
Ten Things Every Parent Should Know About: Behavioral Therapy for Autism

1. Autism is a “whole child” condition, and while not necessarily a disability, some autistic symptoms or behaviors can interfere with your child’s developmental progress, resulting in autism-related disabilities in communication, social interaction and skills development, as well as sensory and health problems.
2. For many children, therapy based in the principles of behavior analysis (sometimes called ABA or applied behavior analysis) can have a powerfully positive effect on their behavior, relationships with family and friends, interactions with others, learning and skills development.
3. ABA is not one thing, but a term used to define a group of methods that apply to the science of behavior analysis to meaningfully effect positive and productive behavior change.
4. The goals of any intervention based on behavior analysis should be child-centered, respectful of their individuality, build on their strengths and contribute positively to their life-course development.
5. Behavior analysis is practiced by Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs), and delivered in a team with a behavior technician.
6. First, your BCBA should spend time with you and your child, and make sure they understand your child’s strengths and individuality, as well as everyone’s hopes, dreams and aspirations, so they can be incorporated into the treatment plan.
7. Then, BCBAs will conduct highly individualized assessments of their strengths and skills and share their findings with you to help inform the treatment plan.
8. BCBAs should then work with you and, whenever possible, your child, to determine and approve the goals of the treatment cycle. Sometimes goals need to be broken down into much smaller parts, and then put together, so the child can accomplish a bigger goal. Individualized plans are submitted to your insurance for approval.
9. Treatment takes place in 6-month treatment cycles. At the end of every cycle, there is a review of progress and a reassessment and update of your child’s treatment plan. The plan is constantly being improved to build on your child’s new skills.
10. Family involvement in therapy is important. Your BCBA will meet with you regularly to help you sustain your child’s treatment outside the hours of direct therapy to support their success at home, school and in the real world.

For more information, ask your child’s healthcare professional.