



## Family guide · 1 of 5

# What is applied behavior analysis?

You don't need to know any of this before you start — your team will explain things as you go. But if you're the kind of parent who likes to understand what you're signing up for, this is for you.

### The short version

- ✓ Applied behavior analysis is the science of how learning works. We look at what happens around your child — right before and right after a behavior — and use it to teach new skills that make everyday life easier.
- ✓ Big skills get broken into small, doable steps, practiced mostly through play and everyday routines.
- ✓ We measure progress every session, so you can see what's working — and we change what isn't.

That's really all you need. The rest is here whenever you want more.

### The idea in one minute

## Before, during, after

Applied behavior analysis looks at three simple things: what happens right *before* a behavior, the behavior itself, and what happens right *after*. Small changes to the before and after can change what happens next time.



### An example

#### **Snack time is hard**

Your child screams for crackers, and eventually the crackers arrive. That's what any loving parent would do — nobody did anything wrong. But because screaming works, it keeps happening.



### What we do

#### **Teach a faster, easier way**

We teach a quicker way to ask — a word, a sign, a picture or a device — and make sure it works *better* than screaming ever did.



### What changes

#### **Asking replaces screaming**

Over time, asking becomes the easy choice. Nobody had to punish anything; your child just learned something that works better.

That's applied behavior analysis in a nutshell. The same idea is used to teach talking, playing, getting dressed, using the toilet, waiting, joining a game with other kids — and to make hard moments less frequent and less intense.

## What it can help with

### **The skills a program can work on**

Every child's plan is different. Goals come from the assessment and from what matters most to your family. Programs often include:

Communication — asking, saying no, being understood

Play and getting along with other kids

Imitation and attention

Getting dressed, brushing teeth, bedtime

Toilet training

Mealtimes and trying new foods

Waiting and handling transitions

Safety — wandering, roads, water

Big feelings and challenging behavior

Getting ready for daycare or school

The research behind applied behavior analysis is strongest for autism, and the same principles help children with other developmental differences too.

## What good applied behavior analysis looks like

### What you should see — and what you never should



#### You should see

##### **Play and motivation first**

Learning built around what your child loves. A lot of good applied behavior analysis looks like play — that's on purpose.



#### You should see

##### **Communication over compliance**

A child who can ask, say no, and be understood is the point. Sitting still and following orders is not.



#### You should see

##### **Your priorities in the plan**

You read and agree to the goals before anything is final. If a goal doesn't matter to your family, it comes out.



#### You should see

##### **Data you can actually read**

Progress you can see for yourself, in plain language — including the wobbly weeks.

### Things we'll never tell you

- ✗ We'll never tell you applied behavior analysis cures autism. It doesn't, and that isn't the goal.
- ✗ We'll never tell you more hours are automatically better. Hours come from the assessment and your child's needs.
- ✗ We'll never tell you progress is a straight line. It isn't, and we'll show you the hard weeks too.

## Who's who

### The people on your child's team



#### The planner **Board Certified Behavior Analyst**

Assesses your child, writes the plan, trains the technician, checks the data and coaches you. This is your go-to person for questions.



#### The day-to-day **Behavior technician (RBT)**

Works one-on-one with your child during sessions, follows the Board Certified Behavior Analyst's plan, and records data as they go. Certified — or actively earning the RBT credential with our support.



#### The expert on your child **You**

Nobody knows your child better. You help choose the goals, and you're the one who helps new skills keep working when we're not there.

We're also happy to coordinate with your child's pediatrician, speech or occupational therapist, daycare or school team — with your permission.

## Common worries

### Questions parents ask us quietly

#### **Will my child be made to sit at a table for hours?**

No. Some practice happens at a table, in short bursts, with plenty of breaks — but most learning happens through play and everyday routines, wherever the skill needs to work.

#### **Will applied behavior analysis change who my child is?**

It shouldn't, and if it ever feels that way, please tell us. The goal is a bigger life for your child — more ways to communicate, play, and take part in things they enjoy — not a different child.

### **Is it okay that I have doubts about applied behavior analysis?**

Completely. Ask us anything, including the hard questions. You can always ask what a goal is for, why we chose a strategy, and what the data says.

### **Is applied behavior analysis only for autism?**

No. The research is strongest for autism, but the same principles help children with other developmental differences. In Colorado, your child doesn't need an autism diagnosis to begin.



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# How ABA works at ACT

There are a few steps between “we called” and “therapy started.” You don’t have to manage any of them alone — our team handles the paperwork with you and tells you what’s next at every stop.

### The short version

- ✓ There are five steps: intake call, paperwork, insurance approval, assessment, and then sessions begin.
- ✓ Plan on keeping at least 10 hours a week open for sessions. Your exact hours come from the assessment.
- ✓ Your Board Certified Behavior Analyst reviews progress constantly and updates the plan — usually with a formal reassessment about every six months.
- ✓ The goal is for your family to need us *less* over time, not more.

That’s really all you need. The rest is here whenever you want more.

## Getting started

### Five steps to your first session

1

ABOUT 10 MINUTES

#### Intake call or form

We ask about your child, your insurance, and the days and times that realistically work. We won’t guess at a start date — as soon as we know, you’ll know.

**2****DEPENDS ON YOUR STATE****Gather what's needed on file**

**Colorado:** no autism diagnosis needed — a letter from your child's physician recommending ABA is enough. **Oklahoma and North Carolina:** a diagnostic evaluation needs to be on file. No paperwork yet? We'll share our referral list and hold on to your information so you never start over.

**3****DAYS TO WEEKS****Insurance check and approval**

We verify your benefits and ask your insurer to approve the assessment. With Medicaid, authorized services cost your family nothing. With a commercial plan, we tell you exactly what the plan said — no made-up numbers.

**4****USUALLY 2-4 VISITS****Assessment**

A Board Certified Behavior Analyst gets to know your child and you, then writes the treatment plan. You read the goals before anything is final. (Guide 4 walks through this.)

**5****ONGOING****Sessions begin**

We match your technician on availability, location and continuity — the same friendly face at the same times whenever we can. Family guidance goes on the calendar from day one.

**Waiting is the hardest part.** Timelines depend on your insurer, your area and staffing near you. We won't give you a date we can't stand behind — but we will keep you updated, and you can always call to ask where things are.

## How many hours?

### How many hours a week ABA takes

We ask families to keep **at least 10 hours a week** open for sessions — enough time for new skills to really take hold. Your exact number comes from the assessment: the Board Certified Behavior Analyst who assessed your child recommends hours based on your child's needs,

goals and daily life — including school, daycare and family time — and your insurer approves them.



About 10–15 hours a week

### **Focused programs**

Aimed at a handful of specific goals — like toilet training, mealtimes or a particular challenging behavior.



About 15–25 hours a week

### **Broader programs**

Several areas of development at once, built around school or daycare.



25 hours a week or more

### **Comprehensive programs**

Support across many areas, usually for younger children who need help in lots of areas at once.



**Sessions come in weekday blocks** — mornings (8–12), afternoons (12–3) or after school (3–6) — scheduled around your family’s week.



**Family guidance is extra time on your calendar:** at least 2 hours a month with your Board Certified Behavior Analyst.



**For in-home sessions,** a parent or another trusted adult needs to be home.



**Hours aren’t forever.** As skills grow, hours usually come down, and we plan that step-down with you.

If the recommended hours don’t fit your family’s life, say so. The plan has to work in the real world — that’s one of our core values. Prefer to watch? [The 1-minute video on hours.](#)

## How progress is tracked

### You'll be able to see it, not just hear about it

- ✓ **Every session:** the technician records data as they go — what your child did independently, what needed help, and what happened around any hard moments.
- ✓ **Between sessions:** your Board Certified Behavior Analyst reviews the data. If a program isn't moving, it changes in weeks, not months.
- ✓ **During family guidance:** your Board Certified Behavior Analyst walks you through progress in plain language. Ask to see the graphs any time.
- ✓ **About every six months:** a reassessment updates goals and the hours request, and your insurer reviews it again.

#### A program that's working

Skills mastered, session by session

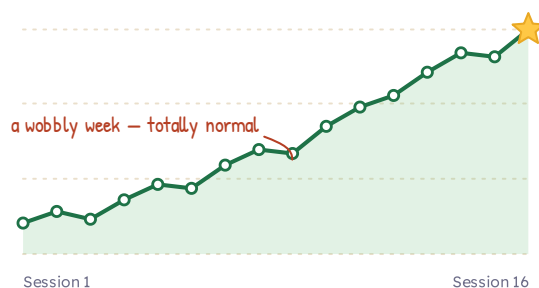


Illustration of how progress data looks — not a real child's chart.

## Down the road

### Where this is all headed

From the start, your child's plan includes what "ready to step down" looks like. As skills grow, hours usually come down, more of the work shifts to you and the other people in your child's life, and eventually your child graduates from ABA. We'll plan that transition with you, not spring it on you.

- ✓ Hours change as your child's needs change — up or down.
- ✓ Goals get handed over to caregivers on purpose, so they keep working after we step back.
- ✓ Transitions — to preschool, kindergarten, a new classroom — get planned ahead.



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# What a session looks like

Most families are surprised by how much an ABA session looks like play. Here's what to expect, so nothing on day one feels strange.

### The short version

- ✓ The first few weeks are mostly about building trust between your child and their technician. That's on purpose.
- ✓ Sessions mix play, short bursts of practice, breaks and everyday routines — wherever the skill needs to work.
- ✓ The technician collects data throughout the session and updates your child's record. Your Board Certified Behavior Analyst visits regularly to supervise and adjust.

That's really all you need. The rest is here whenever you want more.

### The first few weeks

## First, we build trust

Early sessions focus on **pairing**: the technician spends time doing your child's favorite things, follows their lead, and asks very little. It can look like "just playing." It's actually the foundation for everything else — kids learn best from people they trust and enjoy.

**Good to know:** it's normal for a child to be shy, upset or unsure at first. Technicians are trained for this. Give it a few sessions, and tell us if it isn't getting easier.

### A sample session

## From hello to goodbye

Every child's session is different, and the length comes from your child's plan. This is just a picture of how one might flow.

**1****ARRIVAL****Hello and check-in**

The technician arrives at the scheduled time and checks in with you for a minute: How was the night? Anything new today? Any change in medicine, sleep or routine?

**2****WARM-UP****Play to get going**

A few minutes of something your child loves, to get settled and motivated.

**3****LEARNING****Teaching woven into play**

Most teaching happens inside activities your child enjoys — asking for a turn, naming the toy, taking turns, following a direction during a game.

**4****PRACTICE****Short, focused bursts**

Quick rounds of practice on specific skills, with lots of encouragement and a break or favorite activity right after.

**5****ROUTINES****Real-life skills**

Practice on whatever matters at your house: washing hands, snack time, getting shoes on, waiting, cleaning up, moving from one activity to the next.

**6****WRAP-UP****Data and notes**

Before leaving, the technician finishes collecting the session's data and updates your child's record, so your Board Certified Behavior Analyst can see exactly how it went.

## What you might notice

### Things that can look odd at first — and why we do them



#### You might see

##### **Lots of praise and rewards**

Rewards help new skills take hold. As a skill becomes easy, rewards fade to the everyday kind — a smile, a high five, getting what you asked for.



#### You might see

##### **The technician writing or tapping**

That's live data. It's how your Board Certified Behavior Analyst knows what's working without guessing.



#### You might see

##### **Help that slowly disappears**

At first the technician might guide your child's hand or say the first sound of a word. That help fades on purpose, until your child does it on their own.



#### You might see

##### **A calm, planned response to hard moments**

If your child has a big reaction, the technician follows the behavior plan your Board Certified Behavior Analyst has already talked through with you. You'll never be surprised by a strategy.

## Where you fit in

### Your part during a session

- ✓ **A parent or another trusted adult needs to be home** for in-home sessions. You don't have to hover — just be nearby.
- ✓ **Jump in when invited.** Watching and trying strategies during sessions is one of the fastest ways to learn them.
- ✓ **A space with fewer distractions helps** for some activities — but your normal, lived-in house is exactly right.
- ✓ **Share the small stuff.** A rough night, a new medicine, a family change — it all helps us read the day.



#### Your Board Certified Behavior Analyst's visits

##### Supervision, built in

Your Board Certified Behavior Analyst regularly joins sessions to watch, coach the technician, update programs and answer your questions. Save your questions — that's a great time to ask.

At our Tulsa center, sessions happen in our playrooms, and the team will walk you through drop-off and pick-up. In daycare or community settings, we coordinate with the staff there.



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# The assessment: what to expect

The assessment isn't a test your child can pass or fail. It's how your Board Certified Behavior Analyst gets to know your child — and your family — well enough to write a plan that actually fits.

### The short version

- ✓ It usually takes 2–4 visits with a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, at home or wherever therapy will happen.
- ✓ Your child doesn't need to “perform.” A normal day — even a hard one — tells us the most.
- ✓ You'll read the goals and the plan before anything is sent to your insurer.

That's really all you need. The rest is here whenever you want more.

### Before the first visit

## Helpful to have ready (but don't stress)

Pull together whatever you have. If you don't have something, that's fine — your Board Certified Behavior Analyst will work with what's there.

- ✓ A diagnosis report or evaluation, if your child has one — or, in Colorado, the physician's letter recommending ABA
- ✓ Any IEP, IFSP or school/daycare reports
- ✓ Reports from speech, occupational or other therapists
- ✓ A list of medicines, allergies and anything medical we should know

- ✓ Your child's favorite things: snacks, toys, shows, songs, activities
- ✓ The parts of the day that are hardest right now
- ✓ Your top two or three hopes — "I wish my child could..."
- ✓ Questions you want to ask (write them down as you think of them)

## During the visits

### What actually happens

1

#### TALKING WITH YOU

##### Caregiver interview

Your Board Certified Behavior Analyst asks about your child's history, what a typical day looks like, what's going well, what's hard, and what matters most to you. This is the most important part — you're the expert on your child.

2

#### WATCHING AND PLAYING

##### Observation

Your Board Certified Behavior Analyst watches your child play and go through normal routines, and plays with them too. No preparation needed.

3

#### SKILLS CHECK

##### Structured skills assessment

Play-based activities that check communication, play, self-help, social and learning skills. We often use tools like the ABLLS-R or VB-MAPP.

4

#### EVERYDAY SKILLS

##### Adaptive questionnaire

A standardized set of questions about everyday skills — like the Vineland-3 — that you answer with your Board Certified Behavior Analyst's help.

**5****IF NEEDED****A closer look at hard behavior**

If challenging behavior is a concern, your Board Certified Behavior Analyst looks at when it happens, what comes before and after, and what it might be doing for your child. That's how we find a kinder, more effective way to help.

**A few tips****To get the most out of it****Honestly****A hard day is useful**

If your child melts down during the assessment, don't apologize. It shows us exactly what we need to help with.

**Really****No need to tidy up**

Your normal routines and your normal house are the most helpful thing to see.

**Please****Say what matters to you**

If something your Board Certified Behavior Analyst suggests doesn't fit your family, your culture or your priorities, say so. The goals are yours too.

**After the visits****From assessment to approved plan****1****WRITING****Your Board Certified Behavior Analyst writes the plan**

It includes your child's goals, how each will be taught, how hard moments will be handled, goals for family guidance, and the recommended hours.

**2****REVIEWING****You read it together**

Your Board Certified Behavior Analyst walks you through the plan in plain language. Ask questions, change what doesn't fit, and sign when you're comfortable.

**3****APPROVING****We send it to your insurer**

We submit the plan and hours request for approval. This can take days to a few weeks, and we'll tell you as soon as we hear.

**4****STARTING****Scheduling and your technician**

Once approved, we set your schedule and introduce your technician.

**This happens again about every six months.** A reassessment checks progress, updates goals, and renews the approval with your insurer. You'll be part of it every time.

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Questions? Colorado (720) 432-8989 · Oklahoma (918) 764-8544 · North Carolina (336) 270-9453 · [info@actaba.com](mailto:info@actaba.com) · [actaba.com/guide](https://actaba.com/guide)



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## What we'll ask of you — and what you can count on from us

You don't need to be an expert, and you don't need to do it all at once. ABA works best as a partnership, so here's what we'll ask — openly, up front — and what you can expect from us in return.

### The short version

- ✓ An adult at home for in-home sessions, and at least two hours a month of family guidance with your Board Certified Behavior Analyst.
- ✓ A steady schedule — and a heads-up when plans change.
- ✓ Keep your insurance current, and talk to us when something isn't working.

That's really all you need. The rest is here whenever you want more.

## What we ask

### Six things that make the biggest difference



1

#### Be home for in-home sessions

A parent or another trusted adult needs to be in the home during in-home sessions. You can go about your day — just stay nearby and available.



2

#### Family guidance: at least two hours a month

Time with your Board Certified Behavior Analyst, practicing strategies in your real routines — bath time, car seats, the grocery store. It's required by insurers, and it's where a lot of the lasting change comes from. Other caregivers are welcome to join.



3

#### Keep the schedule steady

Consistency is how skills stick. Frequent cancellations can quietly undo months of progress — and insurers look at attendance when they review continued hours.



4

#### Give us a heads-up

As much notice as you can. **Two weeks** for planned vacations. **Same-day cancellations by 6:00 a.m.**, by call or text. If your child is sick — fever, vomiting, anything contagious — please cancel; we'll do the same if our staff is sick.



5

#### Keep your insurance current

Tell us the day your insurance changes. Watch your mail for Medicaid renewal paperwork and send it back quickly — a lapse in coverage is the most common reason therapy pauses, and it's completely preventable.



6

#### Talk to us

Tell us about changes at home — sleep, medicine, a move, a new baby. And tell us when something isn't working: a goal that doesn't matter to you, a time slot that's become impossible, a technician who isn't the right fit.

## In between sessions

### Practice, without the homework feeling

Your Board Certified Behavior Analyst will give you one or two things to try at a time — not a binder. Things like:

- ✓ Waiting a beat before handing over the snack, so your child has a chance to ask.
- ✓ Using the same few words for a routine every time (“shoes, coat, car”).
- ✓ Noticing and cheering the moments that go right — they’re easy to miss on a busy day.

Small, consistent moments across the day add up to more than any single session.

What you can count on

## Our side of the partnership

- ✓ **The same friendly face whenever we can.** We match technicians for continuity and keep them with your family.
- ✓ **A heads-up if we need to cancel** — and a real effort to send someone else to cover.
- ✓ **A Board Certified Behavior Analyst who answers your questions** and explains things in plain language.
- ✓ **Goals you agreed to**, and progress data you can see any time.
- ✓ **Respect for your home, your culture and your language.** Caregiver paperwork is available in Spanish — just ask.
- ✓ **Honesty** — about cost, timelines, and what ABA can and can’t do.

If it feels like a lot

## Most families find their rhythm in a few weeks

New schedules, new people in your home, new words — it’s a lot at the start. That’s normal. If the schedule isn’t sustainable for your family, tell us early. We’d much rather rework it together than have you burn out.

**You’re not doing this alone.** Any question, any time — call your local office or email [info@actaba.com](mailto:info@actaba.com).