

Preparing Your Child for Their First ABA Session

What early sessions usually look like, and ideas to talk through with your team beforehand.

Introduction

Starting ABA is a big step, and it's natural to feel hopeful, nervous, or both. Your child may also have feelings about meeting new people and trying something unfamiliar. This guide describes what early sessions usually look like and offers ideas you can discuss with your BCBA as you prepare.

What Early Sessions Usually Look Like

Early sessions often focus on getting to know your child rather than formal teaching. They may include:

- **Building rapport and trust:** the team member works on becoming a safe, enjoyable person for your child
- **Learning your child's interests:** what they are drawn to and what makes them smile
- **Noticing strengths and preferences:** what your child already does well
- **A comfortable pace:** routines and structure are introduced gradually

Depending on your child's plan, some early sessions may also include parts of an assessment. Your BCBA will explain what to expect.

Talking With Your Child About ABA

Simple, positive explanations that fit your child's age and communication style often work well. You might mention new people, new activities, and what will happen, using words, pictures, or whatever communication your child uses. Your BCBA can help you think through what to say.

Ideas to Discuss With Your BCBA Before the First Visit

- Whether photos of the clinic or team members could help your child know what to expect
- Whether a brief introduction before the first session is possible
- Whether a simple visual schedule would be helpful
- Sensory sensitivities, comfort items, or routines the team should know about
- The time of day your child tends to feel most comfortable

Services, goals, and progress are individualized. Nothing on this page guarantees a specific result, timeline, or authorization.

Your Role During Early Sessions

- **Share what you know:** your child's likes, dislikes, and what helps them feel safe
- **Ask questions:** any time something is unclear
- **Talk through involvement:** whether you will stay nearby, in the room, or step away, based on your child's needs and the plan

When Your Child Has Big Feelings

It's common for children to feel hesitant, clingy, quiet, or upset during the first few sessions. Adjusting to something new takes time, and every child's pace is different. Team members generally:

- Move at your child's pace
- Use your child's interests to build connection
- Keep expectations low at first
- Pay attention to signs that your child needs a break

After the First Session

- Check in with the team about how the session went
- Share anything you noticed that might help future sessions
- Give yourself space to process your own feelings, too

If you have concerns at any point, before, during, or after a session, please speak up. Your team wants to hear from you.

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