



YOUR CHILD'S ABA JOURNEY

A Parent Guide to Understanding Therapy, Time, and
Partnership with Headstart Health



WELCOME TO HEADSTART HEALTH

If you are reading this, you are likely exploring ABA therapy for your child. That can feel hopeful, overwhelming, and full of questions all at once.

At Headstart Health, we partner with independent, local, Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) to deliver high-quality ABA therapy in your community. While your child's BCBA leads the clinical care, Headstart provides the operational support behind the scenes so providers can focus on what matters most: meaningful progress for your child.



OUR GOAL IS SIMPLE.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS.

STRONG PARTNERSHIP.

STEADY PROGRESS.

This guide will walk you through what ABA is, how therapy hours are determined, where therapy happens, and what you can expect during the onboarding process.



<https://headstart.health/>



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WHAT IS ABA THERAPY?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a therapy that helps children build important life skills and reduce behaviors that may interfere with learning or safety.

ABA focuses on skills such as:

- ✓ **COMMUNICATION**
- ✓ **SOCIAL INTERACTION**
- ✓ **PLAY**
- ✓ **DAILY LIVING SKILLS**
- ✓ **EMOTIONAL REGULATION**
- ✓ **SAFETY & INDEPENDENCE**



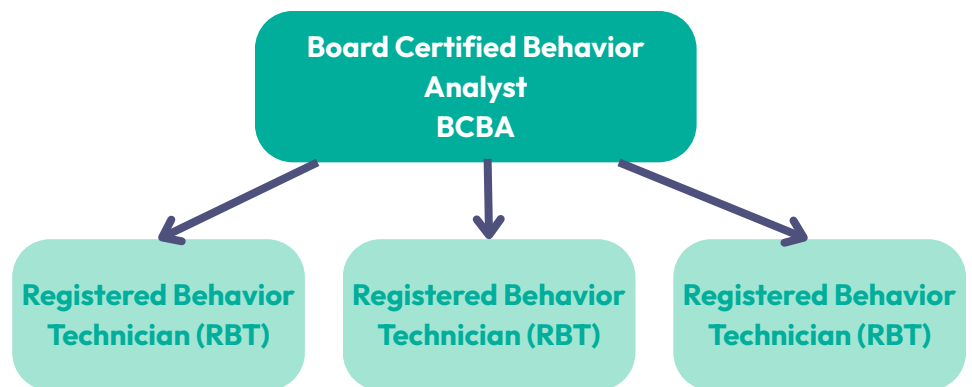
ABA is individualized. No two children receive the exact same plan. Therapy is based on assessment data and adjusted over time as your child grows and progresses.

ABA is supported by decades of research and is widely recognized as the gold standard treatment for children with autism.



YOUR ABA TEAM: WHO IS WHO?

Starting ABA therapy means working with a small team of professionals who support your child's learning and development. Each person has a different role, but everyone works toward the same goal: helping your child build meaningful skills.



BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst)

The clinical leader and business owner.

Your BCBA designs and oversees your child's therapy plan and is your primary contact! They:

- ✓ Complete the assessment
- ✓ Create the treatment plan and goals
- ✓ Train and supervise the therapy team
- ✓ Review progress and adjust programming
- ✓ Provide caregiver training

RBT (Registered Behavior Technician)

Your child's daily therapist.

The RBT works directly with your child during therapy sessions. They:

- ✓ Teach skills through structured activities and play
- ✓ Follow the treatment plan created by the BCBA
- ✓ Track progress during sessions



HOW THERAPY HOURS ARE DETERMINED

There is no standard number of ABA hours.

Your child's BCBA considers:

- ✓ CURRENT STRENGTHS AND SKILL GAPS
- ✓ COMMUNICATION NEEDS
- ✓ BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES
- ✓ SAFETY CONCERNS
- ✓ AGE AND DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL
- ✓ LEARNING PACE
- ✓ HISTORY OF ABA THERAPY
- ✓ FAMILY PRIORITIES

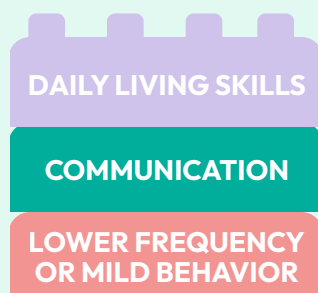
The goal is to recommend enough therapy to create meaningful, steady progress while supporting your family.

Insurance companies may authorize hours based on clinical recommendations and documentation, but the starting point is always your child's assessment.

GROWTH AREAS WILL DRIVE HOURS RECOMMENDATIONS



TRANSITIONAL
10 HOURS



FOCUSED
15-25 HOURS



COMPREHENSIVE
25-40 HOURS



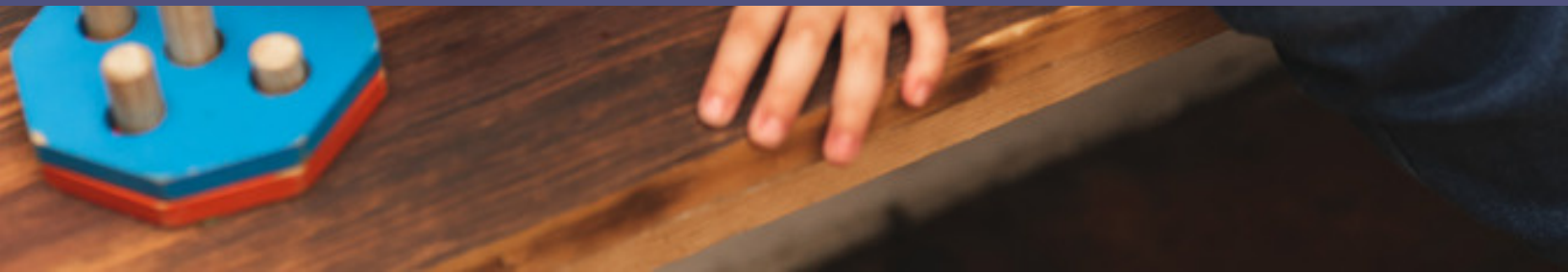


UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR BCBA DETERMINES THE LEVEL OF CARE

Every child's therapy plan is individualized.

However, most recommendations are five days a week and fall into one of three levels based on your child's current needs.

Rather than thinking about this as “more” or “less” therapy, it can be helpful to think about it as building a foundation, strengthening skills, or preparing for independence.



COMPREHENSIVE

Building the Foundation

(Typically 25–40 hours per week)

Comprehensive therapy is recommended when a child is still developing core learning skills or needs support across multiple areas.

This level may be appropriate if your child:

- ✓ **Has difficulty following directions**
- ✓ **Has limited or emerging communication**
- ✓ **Struggles with foundational “learning-to-learn” skills**
- ✓ **Engages in intense or frequent problem behavior for their age**
- ✓ **Has safety concerns (such as elopement or aggression)**
- ✓ **Needs support across many developmental areas at once**

At this stage, therapy focuses on building communication, attention, imitation, behavior regulation, and foundational independence skills.

The goal is to create a strong base that allows future learning to happen more easily.





UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR BCBA DETERMINES THE LEVEL OF CARE



FOCUSED

Strengthening and Refining Skills

(Typically 15–25 hours per week)

Focused therapy is recommended when a child has some foundational skills but needs targeted support in specific areas.

This level may be appropriate if your child:

- ✓ **Can communicate basic wants and needs**
- ✓ **Follows directions with some support**
- ✓ **Needs help refining communication**
- ✓ **Needs support with daily living skills (dressing, hygiene, routines)**
- ✓ **Engages in less frequent or less intense behavior challenges**

At this stage, therapy targets specific skill areas while continuing to support behavior and communication development.



TRANSITIONAL

Promoting Independence and Autonomy

(Up to 10 hours per week)

Transitional services are recommended when a child has built foundational skills and is ready to focus on independence, social development, and generalization.

This level may be appropriate if your child:

- ✓ **Communicates effectively**
- ✓ **Follows directions independently**
- ✓ **Demonstrates safe behavior**
- ✓ **Is working on social skills or peer interaction**
- ✓ **Is preparing to transition out of higher-intensity services and graduate ABA therapy**

At this stage, therapy focuses on helping your child apply skills in natural environments and move toward greater independence.





WHY THERAPY HOURS MATTER

One of the most common questions families ask is

“How many hours will my child need?”

ABA works through practice, repetition and reinforcement. Children learn by practicing skills many times in real-life situations. Because ABA supports multiple areas of development at once, therapy is often delivered for several hours each week.

Most children are recommended to attend ABA therapy five days a week, between 15 and 40 hours per week, depending on their needs.

More consistent hours allow for:

- ✓ **FASTER SKILL DEVELOPMENT**
- ✓ **STRONGER CARRYOVER INTO DAILY ROUTINES**
- ✓ **GREATER OPPORTUNITY TO GENERALIZE SKILLS ACROSS SETTINGS**

Lower weekly hours may still provide benefit, but progress may occur more gradually and you may need to attend therapy for a longer duration of time.

The number of hours is not decided during intake. Final recommendations are made by your child's BCBA after a comprehensive assessment.



A NOTE ABOUT FLEXIBILITY

The recommended level of care is based on clinical assessment — **not just scheduling preference.**

Oftentimes the skills taught in ABA therapy are essential to be successful in other community settings such as school, daycare, extra curricular activities, and church. It may be necessary to prioritize ABA therapy over other activities at the beginning of your therapy journey in order to see the most therapeutic outcomes.

Our goal is always to recommend the level of support that gives your child the best opportunity for meaningful, lasting progress.

As your child grows and develops, their level of care may also change.





WHERE ABA THERAPY HAPPENS

ABA therapy takes place in the environments where your child naturally lives and learns.

HOME



Home-based therapy allows your child to practice skills during daily routines, making learning meaningful and practical. In the home environment caregivers get a real time view of therapy and your child's progress.

During in-home therapy your child will work with a 1:1 Registered Behavior Technician (RBT). A family member or adult over the age of 18 must be within the home at all times of therapy, but they do not need to participate in the therapy session.



SCHOOL

School-based therapy supports classroom participation, peer interaction, and academic engagement. This setting is great for children who have mastered communication, foundational and behavior skills in other environments and seeking to generalize these essential skills across other environments.

Note: School-based ABA support requires special insurance approval and is not covered by all insurance plans. If your Provider indicates this is a therapeutic setting, Headstart Health will work with your insurance to verify coverage.

DAYCARE



Daycare-based therapy provides opportunities for group learning and peer interaction throughout the day. This setting is best for children who have developed core foundational skills of learning such as following directions, indicating choice, and tolerating being in a group.

Note: Daycare-based ABA support requires special insurance approval and is not covered by all insurance plans. If your Provider indicates this is a therapeutic setting, Headstart Health will work with your insurance to verify coverage.





WHERE ABA THERAPY HAPPENS

ABA therapy takes place in the environments where your child naturally lives and learns.

CLINIC



Clinic-based therapy offers a structured environment with specialized materials and peer opportunities to support focused skill development.

This setting is best if your child has severe maladaptive behavior that requires collaboration of a team, children who are not yet ready for daycare/school, but cannot be in-home due to caregiver schedules or children who are ready for group based learning in a controlled setting.



COMMUNITY

Community-based therapy helps children apply communication, safety, and independence skills in real-world settings such as parks, stores, and activities. Community based learning can be embedded into your child's therapy plan as new skills are mastered in-home and are ready for generalization into new environments.

Because therapy often occurs across multiple settings, caregiver involvement and some daytime flexibility are often important for strong progress.





WHAT FAMILIES SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR

Starting ABA therapy is a commitment, but one that can lead to meaningful growth.

Families can expect:

- ✓ **DAYTIME SCHEDULING**
- ✓ **CONSISTENT WEEKLY THERAPY HOURS**
- ✓ **ACTIVE COLLABORATION WITH THE THERAPY TEAM**
- ✓ **REGULAR PROGRESS UPDATES AND PLAN ADJUSTMENTS**
- ✓ **MONTHLY CAREGIVER TRAINING MEETINGS**



Limiting therapy to evenings only may reduce opportunities for learning across settings and may impact the pace of progress. Our team will work with you to create a plan that supports your child's needs while being realistic for your family.

Clear communication at the beginning helps prevent confusion later.



THE HEADSTART ONBOARDING PROCESS

We believe families feel more confident when they understand the steps ahead.

Here is what the process typically looks like:

- 1 INITIAL INTAKE CALL**
We gather background information, answer early questions and verify your insurance benefits.
- 2 PROVIDER CONSULTATION**
Meet with your provider (BCBA) and share your hopes, questions, and goals!
- 3 INDIVIDUALIZED ASSESSMENT**
Your provider meets with your child and family to complete a comprehensive evaluation.
- 4 CLINICAL RECOMMENDATION**
The BCBA reviews assessment results with your family and recommends therapy hours and goals.
- 5 INSURANCE AUTHORIZATION**
Clinical documentation is submitted to your insurance provider for approval.
- 6 SCHEDULING AND TEAM ASSIGNMENT**
Therapy times are confirmed and a treatment team is assigned.
- 7 THERAPY BEGINS**
Services start with ongoing supervision and collaboration.
- 8 REGULAR PROGRESS REVIEWS**
Goals and hours are reviewed and adjusted as your child develops.

Throughout this process, your provider leads clinical decisions while Headstart supports the operational and insurance coordination behind the scenes.



WHAT DOES ABA THERAPY ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?

ABA therapy does not look the same for every child.

It is structured, but it should also feel engaging and supportive.

A typical session may include:

- ✓ **PLAY-BASED LEARNING**
- ✓ **SHORT STRUCTURED TEACHING MOMENTS**
- ✓ **PRACTICE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS**
- ✓ **BREAKS AND MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES**
- ✓ **SUPPORT WITH DAILY ROUTINES**
- ✓ **SOCIAL INTERACTION PRACTICE**

Your child may work at a table for brief periods, practice skills during play, and learn during everyday routines like snack time or getting dressed.

Therapy is active. Children are learning through doing.

You may see:

- ✓ **A THERAPIST TAKING NOTES ON AN IPAD OR ELECTRONIC DEVICE**
- ✓ **A TIMER BEING USED**
- ✓ **VISUAL SUPPORTS OR SCHEDULES**
- ✓ **REINFORCEMENT SUCH AS PRAISE, SMALL REWARDS, OR PLANNED BREAKS**
- ✓ **REPETITION OF CERTAIN SKILLS**

This structure helps build consistency and track progress.





THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

In the beginning, sessions may look different than you expect.

You may notice:

- ✓ **MORE PLAY THAN STRUCTURED TEACHING**
- ✓ **PERIODS OF OBSERVATION**
- ✓ **RAPPORT-BUILDING ACTIVITIES**
- ✓ **SLOWER PACING**

This time is important.

Your therapy team is building trust, understanding your child's motivation, and identifying how your child learns best. Strong rapport and assessment in the early weeks create better long-term outcomes.

WHEN BEHAVIOR HAPPENS



Although we aim to create a positive and play-based environment, there may be times when your child demonstrates challenging behavior.

This is part of the learning process.

Your RBT (Registered Behavior Technician) or BCBA is trained to respond to behavior in a structured and therapeutic way. They may:

- ✓ **PAUSE INSTRUCTION**
- ✓ **ADJUST THE DEMAND**
- ✓ **IMPLEMENT A BEHAVIOR PLAN**
- ✓ **STAY CALM AND CONSISTENT**

Unless you are directly asked to step in, it is helpful to allow the therapy team to work through the situation.

Consistency in response helps your child learn more quickly and safely.





HOW TO PREPARE YOUR HOME FOR ABA THERAPY

Preparing your home does not require a special setup, but a few simple steps can make therapy smoother.



1. CREATE A SMALL LEARNING SPACE

A quiet area with:

- ✓ **A Small Table or Flat Surface**
- ✓ **Two Chairs**
- ✓ **Minimal Distractions**

This does not need to be a separate room. Even a corner of a living area can work.



2. REDUCE MAJOR DISTRACTIONS DURING SESSIONS

During therapy time, try to:

- ✓ **Turn Off Televisions or Loud Devices**
- ✓ **Limit Background Noise**
- ✓ **Reduce Unnecessary Interruptions**

Let siblings know that their brother or sister may not be available to play together for a little while.

This helps your child stay engaged and makes learning more effective.





HOW TO PREPARE YOUR HOME FOR ABA THERAPY

Preparing your home does not require a special setup, but a few simple steps can make therapy smoother.



3. MAKE MATERIALS ACCESSIBLE

Your therapist may bring materials, but it helps to have:

- ✓ Preferred Toys
- ✓ Snacks if Appropriate
- ✓ Visual Supports if Used
- ✓ Access to Everyday Household Items for Skill Practice

ABA often uses natural materials already in your home.



4. EXPECT STRUCTURE

Therapy may look more structured than typical playtime.

There may be:

- ✓ Clear Instructions
- ✓ Repeated Practice
- ✓ A Predictable Schedule
- ✓ Planned Breaks

Structure helps children feel safe and understand expectations.





HOW TO PREPARE YOUR HOME FOR ABA THERAPY

Preparing your home does not require a special setup, but a few simple steps can make therapy smoother.

5. PLAN FOR CONSISTENCY

Because ABA relies on repetition, consistent attendance and scheduling are important.

When possible, treat therapy hours as a standing commitment in your weekly routine.

Occasionally, a makeup session may be needed if a session is missed. Makeup sessions may be provided by another qualified member of your provider's team. All team members are trained and supervised to deliver therapy safely and effectively.

Working with different team members can also support the generalization of skills, meaning your child learns to use their skills with different people and in different situations.

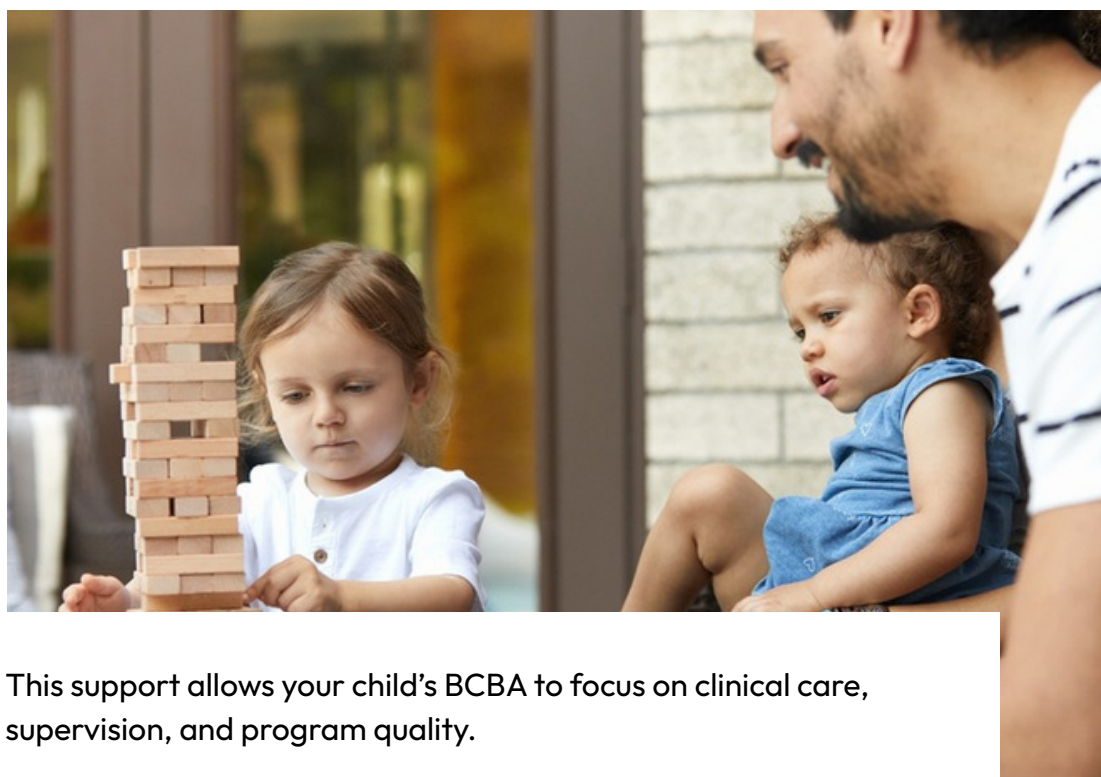
Consistent participation helps build momentum and steady progress over time.



HOW HEADSTART SUPPORTS YOUR PROVIDER

Headstart partners with independent BCBA's by managing:

- ✓ **INSURANCE CREDENTIALING**
- ✓ **BILLING AND CLAIMS PROCESSING**
- ✓ **COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS**
- ✓ **OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS**



This support allows your child's BCBA to focus on clinical care, supervision, and program quality.

Strong infrastructure supports strong clinical outcomes.





FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

? WILL INSURANCE PAY FOR MY CHILD'S THERAPY?

Yes! Most insurances pay for ABA therapy. As a liaison to your provider, Headstart Health will assist in the completion of all the necessary authorizations with your insurance company.

Please note that everyone's insurance plan is unique. As the policy holder it is your responsibility to review and understand your coverage. You may be responsible for a co-pay, deductible, or co-insurance.

? CAN WE START WITH FEWER HOURS AND INCREASE LATER?

In some cases, yes. However, beginning with the clinically recommended number of hours often supports stronger and faster progress.

? WHAT IF OUR SCHEDULE IS LIMITED?

We understand that families have commitments. We will work with you to find a plan that balances clinical recommendations with realistic availability.

Your Provider will provide you with a school note if your child needs to start or end their day with ABA therapy.

? HOW MANY DAYS PER WEEK WILL MY CHILD RECEIVE THERAPY?

Most children receive ABA therapy 5-days a week (Monday-Friday). Occasionally, alternative schedules may be considered, but that will be at the discretion of your Provider.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

? MY ASSESSMENT SAYS MY CHILD NEEDS 35 HOURS OF THERAPY? CAN I JUST DO 10?

As a medically necessary treatment, it is essential to attend therapy in the correct dosage. Data shows that more intensive and consistent ABA therapy results in the most efficient and lasting progress.

Attending therapy at the incorrect dosage may cause increases of behavior, stalled progress, or prolonged need to attend ABA.

? HOW LONG WILL MY CHILD NEED ABA?

Length of services varies. Some children receive therapy for a few years, while others transition sooner as independence increases.

? HOW IS PROGRESS MEASURED?

Progress is tracked through data collection and regular review of goals. Your BCBA will share updates and discuss adjustments as needed.

? WHAT IF A NEW PRIORITY FOR OUR FAMILY EMERGES AND I'D LIKE TO SHIFT THE FOCUS OF MY CHILD'S ABA THERAPY?

Changing priorities is a natural part of your therapeutic ABA journey. As your needs change and new areas of priority are identified let your provider know so that they can adjust your child's plan.





OUR COMMITMENT TO YOUR FAMILY

At Headstart Health, we believe in:

- ✓ **Clinically Appropriate Recommendations**
- ✓ **Clear and Honest Communication**
- ✓ **Strong Partnerships with Families**
- ✓ **Supporting Meaningful, Lasting Progress**

ABA therapy works best when families and providers work together. We are here to guide you through each step with structure, transparency, and care.

Together, we build progress that lasts.



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