

ABA: FAQ Resource

What is ABA therapy?

Answer: Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) is an approach to understanding learning and behavior that is rooted in principles of learning and behavior modification. ABA therapy is a type of behavioral therapy that incorporates these principles and applies evidence-based practices to teach new skills and behaviors.

Common skills and behaviors addressed include:

- Play and problem-solving
- Self-help skills and activities of daily living (ADLs)
- Challenging behaviors and self-injurious behaviors
- Social behavior and interaction
- Attention and Joint Attention
- Occupational/Vocational skills
- Language and communication skills*

**In collaboration with speech-language pathologists*

In addition to Autism intervention, ABA is used in various fields, such as organizational behavior management, substance use disorder treatment, mental health therapy and more. In the field of Autism, ABA practices can be observed in schools, clinics, home, and community settings.

Why is ABA a controversial topic?

Answer: The practice of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) has been challenged by individuals expressing concerns about its methodology and impact on individuals with Autism. With a

complicated and controversial history, strong “pro-ABA” and “anti-ABA” viewpoints, and a focus on neurodiversity-affirming practices, many individuals and families are unsure how to determine if ABA is an option for themselves or their loved ones.

Concerns regarding ABA range from concerns about individual practitioners to concerns about the field of behaviorism as a whole. Some concerns are rooted in ABA’s early history, connecting the practice of ABA with conversion therapy and the use of aversive punishment procedures. Other historical concerns cite that ABA was initially presented as a treatment designed to make Autistic individuals indistinguishable from their non-Autistic peers. During that time, ABA was primarily considered to be a treatment to address speech and language concerns in Autism, and was often practiced with little collaboration from speech-language pathologists.

The contrast between these criticisms and the advocacy of ABA proponents has led to considerable confusion for those who are trying to determine the most beneficial intervention for themselves or their child.

What are the goals of the Autism Society’s ABA Resource?

Answer: This resource is intended to:

- Provide an understanding of ABA, its history, purpose, and practice
- Give insight into diverse perspectives and individual experiences on what leads to positive or negative outcomes.
- Support individuals and families to advocate for the highest quality of care across Autism services and supports, whatever that may be for you.

In keeping with the Autism Society’s long-standing options policy that leaves intervention and service decisions up to individuals and families, nothing in the ABA Resource document should be construed as an endorsement of nor an opposition to ABA therapy. Ultimately,



our **Making Informed Decisions** policy has always acknowledged that no single service or intervention is likely to meet the needs of every individual with Autism. Whichever services are chosen, they should promote self-determination, enhance inclusive community engagement, and result in improved quality of life.

What does the ABA Resource document cover?

Answer: In the Autism Society's first of its kind resource, the organization spent over 18 months working with a diverse group of Autism community members, including Autistic individuals, families and caregivers, and professionals to examine the practice of ABA from all angles. We have created a neutral resource focused on essential information that families and individuals can trust to better understand their options when examining whether ABA is appropriate for them. This resource offers critical information that the Autism Society firmly believes should be available for individuals as a tool in their decision-making process.

In general terms, the ABA Resource covers:

- Understanding ABA Therapy
- How we developed this resource:
 - Outreach
 - Outcomes: common concerns and common benefits
- Making informed decisions: green, yellow and red flags when considering ABA Therapy, and appropriate questions to ask.

Is the Autism Society pro-ABA or anti-ABA?

Answer: In keeping with the Autism Society's long-standing options policy that leaves intervention and service decisions up to individuals and families, **nothing in the document**



acts as an endorsement of nor an opposition to ABA therapy. This resource offers critical information that the organization firmly believes should be available for individuals as soon as possible.

The Autism Society's mission is to empower the Autism community with the resources needed to live fully. Each individual and family has the right to make informed decisions for their personal needs, using unbiased, factual, and trustworthy information. Whichever services are chosen, they should promote self-determination, enhance inclusive community engagement, and result in improved quality of life.

When there is conflict within the community, we must acknowledge the good, bad, and the areas we don't understand from a place of respect and a willingness to learn. We are in this community together, but our experiences are vastly different. What connects us is that at our core, we want the same thing - a world where everyone in the Autism community is connected to the support they need, when they need it.

How did the Autism Society develop the ABA Resource?

Answer: The Autism Society of America spent over 18 months working with a diverse group of Autism community members, including Autistic individuals, families and caregivers, and professionals to examine the practice of ABA from all angles. The organization formed an ABA Commission to assess current opinions about ABA through a series of conversations with people with varied, but direct experiences with ABA. In the context of the diverse opinions that were expressed, the Commission sought to re-examine the purpose and methodologies that comprise ABA, with the goal of providing potential recipients and families with thoroughly impartial decision-making guidance.

The Autism Society is proud of our approach to the creation of this final guide, including:



- Collecting over 150 stories and submissions with a wide array of experiences from a diverse group of Autistic individuals, parents, service providers, ABA practitioners, researchers and more.
- Committing over 500 hours from ASA staff and volunteers to support this process from start to finish.
- Conducting a comprehensive review and editing process with 15 review cycles and over 50 edited versions with input from a multitude of advisors to ensure accuracy and neutrality.

After reading the ABA Resource, I still have questions.

Where can I go for help?

Answer: When making decisions about interventions and therapies for yourself or your child, be cautious of providers who make grandiose promises about outcomes or “cures,” and seek scientific data to support their claims. It is recommended to discuss any concerns regarding recommendations with trusted individuals who are familiar with your self/loved one. Never hesitate to reach out to neutral parties, seek input from those who have used the services you are considering, or contact your local Autism Society. Learn more about our **Making Informed Decision** policy and **Guiding Principles For Selecting Interventions and Therapies**.

The Autism Society’s National Helpline is a fantastic way to learn about resources and services in your area. Speak with a trained Information & Referral (I&R) Specialist about desired resources and support options. While the Helpline isn’t able to provide direct services, the I&R Specialist will connect you to resources and providers that can. You can contact our National Helpline at 800-3-AUTISM (800-328-8476) or by completing the contact form **here**.