

Snapshots of ABA therapy

I've been doing a lot of research and reading today, scouring the internet for information about ABA therapy. I've seen a lot of stories and posts from a lot of people. Some of them are parents, some are autistic people, and some are ABA therapists themselves. What I've come across doesn't surprise me, but it does sadden me. Here are some of the things I've found.

Example 1: therapists talking about their experiences with burnout from long work hours.



MaleRBT 24d

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For me, I get burnt out by the long individual sessions, not the weekly hours. The 40+ hour weeks are great, and I'm fortunate to get those hours since I know some ABA companies aren't as generous.

But any sessions over 3 hours is draining for me. I bring high energy and enthusiasm to session, but it's a challenge to do that for 4+ hours, especially when your session involves kiddos whose primary reinforcers are chase and being lifted up into the air lol.

I'd rather do a 2 hour + 3 hour + 3 hour session over a 4 hour + a 4 hour session in a day.

I know some in this sub have mentioned they do 6+ hour in-home sessions and I couldn't do it.

👍 10 📄 Reply



anonturtle123 24d

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Individual sessions make the difference. I could work 40 hours per week doing 2 hour sessions with each client and not feel burnt out. But if work 3-4 hours at a time with one client 5 days a week... now that's going to burn me out really quickly. I also think it makes it hard to have a lasting therapeutic and professional relationship with the client and family.... starts to feel more like babysitting and the kids get burnt out too. I have coworkers who work 8 hour days 5 days a week with one client and IDK how they do it!

“I know some in this sub have mentioned they do 6+ hour in-home sessions and I couldn’t do it,”

“I have coworkers who work 8 hour days 5 days a week with one client and IDK how they do it!”

If neurotypical, adult therapists are burned out from doing so many hours of ABA, what on earth makes anyone think that such intense hours are appropriate for young autistic kids?

Example 2: a mother talking about having to ignore her child’s distress in the name of following through with ABA principles. In response, an ABA therapist assuring her that “it gets better with time.”



Juju\$ 👑
@_mamiju



KJ has been having ABA therapy at home for 2 hours & it is so hard having to ignore him while he’s crying 😭 but I know he needs this

2:36 PM · 4/30/20 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

5 Likes



Isa @Isababe7 · 4d
Replying to @_mamiju



It’s okay boo! I’m an ABA therapist & trust, It gets better with time. Small sacrifices now that will have BIG rewards in a few weeks 💙

Crying is a sign of distress. And yes, ignoring a crying child will eventually ‘extinguish the behavior’ of crying. So in that sense, sure, “it gets better with time,” if your definition of better is based on externally observable reactions, and not the child’s actual emotions or internal state.

ABA teaches autistic children that the way they feel doesn't matter. So they learn to hide their emotions, put on a false appearance in order to get things over with more quickly. That is not 'progress.' That is abuse.

Example 3: a behavioral chart in an app designed for use in ABA therapy.



One of the 'behaviors' here which is being targeted for extinction is hair twirling. *Hair twirling*. Which is so clearly and obviously a harmless stim. There's absolutely no reason to try and stop this person from twirling their hair.

Another 'behavior' being targeted is "task refusal." Why not ask the reason behind the refusal? Why not examine the ways in which your demands are not in line with the autistic person's autonomy and self-direction? This chart is literally saying that the goal here is to

get to the point where the autistic person is compliant and no longer refuses to do a task- *not taking into account the reasons they were uncomfortable with it in the first place, just making them do it anyway.*

The most telling part of this chart is the bottom part, where it indicates some “replacement behaviors.” The first thing listed is compliance. *Compliance.* (Do what I say. Quiet hands. No hair twirling.) The only acceptable behavior here is to simply give in to what the therapist wants. To give up, to stop expressing any negative emotions you’re feeling.

This entire chart reduces a person to their external behaviors, without asking why those behaviors exist in the first place. Maybe this person is injuring themselves because they’re frustrated and overwhelmed by your demands. Maybe they’re eloping because they’re stressed out and need to escape.

Behavior is communication, and if all you’re doing is trying to get rid of behavior without addressing the root causes, you’re not meeting the child’s needs- you’re ignoring them.

~Eden 🐸