
Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) for Autism

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is a type of therapy for children with autism. During the therapy, good behaviors and social responses are rewarded. Problem behaviors are ignored. Over time, this can create a change in behavior and social skills for your child.

How ABA can help

Children with autism often have problem behaviors. These can include not listening or responding to people, repeating words, or doing the same thing over and over. They may throw violent tantrums. They may not cooperate with parents or other people. They may refuse to play with other children. ABA can help change these behaviors and responses.

The therapy can help children with symptoms from mild to severe. It's often started in younger children. But ABA may help older children as well. It may help your child:

- Have better social and play skills
- Communicate better
- Have more positive behaviors
- Have fewer problem behaviors
- Keep up positive behaviors in the future
- Apply positive behaviors to new situations
- Have fewer times when problem behaviors may occur
- Learn new skills
- Do better in school
- Be more independent
- Enjoy a better quality of life

ABA is now an established treatment for autism. Studies have shown the benefits of ABA when compared with other treatments, such as standard special education.

How ABA works

The therapy rewards good behaviors. Problem behaviors are ignored. Over time, this helps to prevent problem behaviors. During ABA, your child gets a small reward for learning a simple task. The tasks are broken down into small steps. The tasks may include making eye contact, following directions, or speaking at the right times. The therapy creates a fun atmosphere of games, pictures, and physical examples. The rewards include toys, clapping, verbal rewards, and other positive things the child enjoys. Over time, the therapy can help a child learn more complex skills. Each child is different, so the therapy is tailored for each child.

Where ABA is done

ABA can be done in a facility, such as a clinic or school. In some cases, you may need to have ABA done in your home. This may be instead of or in addition to having ABA done at school or in a clinic. This can mean a large investment of time and money. You may need to work closely with your health insurance provider to get part or all of the therapy covered.

To do ABA in your home, look for a board-certified behavioral analyst who is trained in ABA. This type of therapist has extra training in psychology. They will have the training to run a home program. This person can also train and manage behavioral technicians.

Testing before ABA

The behavioral analyst will need to do an in-depth review of your child's abilities and needs. This is to help create goals and choose treatment methods for your child. The analyst will observe your child and talk with their caregivers. The analyst may also give your child assessment tests, such as:

- **Brigance test.** This gives information about what skills your child already has.
- **Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program.** This focuses on language and problem behaviors.
- **Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills.** This gives information about many things such as language, social interaction, and self-help.

What happens during ABA

Your child will have planned therapy sessions with a trained therapist. During a session, the therapist will target certain goals. For example, the therapist may ask your child to point to their head. When your child does this, they get a reward. The therapist will take notes about how your child responds. As your child learns new skills, the analyst in charge will add new goals for your child.

ABA does require your child to do some work. But your child shouldn't find the therapy stressful. If that happens, the whole treatment team works to correct this. A child with autism should find the therapy enjoyable for much of the time.

Each session may last around 3 hours. Experts may advise between 15 to 40 hours of ABA a week for best results. This will depend on your child's situation. But this may not be practical for some families. Your child may still benefit by as few as 15 hours per week.

Results to expect from ABA

Children show a wide range of responses to ABA. Some children make a lot of progress with their core symptoms. Other children have more subtle improvement. Many children show a lot of improvement in their first year of therapy. Progress may continue for several more years.

A number of factors may affect your child's results, such as:

- Your child's age

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- The severity of symptoms
 - The amount of therapy per week
 - The quality of the treatment
 - Consistent home support

In most cases, children who have gone through ABA still have signs of autism. Your child's therapist can give you a better idea of the changes you can expect. Before you begin ABA, learn as much as you can about how it works. This will help you decide if it's a good choice for your child. It will also help you to fully participate in your child's progress from the start. It's important to know what you can expect as you work to help your child.

Remember that other therapies besides ABA may help your child. Talk with your child's healthcare provider about the best approaches for your child and family. Talk about any concerns you have about your child's progress with ABA treatment or its effectiveness.