - lack of any emotional expression

**flight of ideas** - multiple rapid shifts in topic without losing logical connection

**folie a deux** - delusions shared by closely-connected persons

**formication** - false feeling of insects crawling on the skin

**free-floating anxiety** - an apprehensive mood with vague or shifting focus

**fugue** - physical and psychological flight from one's usual place

**global aphasia** - combined motor and sensory aphasia

**glossolalia** - speaking in tongues

**grief** - appropriately dysphoric mood following a serious loss

**guilt** - a sense of blameworthiness without a sense of dishonor

**gustatory hallucination** - tasting something that isn't there

**hallucination** - sensory perception in the absence of relevant external stimulus

**humor** - emphasis on comic elements in disagreeable circumstances

**hyperactivity** - persistent restlessness

**hyperphagia** - pathologically increased consumption of food

**hypersomnia** - pathological increase in need for sleep

**hypervigilance** - increased alertness in expectation of danger or illness

**hypnagogic hallucination** - false sensory perception at the onset of sleep

**hypnopompic hallucination** - false sensory perception while awakening

**hypochondriasis** - preoccupation with false ideas that one is in ill health

**ideas of reference** - interpreting innocuous events as highly personally significant

**illusion** - false perception of a real sensation

**immediate recall** - memory for events of the past few minutes

**imperative hallucination** - false perception which issues a command

**inappropriate affect** - emotional expression unexpected in quality or intensity

**inhibition** - general habit of withdrawal from conflicted situations

**insight** - the ability to understand one's own emotions and behavior

**insomnia** - inability to sleep despite feeling fatigued

**intellectual insight** - improved self-knowledge without corresponding change in behavior

**intellectualization** - obsessively analytical approaches to anxiety-provoking stimuli

**intelligence** - ability to learn new adaptations

**intelligence quotient** -  $IQ = (\text{mental age} / \text{chronological age}) \times 100$

**introjection** - internalizing some aspect of another person

**intuition** - ability to judge situations without conscious deliberation

**irritable mood** - prolonged state of negative reactivity

**isolation** - avoiding the emotional content of a difficult situation

**jamais entendu** - false sense of unfamiliarity in a sound

**jamais vřcu** - false sense of unfamiliarity in a situation

**judgmentability** - to weigh alternatives and select the most useful

**labile affect** - rapid and dramatic shifts in emotional tone

**labile mood** - marked fluctuation of mood

**loose associations** - a series of ideas without apparent logical connections

**macropsia** - objects appear larger and closer than normal

**magical thinking** - a primitive sense of connection between independent events

**mannerism** - an unusual habit which can be modified at will

**melancholia** - the most severe and unrelenting form of depression

**mental age** - adaptive learning capacity expressed as developmental level

**mental retardation** - impairment of adaptive learning beginning before adulthood

**mental rituals** - stereotyped routines of thought directed to lowering anxiety

**micropsia** - objects appear small and far away

**mild mental retardation** - IQ below 70 but above 55

**mimicry** - sociable imitation of another's behavior

**moderate mental retardation** - IQ between 40 and 55

**mood-congruent** - psychotic content consistent with patient's mood

**mood-incongruent** - psychotic content inappropriate to patient's mood

**motor aphasia** - inability to process thoughts into speech

**needle phobia** - unreasonably intense fear of injection or transfusion

**negativism** - persistence of behavior opposite to that which is expected

**neologism** - a newly-created word whose meaning is unknown to others

**nihilism** - ideas of meaninglessness, transience, or nonexistence

**nssi** - non-suicidal self injury

**obsession** - preoccupation with an unpleasant idea, knowing it's unreasonable

**olfactory hallucination** - smelling something that isn't there

**overvalued idea** - an unusual preoccupation which will yield to strong evidence

**panic** - rapid worsening of anxiety to the point of acute crisis

**paranoid delusion** - fixed, false belief in one's special importance to strangers

**passive-aggression** - punishing others through failure to perform one's duties

**pathological jealousy** - persistent fear that one's love object is unfaithful

**perception** - assignment of meaning to sensory data

**performance anxiety** - intense fear of public speaking or of trying to entertain people

**performance IQ** - a measure of ability to work with real objects

**persecutory delusion** - fixed, false belief that others are determined to harm oneself

**perseveration** - inability to switch ideas in accord with the social

**phantom limb** - sensation perceived in an amputated extremity

**phobia** - intense situational fear which the person knows is exaggerated

**pica** - ingestion of nonnutritive matter

**polyphagia** - a neurological syndrome of gross overeating

**posturing** - assumption of bizarre poses which are maintained indefinitely

**poverty of content** - speech that lacks meaning

**poverty of speech** - minimal effort at verbal communication

**preoccupation** - thoughts which dwell on a particular topic or theme

**pressure of speech** - rapid and copious talk, often loud and difficult to interrupt

**primary process** - unstructured logic typical of children, dreaming, and

**procedural memory** - ability to perform overlearned skills such as walking

**profound mental retardation** - IQ less than 25

**projection** - perception of one's own attitudes as belonging to another person

**pseudodementia** - misleading appearance of intellectual deficiency

**pseudologia** - elaborate logical structure which is obviously false

**psychogenic mutism** - prolonged failure to speak without an underlying physical cause

**psychomotor retardation** - marked slowing of thought and behavior

**psychosis** - the most severe form of thought disorder

**rationalization** - finding reasons to justify one's own emotionally-driven behavior

**reaction formation** - behavior which negates the underlying emotion

**reality testing** - ability to distinguish between fact and fantasy

**recent memory** - recall of events over the past few days

**regression** - avoiding conflict by withdrawing to old interests and behaviors

**remote memory** - recall of events from more than a few days ago

**repression** - unconscious denial of an unacceptable wish or fantasy

**restricted affect** - emotional reactions are muted

**retrograde amnesia** - inability to recall what happened before a traumatic episode

**retrospective falsification** - distortion of recall due to emotional arousal

**schizoid fantasy** - daydreaming and eccentric speech used to avoid intimacy

**screen memory** - false recollection constructed to conceal an unacceptable wish

**seizure** - sensorimotor response to hypersynchronous neuronal activity

**selective inattention** - systematic failure to notice unpleasant

**sensory aphasia** - inability to process words into thoughts

**severe mental retardation** - IQ between 25 and 40

**sexualization** - amorous behavior used as a defense against uncomfortable emotion

**shame** - uncomfortable sense of having betrayed one's own ideals

**sleepwalking** - ambulation during deep sleep

**social intelligence** - ability to judge the needs of others and to act accordingly

**social phobia** - unreasonable dread of appearing in public

**somatic delusion** - fixed, false belief that one's body is grossly abnormal

**somatization** - experiencing physical symptoms in lieu of emotional ones

**somnolence** - inability to maintain alertness without constant stimulation  
**stereotypya** - fixed pattern of purposeless behavior  
**stupor** - markedly decreased alertness, brief response to discomfort  
**stuttering** - certain speech sounds are habitually prolonged or repeated  
**sublimation** - diversion of destructive impulses into acceptable outlets  
**suicidality** - thoughts or intentions of self-murder  
**sundowning** - worsening of delirium or dementia at night  
**suppression** - decision to delay the consideration of unpleasant circumstances  
**synesthesia** - misperception of sensory modality  
**systematized delusion** - a fixed, false belief with complex logical structure  
**tactile hallucination** - sensation of physical contact with an object that isn't there  
**tangentiality** - speech which digresses from its topic and doesn't ever return  
**tension** - uncomfortably increased muscle tone with intense worry  
**thought blocking** - inability to finish a thought, or to recall what the thought was  
**thought broadcasting** - fixed belief that others hear one's private thoughts  
**thought disorder** - inability to generate a logical sequence of ideas  
**thought insertion** - sensation that thoughts are being placed in one's mind  
**thought withdrawal** - sensation of having one's thoughts removed from one's mind  
**tics** - brief, repetitive, purposeless muscular spasms  
**trailing** - abnormal persistence of visual images  
**trance** - state of narrowly focused attention and suggestibility  
**transient global amnesia** - loss of recent memory function for less than one day  
**tremorrapidly** - alternating flexion and extension of opposed muscles  
**trichotillomania** - compulsive pulling out of one's own hair  
**twirling** - several rapid rotations of the body in a stereotyped manner  
**verbal IQ** - a measure of ability to use abstract logic  
**verbigeration** - a meaningless utterance consisting of repeated ideas  
**visual hallucination** - seeing something that isn't there  
**waxy flexibility** - increased muscle tone allows person to be sculpted by examiner  
**word salad** - familiar verbal expressions assembled in apparently random order  
**xenophobia** - abnormal fear of unfamiliar persons  
**zoophobia** - unreasonable fear of innocuous animals