

TIPS FOR CHOOSING A PROVIDER FOR APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS (ABA)

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Because family members know that early intervention helps children on the autism spectrum learn new skills and decrease problem behaviors, they often want to consider behavioral therapies for their child. “ABA” (applied behavior analysis) programs are one of the evidence-based types of behavioral interventions that may be available for your child. This list provides some first steps in making choices about ABA services.

- **Understand what the provider means by ABA.** It is sometimes confusing to know exactly what someone means when they say “ABA.” ABA can be used for varying lengths of time, includes reinforcement, shaping, chaining, and many other techniques, and can occur in any setting, including home, school, or clinic. ABA should always include data collection for the purpose of making program decisions to help people live better lives.
- **ABA is not a single or one size fits all program.** ABA is individualized and teaches skills that are important for everyday life for a specific child. If the provider offers a single approach, question how it will fit your child.
- **Be sure that someone on their staff is credentialed or licensed in ABA.** Ask questions about the credentials and qualifications of staff to ensure that there is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). And, because any credential only shows that the professional has passed a test and has met a minimum standard of supervised practical training, find out about all of their experience with children like yours.
- **Your child is precious and you need to know that they are in safe hands.** Background checks are common practice for most providers. If you hire your own front line therapist or are bringing a provider into your home, make sure that a background check has been done on them.
- **Question practices that make you feel uncomfortable or that may be perceived as dangerous.** Observe how the therapist responds to your child and don't hesitate to question them (or any therapist working with your child).
- **Beware of practitioners that make grand promises.** There is no ABA magic wand. It takes a lot of work by a lot of people (including you) to help your child reach his or her potential. Be very careful of promises about unrealistic outcomes.



- **Be prepared to make a list of skills that you and your family want your child to do.** In the plan developed for your child, skills should be taught that are valued by you (e.g., communication, toilet training, eating at a table, playing with brothers and sisters) and that can be used now and in the future.
- **Performing a skill in a clinical setting with only one person is only the first step in the process.** If the program does not expand the skill into other settings with other people, including family members, then the skill has not been truly learned and is not useful.
- **Intensive ABA programming should not be for life.** There should be a transition plan to move the child out of therapy and into more natural settings (e.g., school, community).
- **Data collection is a critical component of ABA programs.** All providers and centers should be able to regularly provide you with data in a format that is understandable including a summary with trends that show whether or not your child is improving.
- **Make sure your provider addresses all aspects of your child's ASD, and that their beliefs match your beliefs about your child.** Although ABA providers hold many core beliefs in common, you will also find that they have differing beliefs and philosophies. For example, ask how the provider thinks about issues including connections between sensory and medical conditions and behavior, or the use of visual supports or augmentative communication systems.
- **ABA providers and centers charge different rates.** Costs will vary greatly and there are no standard fees. Please do not assume more expensive programs or providers necessarily provide better services. Make sure you ask about costs of various providers and centers before you make any decisions.
- **Be aware of billing, business, and insurance practices.** Check with other family members to make sure good and ethical business practices are being followed, and to determine costs charged by various centers or providers.
- **Request that your ABA providers explain things in common terms.** Do not be embarrassed to say you do not understand. It is their responsibility to explain things in a way you understand. Each professional has to be careful not to use jargon; almost all do. So don't be shy!
- **The goal is that all involved with your child work in collaboration.** If your child attends a school or other program, there should be a discussion about how collaboration will occur. Be cautious of providers, schools, or centers that condemn others to raise their own status. Schools and ABA programs are very different. The goal is that they all work together (and with you) peacefully to ensure maximum progress for your child.

Our hope is that these tips can assist in your decision-making process. Remember that you play an important role in making choices about the setting or provider from which your child receives services. Look for providers that welcome your perspective and full participation in your child's plan. Ask a range of people about the services provided, take both positive and negative comments, and then make a decision based on what will benefit your entire family. Trust your common sense and knowledge about your child.