



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.