

Optum Health Education™

Autism Spectrum Disorder and Behavioral Treatment Approaches

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Disclosures

Disclosure

- We have nothing to disclose.

Learning objectives

At the end of this educational activity, participants should be able to:

- Examine the objectives and significance of a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation.
- Explain the pivotal role of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services as an effective treatment modality for individuals diagnosed with Autism and how it can be integrated with other therapeutic interventions.
- Describe the potential pathways for transitioning from higher levels of care to ABA-focused interventions.

What is Autism?

What is Autism?

Autism is a
complex
neurobiological
disorder

- Onset occurs before 3 years of age
- A range of abilities and disabilities
 - Communication abilities
 - Social interaction impairments
 - Restrictive and repetitive behaviors
- Impairs and limits everyday functioning
- Lifelong disability
- May include comorbid Intellectual disability

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

The essential features of ASD

- Persistent impairment in reciprocal social communication and social interaction
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests or activities
- Symptoms present from early childhood
- Symptoms limit or impair everyday functioning
- Symptoms not better explained by other diagnosis



American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition: DSM-5*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing; 2013.

Comorbid Diagnosis and rule in/rule out

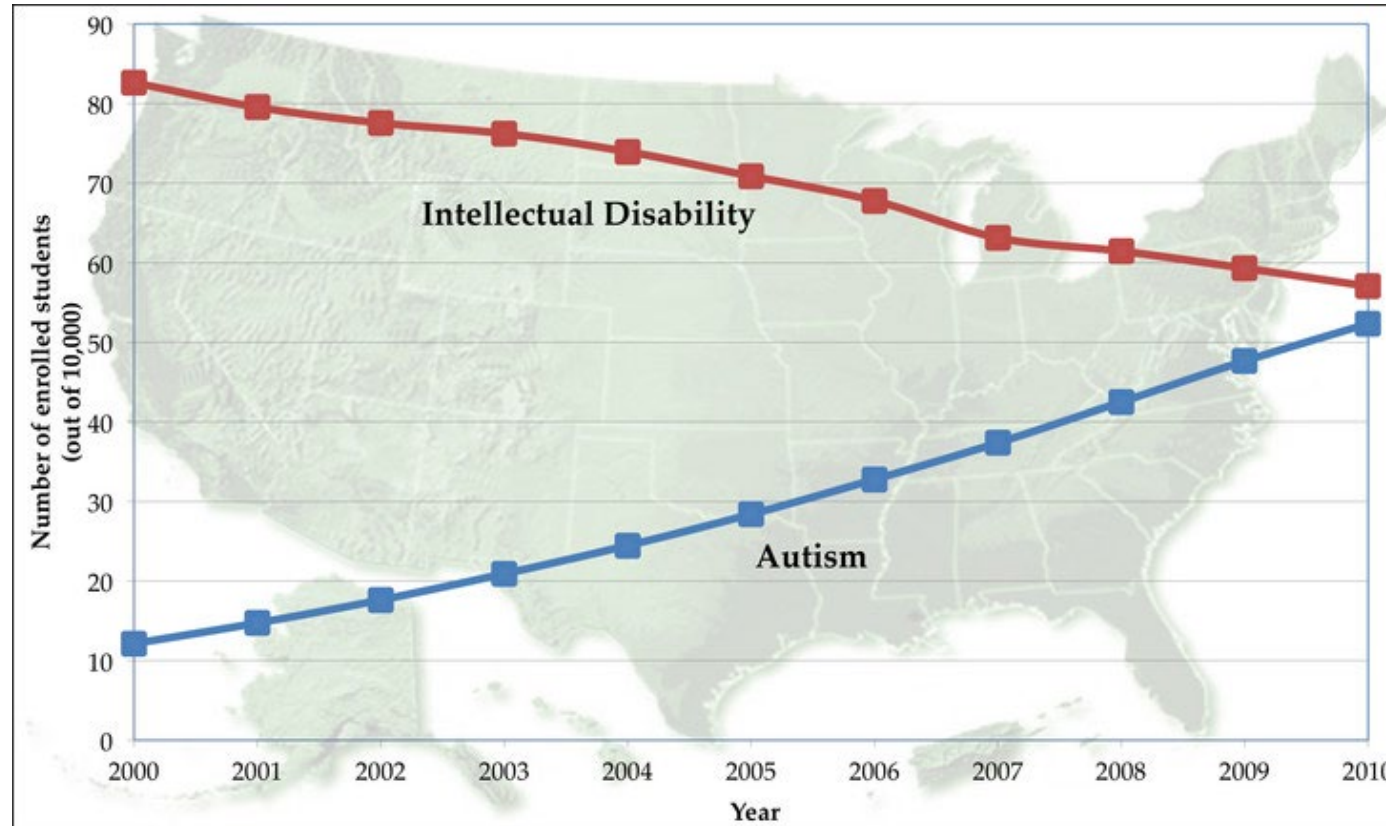
A Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluation is recommended to ensure appropriate diagnosis, as differential diagnosis is key to optimal treatment.

- Autism must be differentiated from other developmental disorders such as: Learning disorders, sensory impairments, attachment disorders, OCD, intellectual disability or developmental delay, selective mutism, ADHD, etc.
- Children who have comorbid intellectual disabilities need to show social and communication deficits that are more severe or delayed than other adaptive functions.
- Language delays or selective language can occur with developmental language disorders and selective mutism; It's important to review other potential symptoms of ASD to rule-in or out diagnosis.
- ASD can commonly co-occur with ADHD, anxiety, and intellectual disabilities its important to assess for those conditions as well.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What is autism spectrum disorder? cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html. Updated March 31, 2022. Accessed May 16, 2022.

American Academy of Pediatrics. Caring for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A practical resource toolkit for clinicians, 3rd edition. Accessed August 4, 2023

Intellectual Disability and Autism



Penn State study reviewed 6.2 million children

This graph shows the number of students (per 10,000) diagnosed with autism (blue) and intellectual disability (red) in special-education programs in the United States from 2000 to 2010.

The increase in autism diagnoses during this period was offset by decreases in the diagnosis of intellectual disability, suggesting that shifting patterns of diagnosis may be responsible for increases in autism diagnosis.

Diagnostic Tools

Optum Supplemental Clinical Criteria recommends:

- Standard parent- or clinician-rated screening instruments for Autism
- Formal examination of language, cognitive, and adaptive abilities and sensory status
- Use of a standard psychiatric assessment for Autism
- Observation tools used to confirm an Autism Diagnosis
- Interviews with individual and family
- Thorough review of history
- Systematic attention to the areas relevant to differential diagnosis, with specific attention to as to whether social communication skills fall below the individual's developmental level. This is especially important when there is comorbid Global Developmental Delay or Intellectual Disability

*Diagnostic Evaluations need to be comprehensive, as there be confirmation bias if only ASD tools are utilized

Autism and other conditions



Behavioral health

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Communication disorders
- Intellectual disabilities
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Bipolar disorder
- Trauma related disorders
- Learning Disorders
- Motoric challenges



Medical

- Seizures/Epilepsy
- Down syndrome
- Genetic abnormalities
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Sleep challenges
- Food related challenges

Source: Autism Speaks. Medical conditions associated with autism. autismspeaks.org/medical-conditions-associated-autism. Accessed May 16, 2022.

Importance of ongoing reassessment

Using certain standardized measures can help differentiate progress due to typically developmental progress vs treatment.

If there is a decline in standardized scores across time it may indicate:

- Comorbid diagnosis
- Lack of progress
- Typical developmental growth that isn't occurring
- Inaccurate initial diagnosis

Facts about ASD:

About

1 in 36

children is diagnosed with ASD.¹

ASD occurs in

all

racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups.¹

Boys are nearly

4x

more likely than girls to have ASD.¹

ASD can be diagnosed by

age 2

and can sometimes be detected at 18 months or younger.

Early intervention

treatment services can greatly improve a child's development.²

Early diagnosis and intervention can also reduce the cost of lifelong care by

2/3

compared with the cost of not receiving early help.²

The exact cause of ASD is

unknown.²

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Data and statistics on autism spectrum disorder. cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html. Updated April 4, 2023. Accessed July 5, 2023.

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What is autism spectrum disorder? cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html. Updated March 31, 2022. Accessed May 16, 2022.

Treatment

Medical and behavioral benefits for autism

Treatment of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can require access to both medical benefits and mental health benefits



Behavioral benefits

- Psychiatric management
- Family therapy
- Individual therapy
- Applied behavior analysis (ABA)
- Social Skills development



Medical benefits

- Pediatric neurology
- Developmental pediatrics
- Occupational therapy
- Speech therapy – especially with an AAC device
- Gastrointestinal/Feeding

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

- Very little to no evidence of benefit
- 95% of parents use some type of CAM therapy
 - *Levy and Hyman, Child Adol Psychiatr Clin N Am. 2008 October*
 - [Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use in a Large Pediatric Autism Sample | Pediatrics | American Academy of Pediatrics \(aap.org\)](#)
- Gluten-free diets:
 - 88% of gluten-free foods for children are unhealthy
 - *Pediatrics, July 2018*
- Hyperbaric Oxygen Chamber
- Other therapies might include herbal supplements, vitamins, animal therapies, art therapies

AMA Journal of Ethics, Complementary and Alternative Treatments for Autism part 2. updated April 2015, accessed 08/04/2023

Psychopharmacology

To Treat Comorbidities

- Anxiety / phobias
- OCD
- ADHD
- Depression
- Bipolar disorder
- Disruptive behavior

To Treat Autism Irritability and Aggression

- Risperidone
- Aripiprazole



School Services After Preschool

IEP Under:

- Autism
- Intellectual Disability
- Speech / Language Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Vision / Hearing Impairment
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Multiple Disabilities
- Emotional Disability
- Traumatic Brain Injury

504 Plans:

- ADHD
- Chronic Illness
- Anxiety / Depression
- High-functioning Autism / Asperger
- Milder impairments that do not reach criteria for IEP

Intensive behavioral therapy including applied behavior analysis

Intensive behavioral therapy (IBT)

Umbrella term for a variety of outpatient behavioral interventions to treat ASD

Applied behavior analysis (ABA)

- Most common intensive behavioral therapy for autism spectrum disorder
- Interventions to reduce problem behavior and develop alternative behaviors and skills



ABA is an Umbrella Approach



- Discrete Trial Instruction
- Pivotal Response Training/Treatment
- Script/Script Fading
- Self-Management
- Functional Assessment
- Incidental Teaching
- Modeling
- Functional Communication Training
- Chaining
- Shaping
- Errorless Learning
- Direct Instruction
- Verbal Behavior
- Video Modeling
- Lovaas
- Peer mediated social skills training
- Pivotal Response Training
- Precision Teaching
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

ABA is a comprehensive approach

Goal: Promote optimal functioning in all natural environments

The provider, also known as the ABA supervisor or board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA), will involve and coordinate care between all caregivers and other treating professionals in treatment:



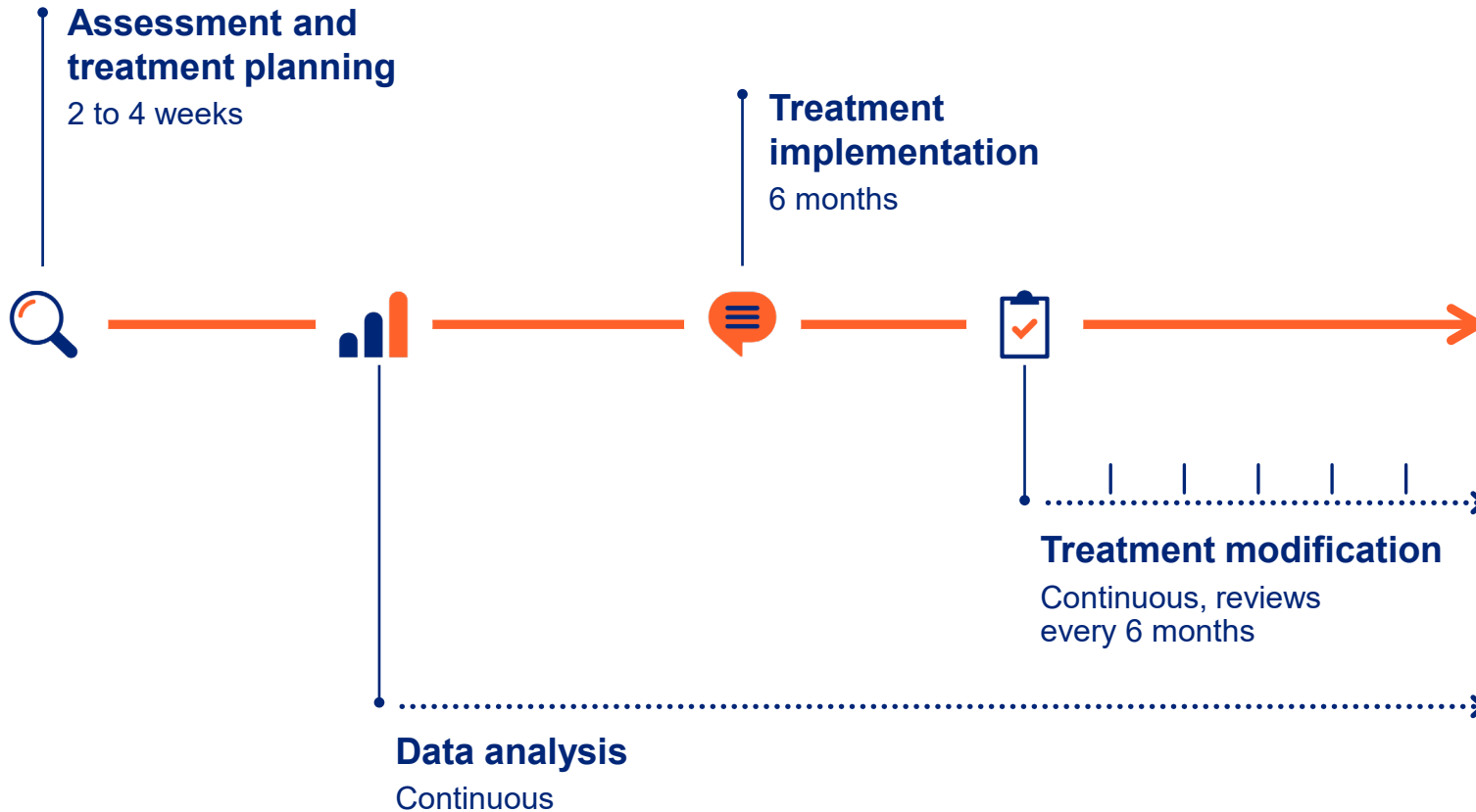
Elements of ABA treatment



Supervision by a behavior analyst

- Description of behavior at baseline
- Direct assessment, analysis and adjustments to the treatment plan
- Direct observational data
- Direct support
- Establish small units of behavior to build upon
- Function-based and value-focused intervention
- Management of the treatment environments
- Training of family and other involved professionals
- Coordination of Care with other treating individuals
- Written treatment protocols that are implemented repeatedly, frequently and consistently across multiple environments

Treatment review process



A day in the life



Jaden's journey

6-year-old boy diagnosed with Autism, receiving ABA and in Kindergarten. Lives with parents and younger sibling.

Stock photo used.



Mornings

BCBA has worked with parents to set up a visual schedule to help Jaden get to school and finish morning routine.



School

Jaden attends the local public school from 8-3. He has an IEP in place that the BCBA gave input on.



Home

Jaden has ABA every weekday from 3:30-6:00. Sessions focus on reducing behaviors and increasing social communication.



School continued

The BCBA meets with the teachers once per week to work on behavior plans and coordinating to ensure treatment is similar.



Home continued

The BCBA meets with Jaden's parents 2xs per month to teach them how to manage behaviors in the home and continue skill development. Parents learn skills to help manage homework, dinner, and bedtime routines.



Supervision

The BCBA attends sessions in the home 1xs per week with the front-line staff to ensure appropriate progress and problem solve as needed.

Questions to Consider for stepdown to ABA

- Is Autism the primary diagnosis that needs to be targeted? Or are the deficits from Autism impacting the members ability to participate in standard BH treatment?
- What is the member's journey to an Autism Diagnosis? What has already been tried?
- ABA requires high levels of caregiver engagement, are caregivers motivated to engage in treatment?
- How has member benefited from other services?
- ABA is meant to target the core deficits of Autism, are those the areas needing to be addressed with the member?

When is ABA appropriate

Discuss Case Examples

Q&A