

## Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

### At a glance: Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

Type of therapy	Behavioural
The claim	Improves social, communication and academic skills and skills of daily living; decreases difficult behaviours.
Suitable for	Children with ASD
Research rating Find out more about this rating system in our <a href="#">FAQs</a> .	 <p><b>Established</b> Research shows positive effects.</p>
Time Estimate of the total time for family in hours per week and duration.	 <p>While interventions based on ABA can be time intensive, research has shown that this intensity can be critical to their success.</p>
Cost Estimate of cost to family per session/item or week.	



Visit the [Autism Service Pathfinder](#) to browse Service Providers information.

### About this intervention

#### What is it?

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is not a therapy in itself, but a theory, a set of principles upon which some therapies are based. The theory identifies various teaching techniques which generally involve breaking down complex skills (or behaviours) in to smaller steps and teaching them through the use of clear instructions, rewards and repetition.

#### Who is it for?

ABA teaching techniques can be used for any child with autism.

What is it used for?

The ABA approach and its techniques can help children with ASD learn new ways of interacting with others, improve academically and use the skills they learn in different settings – at home, school and in the community. It can also help children learn to replace difficult behaviour with more appropriate behaviour, such as using words to ask for an object rather than screaming. Example skills taught might include using words and language, following instructions, taking turns, playing with others, toileting and dressing.

Where does it come from?

ABA is an approach based on learning theory and the theory of behavioural psychology, which have been around since the early 1900s.

What is the idea behind it?

The key idea behind ABA is that most human behaviour is learned through our interaction with our environment. What happens before and after any behaviour influences the likelihood of it being repeated. For example, if behaviour is rewarded, then it's more likely to happen again. If it's not rewarded, or is ignored or punished, it's less likely to happen again.

ABA uses this idea to teach and encourage new and appropriate behaviours in children with autism.

What does it involve?

ABA-based programs generally involve:

- assessing the child's current skills and difficulties
- setting goals and objectives (for example, learning how to say 'hello')
- measuring how often the behaviour or skill happens currently
- designing and implementing a program that teaches the 'target' skill
- ongoing measurement of the 'target' skill to see if the program is working
- ongoing [evaluation](#) of the program itself, making changes as needed.

How programs incorporate and apply these elements will vary. The way they're applied will also vary from one child to the next. For example, an ABA-based program can be run in the family home, at a clinic, school or centre (such as an early intervention service), or in a combination of two or more of these settings.

Most ABA-based programs incorporate several teaching techniques, which may include [Discrete Trial Training \(DTT\)](#), [incidental teaching](#) or using everyday interactions as opportunities for children to learn.

Cost consideration

The cost of an ABA-based program to a family will depend on the program: how it's structured, and the service that delivers it.

A family can reduce costs by providing some of the therapy themselves, by finding volunteers to work as aides, or by borrowing materials and resources from local toy libraries or local autism associations. The cost of consulting with and using therapists will vary according to their training and experience.

Does it work?

Quality research shows that this approach has positive effects on the behaviour of children with autism. In fact, ABA is generally acknowledged as the most effective approach in working with children with autism. Given the variation in how ABA is applied, however, you might need to check the outcomes of specific programs to judge their success.

Who practises this method?

There are no formal qualifications for ABA practitioners. Therefore, you will need to consider the qualifications and experience of each person you choose to work with.

Parent education, training, support and involvement

Parents generally play an active role in their child's program. It can help if parents are aware of the goals and content of the program, so that they can reward appropriate behaviours and help their child transfer skills from the learning environment to other contexts.

Some parents also take part in ABA training so that they can implement some of the therapy themselves. This is one way to reduce program costs.

Where can I find a practitioner?

Contact the autism association in your state and ask them to recommend a service or practitioner. Professionals with experience in ABA approaches usually include [psychologists](#), [special education teachers](#) and [occupational therapists](#).

Tips on factors to consider when choosing a service or practitioner are available through the [Autism Behavioral Intervention Association \(ABIA\)](#). ABIA also offers two-hour seminars for parents on how to set up and sustain an ABA program. Information about seminars can be found on the ABIA website.

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Rated ★★★★★ (10 ratings)

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## GLOSSARY

Incidental teaching

A technique used in some autism spectrum disorder (ASD) therapies. With incidental teaching, naturally occurring situations are used to help the child learn. For example, if the child chooses a toy with multi-coloured balls, the person working with the child might use it as a chance to talk about colours, and ask the child to request the balls by colour. This can help the child develop language and other skills important to development. Incidental teaching is sometimes referred to as using 'teachable moments'.

### More to explore

- ▶ Testing interventions for autism spectrum disorder
- ▶ Therapy hours: how many are enough for autism spectrum disorder?
- ▶ Preschoolers Behaviour Toolkit

### Web links

- ▶ Association for Behavior Analysis International
- ▶ Autism Behavioural Intervention Association

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