

SUCCESS ON THE SPECTRUM

**A Parent's Guide to ABA**

## The Numbers Are Staggering

According to the CDC, approximately 1 out of 59 American children has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). According to Autism Speaks, the number of Americans with ASD has increased tenfold in the past 40 years.

As a parent of a child with Autism, finding help can be difficult. You may have tried to manage on your own but realized that you need more support in order to truly help your child. However, it is challenging to know where to turn. What type of treatment does your child need? Which provider is the best?

Many parents seek help from the public school system. However, the teachers have no specialized training and split their attention among many other children. Speech therapy is an option. However, with only 1 or 2 sessions per week, it is nearly impossible for your child to catch up to their peers. You can also seek occupational therapy, which assists with motor functioning and some sensory deficits, but it does not address behavior and social skills deficits common in those with ASD.

If your child has been diagnosed with Autism, it is likely that your doctor recommended Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). As a parent new to the world of Autism, ABA is probably not something you are familiar with. This guide was designed to assist you in understanding what ABA is and how it can assist you and your family.



## What is ABA Therapy?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a science-based therapy that improves social behavior and communication. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychological Association, Autism society of America, the US Surgeon General and other medical experts all endorse ABA as the most effective, evidence-based treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Research shows that the earlier ABA treatment begins, the better the long-term outcomes.

Using a scientific assessment that compares a child to his or her peers, a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) can identify a child's social deficits. In addition, BCBAs seek out the input of parents, teachers, and other caregivers in order to form a complete evaluation. Subsequently, they create individualized programs that address those deficits and help the child reach toward those missing milestones.

Under the supervision of the Behavior Analyst, a Behavior Technician will work directly with the child and teach them new skills by breaking them down into small steps. The child is given instructions and prompts to encourage successful performance. The technician will slowly fade those prompts until the child can complete the task independently. Any achievement that the child makes is immediately reinforced, increasing the likelihood that the child will engage in that skill again. The Behavior Technician constantly acquires data as demands and responses are given. Behavior Analysts regularly review the data to determine if the current method of instruction is effective.



## Choosing the Right ABA Provider

**1.** The Behavioral Health Center of Excellence (BHCOE) is the only organization that evaluates an ABA clinic's standards and quality of treatment. A BHCOE auditor thoroughly reviews a clinic's records, programs, and behavior plans. They directly observe the technicians with the children. They compare the clinic's employee turn-over rate, education levels, and pay rates and benefits to the national average. They evaluate a clinic's operations manual and training schedule. They also conduct parent interviews and staff interviews.

Those facilities that meet their standards of science-based, high-quality ABA are given an accreditation. As such, parents can be confident that clinics holding the BHCOE accreditation have been thoroughly investigated and determined to be providing the highest quality services. However, the BHCOE accreditation is difficult to obtain and is not required by any medical licensing agency, so very few providers actually seek it out.

**2.** There is extensive research proving that parent involvement increases the rate of progress. Parents should be in constant contact with the BCBA so they are able to discuss problem behaviors as they occur. High quality ABA providers value parent input and encourage them to participate in their child's treatment. High quality clinics should also offer parent training. Staff should answer parent questions openly and non-defensively.



## Choosing the right ABA Provider (continued)

**3.** Children should be happy in their environment. Certainly, there may be a little anxiety when your child first starts at a new center, but over time you should expect him or her to bond with the staff and enjoy going. If fear is an ongoing issue, look for signs of abuse or neglect.

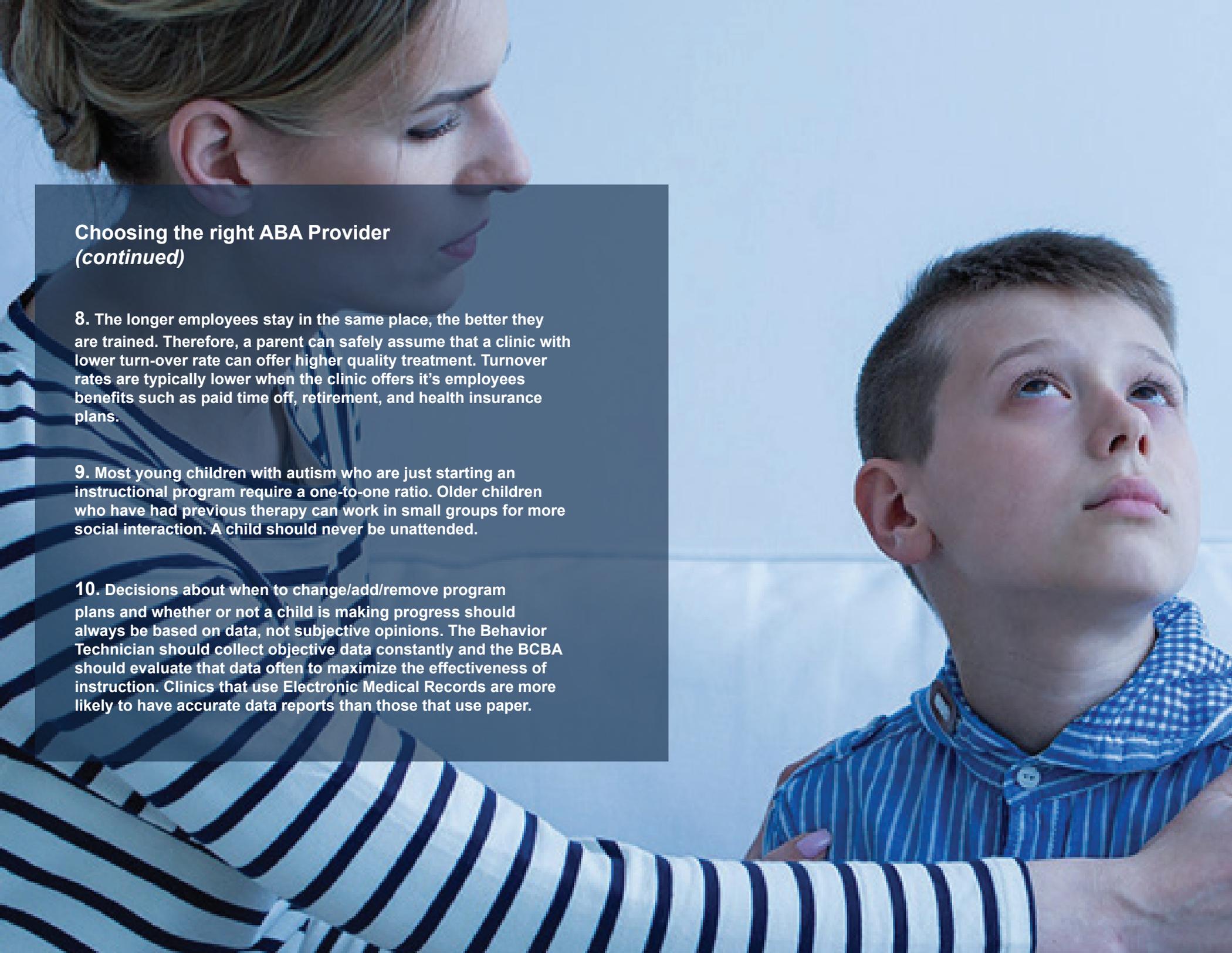
**4.** Reinforcing (rewarding) a desired behavior has been scientifically proven to be a more effective method of behavior modification than punishing an undesirable behavior. An ABA clinic should never put a child in isolation, spank them, withhold food, or yell at them. Punishment programs should be a last resort for stopping an undesirable behavior.

**5.** Regardless of the accolades on the wall of a center, you need to trust your own intuition about whether it's a good fit for your child. Every child with Autism is unique, and you want to ensure that the center you choose is meeting your child's specific requirements to help him or her thrive.

**6.** While there is much data that proves that ABA therapy is beneficial to every age group and every severity of Autism, no center should promise that your child will be ready for a mainstream school in a fixed amount of time. Every child progresses at his or her own pace. If center staff is trying to sell you a guarantee, don't believe them.

**7.** Anyone with a high school diploma can be a Behavior Technician. The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) offers specialized training courses. After passing a certification exams, a Behavior Technician can become registered. It is important the the majority of an ABA's behavior technicians be properly trained and hold this certification. Although a Registered Behavioral Technician (RBT) may be the person who is with your child daily, a licensed Board-Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) should be supervising them.



A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a black and white striped shirt, is looking towards a young boy. The boy is also wearing a striped shirt and is looking upwards and to the right. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## Choosing the right ABA Provider (continued)

8. The longer employees stay in the same place, the better they are trained. Therefore, a parent can safely assume that a clinic with lower turn-over rate can offer higher quality treatment. Turnover rates are typically lower when the clinic offers its employees benefits such as paid time off, retirement, and health insurance plans.

9. Most young children with autism who are just starting an instructional program require a one-to-one ratio. Older children who have had previous therapy can work in small groups for more social interaction. A child should never be unattended.

10. Decisions about when to change/add/remove program plans and whether or not a child is making progress should always be based on data, not subjective opinions. The Behavior Technician should collect objective data constantly and the BCBA should evaluate that data often to maximize the effectiveness of instruction. Clinics that use Electronic Medical Records are more likely to have accurate data reports than those that use paper.

## Success On The Spectrum

Success On The Spectrum was founded by an Autism mom who wanted to maximize the potential for progress for her daughter. She created the perfect combination of the most effective methods of ABA science, a fun environment, community outings, safety, and high parent involvement.

Come explore an ABA center that makes both parents and child happy!

Our goal is to help children develop self-control, independence, and a positive self-concept. Our long term objective is to teach life skills that help our clients become fulfilled adults in mainstream society. There is no guarantee that every child is capable of becoming an independent adult, but we believe that every child should be given the best opportunity to achieve it.

We believe that quality is the key to a child's success. In an industry with little regulation, SOS has created a manual of best ABA practice guidelines for our franchise. Our operational standards ensure that our RBTs receive quality training, our BCBAs provide close supervision, and that our ABA programs are informed by the latest science. We are proud to hold the rare BHCOE Accreditation and boast our standards of excellence.



## The SOS Programs

SOS programs focus on the verbal- behavior approach of ABA and put emphasis on language development and socialization. We use a mixture of Discrete Trial Training (DTT) and Natural Environment Training (NET), according to the child's needs.

Our hand-picked staff hold weekly training meetings to ensure a deeper understanding of the science of human behavior. Each staff member is thoroughly background checked and holds CPR and Safety-Care certifications. Technician-to-child instruction ratios are 1:1 or 1:2. BCBAs directly supervise each child's program implementation each week and make changes or give additional training to staff as needed.

When it comes to righting a child's ship, we need all hands on deck! Parent involvement is a requirement. Our BCBAs frequently meet with parents to discuss program creation and implementation. In addition, parents have unrestricted access to our online data collection system and can view a child's live progress at any time.

Each week, we will provide training sessions to parents, grandparents, siblings and babysitters. Our lessons help caregivers to manage problem behaviors at home. We can help implement a routine that will ease your daily struggles. We will also help establish functional communication between you and your child.



## The SOS Programs (continued)

We are unique in that we offer three treatment options:

### 1. In-Center:

Our nautical centers are open Monday through Friday 8:00am-4:00pm, year-round. Choose to attend full-time or part-time. In center clients are not required to be vaccinated or potty-trained to attend.

Our centers are designed to get your child “school ready”. Clients who are under 5 years old learn a daily routine and to follow directions. Older children learn social skills that will allow them to be included with their future school peers. Children with aggression or emotional outbursts are taught self-calming strategies.

We believe that learning shouldn’t just occur at a desk located in a cold treatment room, but in a variety of environments and locations. Children learn best when they are having fun! Throughout the day, children alternate between private lessons and group activities. Our centers are equipped with private staterooms, mock classrooms, and social activity rooms. Each new lesson is taught through individual play and practiced in a peer group. Our technicians integrate sensory activities to engage a child’s attention and incorporate group games to encourage social interaction. We design our program to deliver a happy experience. Children are motivated to interact with our staff, which encourages the learning process.

While in our center, children are grouped according to their developmental abilities, so that higher functioning children do not mimic the behaviors of those with fewer social skills. Progress is celebrated as children “graduate” from one crew to the next!

Success On The Spectrum’s ABA program also incorporates field trips! Each lesson learned within our center is practiced in different environments. We promote transition tolerance by associating fun activities with new settings. Parents and siblings are encouraged to come along on field trips, but are not required to.

Safety is a priority. All centers have restricted access to children’s areas. Staff-to-student ratios are 1:1 or 1:2. Each center is equipped with state-of-the-art video surveillance systems. Parents are welcome to enjoy our viewing room, where you can discreetly watch your child and therapist working together.



*We Offer Three Treatment Options (continued):*

## **2. At Home:**

For older children who already attend school, our technicians can travel to your home Mondays through Thursdays 4:30pm-6:30pm. Saturday sessions are available at select locations.

In the home setting, we can focus on self-care and independence skills. We also travel with you on community outings to teach functional living skills, such as the grocery store.

## **3. In School:**

Special needs children sometimes require a little extra assistance. Teachers are not always able to interrupt a lesson to provide that extra help.

Our technicians are specially trained to discreetly collect data within the classroom while optimizing the learning experience and encouraging growth in your child's social skills.





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**[successonthespectrum.com](http://successonthespectrum.com)**