

NAVIGATING ABA THERAPY

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Getting a Lay of the Land: What is ABA?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is all around us and we often don't even realize it... As you took your first steps as a child and your parents cheered you on, leading you to toddle further ahead—that was ABA! If you have been pulled over for speeding, causing you to be more cautious thereafter—that was ABA! ABA is simply the application of behavioral principles to teach, shape, and increase adaptive skills and to reduce inappropriate behaviors. Strengths are built upon and deficits are replaced with skills in order to help the individual be more successful in his or her environment.

ABA therapy is very different than any other therapy—it is very individualized for each client; however many aspects are consistent across cases:

- * *ABA is most effective when intensive*—Clients receive services for several hours each week, depending in level of need, insurance approval, and logistics, though intensity is typically between 6 and 35 hours per week, spread across 2 to 5 days.
- * *ABA can be implemented anywhere*—Although ABA is able to be applied in any setting, due to COVID-19 and recent changes in insurance, almost all ABA services at Beacon have transitioned to an exclusive clinic-based model. If we are able to offer in-home or school/daycare services again in the future, we will let you know; any cases that receive off-site ABA will be required to have at least one session per week in the office setting for supervision purposes.
- * *ABA often does not look like 'therapy'*—Therapists may work with a client by providing direct instruction and rapid trials, which is called Discrete Trial Training (DTT), or sessions may be conducted in a more naturalistic environment (NET) where the child's interests and the surrounding peers and environment are used to evoke skill building opportunities.
- * *ABA takes a scientific approach to behavior change*—Therapists collect data throughout sessions, which is analyzed and used to monitor progress and guide treatment decisions.
- * *In ABA, it is believed that all behavior serves a purpose*—It is important to determine the function of an individual's maladaptive behaviors by evaluating patterns of antecedents and consequences that occur around the behaviors. Based on this information, therapists systematically modify the environment and teach the individual more appropriate replacement behaviors.
- * *Your participation is important*—Parent training is a vital component of ABA! You will be asked to attend regular parent meetings with the supervising BCBA to review your child's progress and train you in any necessary ABA skills! Please reach out ANY time if you wish to schedule a meeting with your supervising BCBA and/or the directors!

Charting the Course: The ABA Process

The directors of Beacon Pediatric Behavioral Health (BPBH), Dr. Adrienne DeSantis King, PhD, BCBA-D, NCSP, and Dr. Paras Nabizadeh, PsyD, BCBA-D, are dually licensed and certified as both psychologists and doctoral level Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA-Ds) and have been working in the behavioral health field and in Jacksonville, Florida, serving military families for over a decade. As such, they have gained extensive experience in navigating the requirements of many different insurance plans and have built strong relationships with relevant care providers, which all will be helpful as you begin to navigate the process of getting your child the care that they need! Therefore, we begin every case with a meeting with either Dr. Adrienne or Dr. Paras!

Here are the steps you can expect to occur as you begin the ABA process!

1. *1 hr appointment with Dr. Adrienne or Dr. Paras; (this session will be considered under your insurance's mental health benefits (not ABA); during this meeting, we will:*
 - * Review your child's diagnostic report (it is necessary to provide a copy of the evaluation that identified your child as meeting the criteria or the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as your insurance plan requires evidence of the ASD diagnosis for coverage of ABA therapy.)
 - * Gather background history and details about the areas of concern that you have for your child, as well as goals that you wish to have addressed during ABA.
 - * Explain more about ABA services.
 - * Obtain details on your ABA scheduling needs,



2. *The doctors will request authorization from insurance for your child's ABA services. We will submit a copy of the evaluation diagnosing your child with Autism; all insurances have different requirements and you may be asked to provide additional information or take additional steps if insurance requests. Authorization may be obtained as soon as 2 weeks; however, insurance may take up to 60 days at times for approval. If you have Tricare insurance, an Autism Service Navigator (ASN) will contact you after the referral has been placed; please confirm with the ASN that you wish to receive ABA with Beacon Pediatric Behavioral Health.*
 3. *1-2 hr appointment with a BCBA at BPBH; during this meeting, we will:*
 - * *Conduct a 'goals assessment; with your child to probe his/her strengths and weaknesses and determine areas that may benefit from being included on your child's ABA treatment plan*
 - * *Complete additional paperwork and any measures required by insurance for authorization*
 4. *The BCBA will develop and submit the treatment plan to insurance for approval; this can take anywhere from 2-6 weeks, depending on your insurance.*
 5. *The directors will collaborate with you to assign therapists to your child's treatment team and determine an ABA schedule. Dr. Adrienne DeSantis coordinates ABA schedules. Please feel free to reach out via text to get the process started at (904) 800-8543! If your child receives speech, PT, and/or OT from our partner, North Florida Therapy Center, next door, we are happy to coordinate the schedule with their providers as well! Please let us know!*
 6. *If you are active duty military, Tricare requires enrollment into the ECHO program and EFMP in order to receive ABA services. Please let us know if so, and we are happy to assist you in the process! Tricare will only allow 90 days for ECHO/EFMP to get submitted and will halt ABA if not received with 90 days.*
 7. *Once ABA is started, most insurance plans require updated treatment plans every 6 months, as well as parent completion of additional measures. We will reach out to you periodically when that time comes.*
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Setting Sail: Starting ABA

Please visit our website at www.beaconpediatric.com/forms and review and sign the ABA policies form! This will provide you with important information about ABA services! On your child's first day of ABA, you may be able to join briefly at the start of session; however, for HIPAA reasons we are not able to allow parents to remain during the entirety of the ABA sessions. Parents are welcome to wait in the lobby or car, or leave the clinic and return 10 minutes before session end time. Please send the following items that will remain in your child's ABA bin at the clinic: (your therapist will inform you when supplies run low so that you may replenish; approximately once a month): 1 roll of disinfectant/antibacterial wipes, 1 food storage container (approximately 8 cups in size), 1 bag non-perishable edible reinforcer that will last at least a month (if applicable), 1-2 changes of clothes (shirt, shorts/pants, socks, underwear/pull ups/diaper, if applicable). Your BCBA will inform you if other materials may be needed related to your child's treatment program (e.g., communication devices, 'chewy' items, food for feeding targets, toileting materials/additional changes of clothes (if potty training), etc.). We recommend sending your child to each session with a bag/backpack that contains items listed above, as well as a lunch and any necessary utensils/plates (if present during lunch hours; snacks (non-'junk'), and a drink/water bottle. Please do not send toys or 'favorite' items from home that could become easily lost/broken.

The Crew on Board: Your ABA Team

Our collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to services will ensure that your child gets the most comprehensive level of care. A team approach is utilized for every ABA case at Beacon. Find out about our providers below!

- * The directors of Beacon, Dr. Adrienne DeSantis King, PhD, BCBA-D, NCSP, and Dr. Paras Nabizadeh, PsyD, BCBA-D, are dually licensed and certified as both psychologists and doctoral level Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA-Ds). Dr. Adrienne and Dr. Paras communicate regularly with all clients and their treatment team and assist in facilitating your child's services by coordinating his or her care, both at Beacon as well as by connecting you to resources, supports, and services outside of our agency's doors.
- * Your child will be assigned a BCBA, who will conduct your child's 'goals assessment' and develop and periodically update your child's treatment plan. The BCBA is responsible for monitoring your child's progress towards his or her treatment goals and supervising the therapists on your child's treatment team. At times, the BCBA may provide direct therapies and parent training as well.
- * The BCBA may have an assistant level analyst, a BCaBA, on the team to support them in their role and provide services as times as well.
- * Most of your child's direct ABA therapy will be provided by a team of Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs), who have training and certification in ABA services. Depending on the number of weekly ABA hours your child receives, there may be between 1 to 4 RBTs on their case.



We look forward to working with you and your child!