



Parent's Guide to ABA

Helping Your Child Grow Through Positive Change

What is ABA Therapy?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is an evidence-based therapy that helps children build meaningful skills and reduce barriers that impact their daily lives. While ABA is often thought of as “behavior therapy,” it is so much more. ABA supports learning, communication, independence, social skills, and family well-being. We prioritize your child’s comfort, dignity, and assent during sessions and adjust teaching approaches to support a positive therapeutic relationship.

How Does ABA Work?

ABA therapy is a process that focuses on understanding why behaviors occur and how to teach new, more helpful behaviors. It includes:

- **Assessment:** A Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) gathers information about your child’s abilities, preferences, and areas for growth by observing their behavior in natural settings and talking with you.
- **Personalized Planning:** The BCBA develops a plan with specific, measurable goals tailored to your child’s needs.
- **Skill Building:** Skills are broken down into smaller steps and taught systematically using reinforcement to increase the likelihood of success.
- **Behavior Reduction:** When challenging behaviors occur, therapists use strategies based on understanding the function (reason) behind the behavior to teach alternative, appropriate behaviors.
- **Data-Driven Decisions:** Therapists collect data during each session to measure progress and make adjustments to ensure your child is always improving.

What Can ABA Help With?

ABA focuses on teaching skills that matter in everyday life. For example:

- **Communication:** learning to ask for help, express wants and needs, use words, signs, or communication devices.
- **Daily Living Skills:** dressing, brushing teeth, using the bathroom, feeding independently.
- **Social Skills:** sharing, turn-taking, playing with peers, joining group activities.
- **Behavior Support:** reducing harmful or disruptive behaviors while teaching positive alternatives.
- **School Readiness:** following directions, attending to tasks, completing classwork, and working in groups.

Why Consistency Matters.

- **ABA works best when sessions are consistent and when families commit to the hours insurance has approved.**
- **Insurance-approved hours are based on your child’s individual needs, and research shows outcomes improve when children receive the recommended intensity.**
- **Consistency builds progress: frequent practice helps children learn and retain new skills faster.**
- **Reauthorization depends on outcomes: insurance requires proof of progress. Insurance providers review progress and utilization when determining continued authorization.**

How lack of consistency can impact treatment:

Missed or reduced sessions slow skill development.

- Children may forget new skills if they aren't practicing regularly.
- Behaviors can return (or even worsen) when expectations and strategies aren't consistent.
- Insurance may reduce or deny services if hours aren't used, limiting opportunities for your child.
- Consistency is the bridge between practice and real progress.

ABA therapy focuses on unlocking potential and creating positive, lasting change for your child and family.

Parent Training = Better Outcomes

Parent involvement is a cornerstone of ABA. Through parent training, you'll learn how to:

- Use ABA strategies at home and in daily routines.
- Handle challenging situations with confidence.
- Support your child's growth between sessions. • Provide consistent responses when parents follow through, the child receives the same message instead of
- becoming confused by mixed responses.

Parent training is a required or strongly encouraged component of treatment under Medicaid and many insurance plans, as it supports long-term progress and consistency. ABA is most effective when families, therapists, schools, and other providers collaborate as a team.

Why this matters:

When parents are not consistent, children may receive intermittent reinforcement (for example, sometimes getting what they want after screaming, other times not). Intermittent reinforcement makes unwanted behaviors stronger and harder to change. Parent training ensures your child hears a consistent message from everyone, which leads to faster progress. Parent training is also required by Medicaid as well as other Insurance Providers as part of the treatment plan to ensure parental involvement and training.

Where We Provide Services

We bring ABA to the places that matter most in your child's life:

- Home – building routines, teaching daily skills, reducing challenges in familiar environments.
- Daycare/Preschool/School (if permitted) – supporting learning, peer interactions, and classroom success.
- Community – grocery stores, playgrounds, restaurants—real-world practice for independence and inclusion.

How In-Home ABA Works

Each child's program is individualized and delivered by key team members:

- **Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA):** The clinical supervisor who designs and oversees your child's treatment plan, monitors progress, and provides parent and staff training. The BCBA collaborates with families, schools, and other providers as needed.
- **Registered Behavior Technician (RBT):** A credentialed therapist who works directly with your child during sessions, teaching skills and implementing strategies under BCBA supervision.
- **Behavior Technician (BT):** A therapist who works directly with your child using ABA strategies while completing required training and supervision under the BCBA.

Unlike other therapies (such as speech or OT, which may be 1–2 hours weekly), ABA may range in intensity depending on your child’s individual needs, goals, and medical necessity. Some children benefit from more intensive services, while others make progress with fewer hours.

Generalization into the Community

One of the most powerful parts of ABA is generalization—making sure skills learned during therapy carry over into real life.

- A child who learns to request “help” at home can also use it at school.
- A child who practices waiting their turn with siblings can practice at the playground with peers.
- Skills like following directions, using coping tools, and communicating needs are practiced across home, school, daycare, and community settings, so your child gains independence in the real world.

FBA’s & BIP’s: What They Are and Why They Matter

- **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA):** An FBA is an evaluation process where the BCBA identifies why a behavior is happening (what the child is trying to communicate or achieve). This includes observations, data collection, and caregiver input.
- **Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP):** After the FBA, the BCBA creates a step-by-step plan to address challenging behavior. A BIP outlines strategies for prevention, teaching new skills, and responding consistently.

Where they can be conducted:

- At home
 - In school or daycare
 - In the community
- Purpose:** FBA’s and BIP’s help the team replace challenging behavior with positive, functional alternatives, while ensuring all caregivers and teachers respond in the same way.

Real Life Examples: How ABA Helps

Challenge Families Face	How ABA Supports	Example in Practice
Child throws tantrums when told “no.”	Teaches replacement communication and coping strategies.	RBT helps children use a “break card” instead of screaming when denied candy at the store.
Child struggles to follow routines like bedtime.	Breaks tasks into small steps, reinforces progress.	RBT teaches tooth-brushing in steps: get toothbrush → add toothpaste → brush front teeth → brush all teeth.
Child is unable to communicate or has limited communication.	Builds functional communication using speech, signs, or AAC device.	Child learns to use a speech device to request “juice” instead of crying.
Child has trouble making friends.	Teaches social interaction and play skills.	At the park, RBT practices turn-taking with a ball so children can join a group game.
Child has difficulty in public settings (store, social events, etc.).	Practices coping skills, transitions, and tolerance in real-world environments.	RBT helps children use a visual schedule to shop calmly at the grocery store without meltdowns.
Parents feel overwhelmed and unsure of what to do.	Provides coaching, strategies, and emotional support.	BCBA teaches parents how to calmly respond to screaming and reinforce calm communication.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: Why does my child need so many hours of ABA per week?

A: ABA is most effective when children have frequent, structured opportunities to learn. The recommended hours are based on research and individualized assessment of your child's needs. More practice = more progress.

Q: Can my child still attend school while receiving ABA?

A: Yes. ABA hours can be scheduled around school, and services may also be provided in the school setting if permitted. The BCBA may also attend IEP meetings and collaborate with teachers.

Q: Who should be involved in parent training?

A: Parent training is most effective when all primary caregivers (parents, guardians, grandparents, and sometimes older siblings) participate. The goal is for everyone who cares for your child to use the same strategies, so your child receives a consistent message across environments.

Q: What is an FBA?

A: A Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is an evaluation where the BCBA identifies why a behavior occurs and what the child is trying to communicate through it.

Q: What is a BIP?

A: A Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is a plan created after an FBA that outlines strategies to reduce challenging behavior and teach new skills. It provides a roadmap for caregivers, teachers, and therapists to respond consistently.

Q: How long will my child need ABA therapy?

A: It depends. Some children need ABA for several years, while others may graduate earlier. The BCBA will review progress and goals regularly to determine the best path.

Q: What is intermittent reinforcement, and why is it a problem?

A: Intermittent reinforcement happens when a behavior is only sometimes rewarded (like a child screaming and sometimes getting what they want). This actually makes the behavior stronger and harder to change. Parent training helps caregivers avoid this by responding consistently every time.

Q: How are ABA clinicians screened before working with my child?

A: All staff complete comprehensive background checks, including fingerprinting, criminal history, and CPS (Child Protective Services) checks before providing services.

Q: What is needed to get Medicaid authorization for ABA?

A: Medicaid requires a Diagnostic Report, a Referral from a physician or psychologist, and your insurance card information. Our intake team will guide you through this process step by step.

Q: What if I cannot find my child's diagnostic or referral documents?

A: No worries. You can sign a Release of Information (ROI) form, and we can help you obtain the required documents from your child's physician, psychologist, or diagnostic provider.

Q: Will ABA change who my child is?

A: No. ABA is about supporting your child's growth, independence, and ability to express themselves—not changing who they are. The focus is on teaching skills that improve quality of life.

Q: How is ABA different from other therapies?

A: ABA is more intensive and targets a wide range of developmental areas. While speech, OT, or PT may focus on one specific area, ABA takes a comprehensive approach and integrates with other therapies. ABA services vary in intensity based on your child's individual needs, goals, and medical necessity. Some children benefit from more intensive services, while others make progress with fewer hours. The BCBA regularly reviews progress and adjusts recommendations accordingly.

Key Takeaways for Families

- ABA is a comprehensive therapy that addresses communication, social, daily living, and behavior skills.
- Consistency and hours matter—progress depends on using the full insurance-authorized hours.
- Parent training ensures skills last and supports your whole family.
- FBAs and BIPs guide the team in understanding and addressing behaviors with a consistent plan.
- All staff are background-checked, fingerprinted, and CPS-cleared before working with your child.
- An adult 18 or older must always be present during sessions.
- ABA is a team effort between your family, the BCBA, RBT, and BT.
- ABA skills generalize into the community, supporting independence everywhere your child goes.

Your child's journey with ABA is a partnership. Together, we'll celebrate progress, overcome challenges, and open new doors for their future.