

ABA Curriculum for Autistic Learners

Three tracks: Ages 6-9, Ages 10-13, Ages 14+

Important: This is a planning framework, not a replacement for an individualized assessment. It should be adapted and supervised by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) together with the learner, family, and school team.

1. Guiding Principles

- **Neurodiversity-affirming:** The goal is to build skills, independence, and well-being, not to make a child "look less autistic." Harmless stimming, special interests, and sensory preferences are respected.
- **Assent-based:** Learners can say "no," "stop," or "break," and those requests are honored and taught as skills. Sessions pause when a learner shows distress.
- **Strengths and interest-based:** Use special interests as teaching material and reinforcers.
- **Functional skills first:** Prioritize skills that improve safety, communication, choice-making, and quality of life.
- **Positive reinforcement:** Avoid punishment and compliance-for-its-own-sake. Teach alternatives rather than only reducing behavior.
- **Communication is a right:** Every learner has access to a communication system (speech, AAC, PECS, sign, or text) at all times.
- **Family and learner voice:** Goals are chosen with the learner (when possible) and caregivers, and reviewed regularly.

2. Program Structure (All Ages)

Component	Details
Intake and assessment	Interviews, observation, and tools such as VB-MAPP, ABLLS-R, AFLS, Vineland, or PEAK. Include sensory, medical, and communication profiles.

Component	Details
Goal setting	8-12 active goals per term across domains. Each has a baseline, target, and mastery criterion.
Teaching methods	Natural Environment Teaching (NET), Discrete Trial Training (DTT) for new skills, task analysis, chaining, shaping, video modeling, visual supports, and Pivotal Response Training (PRT).
Data	Trial-by-trial, frequency, duration, and ABC data. Graph weekly; review every 2 weeks.
Mastery criterion	Typically 80-90% correct across 3 consecutive sessions and 2+ people/settings.
Generalization	Teach across people, places, materials, and instructions. Probe in home, school, and community.
Maintenance	Re-probe mastered skills monthly, then quarterly.
Review cycle	Formal review every 3-6 months with family and team.

Core Skill Domains

1. Communication and language
 2. Social and play skills
 3. Emotional regulation and coping
 4. Daily living and self-care
 5. Academic and learning readiness
 6. Safety and community skills
 7. Self-advocacy and independence (emphasized in later tracks)
 8. Vocational and transition skills (14+)
-

3. Track A: Ages 6-9 (Foundations)

Focus: Functional communication, play and early social skills, learning readiness, self-care routines, and emotional awareness.

Domain 1: Communication and Language

Skill area	Sample goals
Requesting (manding)	Request items, actions, help, and breaks using speech, AAC, or pictures across 20+ items.
Labeling and describing	Label common objects, actions, and feelings; describe using 2-3 word phrases or sentences.
Answering questions	Answer "what," "who," "where" questions; progress to "why" and "how."
Conversation basics	Greet, respond to greetings, take 2-3 conversational turns on a preferred topic.
Following directions	Follow 1-2 step instructions in routines ("get your bag and sit down").
Protesting and refusing	Say "no," "stop," or "I need a break" appropriately and have it honored.

Domain 2: Social and Play Skills

- Parallel play, then cooperative play with a peer for 5+ minutes
- Turn-taking in simple games
- Joint attention: pointing, showing, and responding to a name call
- Sharing and trading materials
- Imitating peers and adults (motor, vocal, and play actions)
- Joining a group activity with one prompt

Domain 3: Emotional Regulation

- Identify 5-8 basic emotions in self and others using pictures and real-life moments
- Use a feelings scale (e.g., 1-5 scale) to rate intensity
- Request a break and use a calm-down plan (deep breaths, quiet corner, sensory tools)
- Tolerate small changes in routine using visual schedules and a "first-then" board
- Wait for 30-60 seconds with a visual timer

Domain 4: Daily Living and Self-Care

- Toileting routine (with visual task analysis)
- Handwashing, toothbrushing, dressing (zippers, buttons, shoes)
- Eating with utensils, trying new foods using gradual exposure
- Packing and unpacking a school bag
- Bedtime and morning routines using a picture schedule

Domain 5: Academic and Learning Readiness

- Sitting and attending for 5-10 minutes in structured tasks (with movement breaks built in)
- Matching, sorting, and pre-reading skills; letter-sound recognition
- Early number concepts and counting objects to 20
- Pencil grip, tracing, and writing name
- Transitioning between activities with a visual schedule
- Raising a hand or using a signal to ask for help

Domain 6: Safety

- Respond to name and "stop" in all settings
- Stay with a caregiver in public places
- Learn personal information (name, parent's name, phone number)
- Body safety: private parts, saying "no" and telling a trusted adult
- Road and street safety basics

Sample Weekly Plan (Ages 6-9, ~10 hrs/week; adjust to the child)

Day	Focus
Monday	Communication (requesting, labeling) + play skills
Tuesday	Daily living (routines) + learning readiness
Wednesday	Social skills with a peer + emotional regulation
Thursday	Academics + NET in kitchen or playground

Day	Focus
Friday	Community outing, generalization, and fun reinforcement activity

4. Track B: Ages 10-13 (Building Independence)

Focus: Expanding conversation and social understanding, emotional self-management, hygiene and puberty readiness, academic and executive function skills, and growing independence.

Domain 1: Communication and Language

Skill area	Sample goals
Conversation	Start, maintain, and end conversations; ask questions to show interest; stay on topic for 5+ turns.
Perspective-taking	Identify what others may think or feel from words, tone, and body language.
Non-literal language	Understand common idioms, jokes, and sarcasm with explicit teaching.
Self-advocacy	Ask for accommodations, clarification, quiet space, or repetition respectfully.
Digital communication	Use text/chat safely and politely; understand tone in messages.
Narrative skills	Retell events in sequence and describe a day or experience.

Domain 2: Social Skills

- Join and leave peer groups appropriately
- Handle disagreements, losing, and compromise
- Recognize friendship vs. unsafe or unkind behavior
- Understand personal space and consent (for self and others)

- Participate in group projects and clubs based on interests
- Online safety: privacy, strangers, cyberbullying
- Recognize and respond to teasing or bullying; tell a trusted adult

Domain 3: Emotional Regulation and Coping

- Identify triggers and early warning signs of stress or overwhelm
- Build a personal coping toolbox (movement, music, sensory tools, deep breathing, talking to someone)
- Use a scale (e.g., Incredible 5-Point Scale) and a self-monitoring checklist
- Manage anxiety with gradual exposure and cognitive strategies (adapted for the learner)
- Handle unexpected changes with a "Plan B" routine
- Express frustration without harm (words, drawing, writing, asking for space)

Domain 4: Daily Living and Health

- Independent hygiene routine: shower, deodorant, hair, nails, clean clothes (visual checklists)
- Puberty education: body changes, privacy, menstruation or other relevant topics (age-appropriate and delivered with family guidance)
- Simple meal preparation (sandwiches, microwave meals, snacks)
- Basic chores: laundry steps, tidying, taking out trash
- Medication and health awareness: describing symptoms to an adult
- Time management: reading clocks, using timers and alarms

Domain 5: Academic and Executive Function

- Use a planner or digital calendar for homework and tasks
- Break big tasks into steps (task analysis, checklists)
- Organize materials and backpack
- Study skills: note-taking, highlighting, using visual organizers
- Reading comprehension: main idea, inference, and summarizing
- Math word problems and money skills
- Self-monitoring attention and asking for help

Domain 6: Safety and Community

- Memorize and use emergency contacts; call or text for help
- Travel skills: walking with a buddy, reading signs, simple public transport practice
- Shopping: make a list, find items, pay, check change
- Respond appropriately to strangers and unexpected situations
- Basic first aid and fire safety

Sample Weekly Plan (Ages 10-13, ~8 hrs/week)

Day	Focus
Monday	Social skills group + conversation practice
Tuesday	Executive function and homework strategies
Wednesday	Daily living (cooking, hygiene, chores)
Thursday	Emotional regulation and coping toolbox
Friday	Community skills outing (shop, library, transit)

5. Track C: Ages 14+ (Transition to Adulthood)

Focus: Self-determination, vocational readiness, independent living, relationships, advocacy, mental health, and community participation. The learner leads goal-setting as much as possible.

Domain 1: Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination

- Understand own strengths, needs, and diagnosis in an affirming way
- Make and communicate choices about schedule, activities, and goals
- Participate in IEP/transition meetings and present own preferences
- Request workplace or school accommodations in writing and in person
- Understand rights, consent, and when and how to say no

Domain 2: Communication and Relationships

- Conversational skills with peers, adults, and in group settings

- Professional communication: email, phone calls, interviews
- Friendships and dating: respect, boundaries, consent, and healthy vs. unhealthy relationships
- Reading social context in school, work, and online environments
- Conflict resolution and repairing misunderstandings
- Digital citizenship: privacy, scams, social media safety

Domain 3: Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health

- Recognize signs of anxiety, depression, burnout, and sensory overload
- Use a personalized coping and recovery plan (including masking awareness and rest time)
- Know when and how to seek help from a counselor or trusted adult
- Build routines for sleep, exercise, nutrition, and downtime
- Manage perfectionism and transitions with self-compassion
- Build a support network (family, friends, mentors, communities)

Domain 4: Independent Living Skills

Skill area	Sample goals
Cooking and nutrition	Plan, shop for, and cook 5-10 meals independently with safety steps.
Home care	Laundry, cleaning schedule, basic repairs, and organization.
Money management	Budget, bank account, debit card use, saving, and avoiding scams.
Health management	Make appointments, refill prescriptions, describe symptoms, and track medication.
Transportation	Use public transit, rideshare safely, or prepare for driving if relevant.
Time and planning	Use a calendar app; manage weekly schedules and deadlines.
Personal documents	Know where IDs and documents are kept; understand basic forms.

Domain 5: Vocational and Career Skills

- Career interest inventories and exploration of strengths
- Job-readiness: resume, applications, interview practice (mock interviews with video feedback)
- Workplace behaviors: punctuality, following instructions, asking for clarification, taking feedback
- Job sampling: volunteering, internships, or supported employment trials
- Task analysis and checklists for job duties
- Workplace social skills: breaks, coworkers, and boundaries
- Understanding paychecks, taxes basics, and workplace rights

Domain 6: Academics and Post-Secondary Planning

- Functional academics: reading forms, calculating, writing emails
- Study strategies and time management for high school or college

- Explore options: college, vocational training, apprenticeships, day programs, or work
- Learn how to access disability services and accommodations
- Prepare for standardized or placement tests if relevant

Domain 7: Community Participation and Safety

- Navigate the community independently (shops, appointments, public spaces)
- Emergency and crisis response, including interacting with police or first responders
- Join clubs, sports, faith, or interest-based communities
- Voting and civic participation (where applicable)
- Online and offline safety, including recognizing exploitation

Sample Weekly Plan (Ages 14+, ~6-8 hrs/week)

Day	Focus
Monday	Self-advocacy and transition planning
Tuesday	Vocational skills (work-site or simulated tasks)
Wednesday	Independent living (cooking, budgeting, health)
Thursday	Social and relationship skills group
Friday	Community-based instruction and reflection

6. Teaching Strategies and Supports

- **Visual supports:** Schedules, checklists, first-then boards, social stories, and visual timers
- **Prompting:** Use least-to-most or most-to-least prompting and fade prompts systematically to avoid prompt dependence
- **Reinforcement:** Use preference assessments often. Offer choice, praise, access to interests, and natural reinforcers. Thin schedules gradually
- **Task analysis and chaining:** Break skills into small steps; use forward, backward, or total-task chaining
- **Video modeling and role-play:** For social, vocational, and safety skills
- **Behavior skills training (BST):** Instruction, modeling, rehearsal, feedback

- **Sensory-aware environments:** Reduce noise and clutter; allow sensory tools and breaks
- **Functional behavior assessment (FBA):** For challenging behavior, identify the function (escape, attention, access, sensory) and teach functional communication training (FCT) as the replacement

7. Sample Goal Format

Goal: When feeling overwhelmed in class, **[Learner]** will request a break using a break card or words in 4 out of 5 opportunities across 3 consecutive weeks, with no more than one gesture prompt.

Baseline: Requests breaks 0/5 opportunities; leaves the room or cries instead.

Teaching: Role-play, video model, and NET practice; reinforce each break request by honoring it. **Mastery:** 80% across 3 sessions, 2 settings, 2 adults.

8. Progress Monitoring and Review

Measure	How often
Session data (trial, frequency, or duration)	Every session
Graph review by BCBA	Every 2 weeks
Parent and caregiver update	Monthly
Learner feedback (preferences, comfort, goals)	Every session or monthly
Goal review and updates	Every 3-6 months
Full reassessment	Every 6-12 months

9. Family and School Collaboration

- Caregiver training sessions to practice strategies at home
- Shared visual supports across home, school, and therapy
- Regular communication log or app
- Include siblings and peers where helpful

- Coordinate with speech-language therapists, occupational therapists, teachers, and mental health professionals

10. Ethical Reminders

- Monitor for signs of distress, fatigue, or masking. Prioritize wellbeing over compliance.
- Avoid goals that suppress harmless self-regulation (stimming) or require forced eye contact.
- Give the learner real choices and honor assent withdrawal.
- Ensure all supervision, assessment, and plan changes are overseen by a qualified BCBA.
- Review goals regularly with the learner and family to confirm they are meaningful and respectful.