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# While You Wait for ABA

A Parent's Guide to Progress Before ABA Starts

**Stuck on a  
Waitlist?  
Start Here**



Chris & Ana Topham (Parents & BCBA's)

# Welcome Parent 🙌

If you're reading this, it probably means your child was recently diagnosed with autism, or you've had that gut feeling for a while and the paperwork just made it official.

Let us say this clearly:

**You didn't miss anything.**

**You're not late.**

**And you're absolutely not a bad parent.**

Most families are handed a diagnosis and then... nothing. No clear plan. No coaching. Just a waitlist.

This guide is designed to change that.



We're Chris and Ana 🙌, both Board Certified Behavior Analysts (and parents).

We've **supported hundreds of families navigating the early days after diagnosis**, and we've lived the overwhelm that comes with raising a toddler ourselves.

**Chris & Ana Topham**

BCBAs, Parents, and Founders of Celeration ABA

# The Waiting Game is Real

**Most families wait 3 to 9 months** (sometimes more) before their child actually starts ABA therapy.

And even then, let's be honest, it's common to spend weeks just adjusting schedules, meeting new providers, or figuring out whether it's even the right fit.

**That's a lot of lost time.**

## 3 Simple Things You Can Do Today

We've seen this from both sides, as BCBA's and as family. Ana's sister is autistic, and supporting her journey is part of what led us into this work.

That's why we created this guide, to give you **3 simple, powerful things you can do today** to support your child while you wait.

**Wondering if it is too soon to start?**



Or, scan the code



[Click To Watch](#)



You'll learn how to spot readiness, what early ABA really means, and how to move forward without rushing your child (or yourself).

# 1

## Get Clear on What You Want

When a diagnosis happens, most parents are **immediately told** what their child needs:

Therapies. Goals. Funding. Schedules. Evaluations.

It's a lot, and it skips something essential:

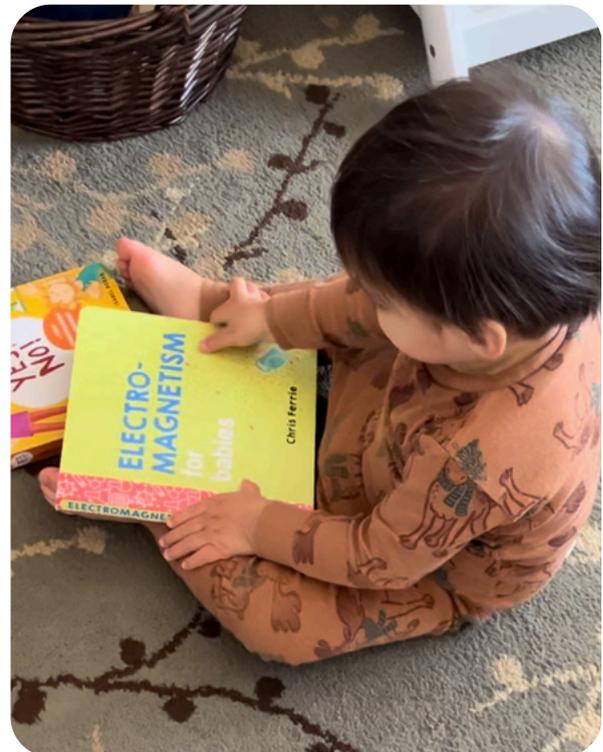
## What Do You Want?

*For your child. For your home. For your peace of mind.*

Most families are so **busy reacting to recommendations**, they never get the chance to define their own priorities. But the truth is:

**Your values should guide the plan.**

This first step is about taking 3 minutes to **get grounded**, so you don't waste weeks chasing things that don't align.



*He's either going to master electro magnetism or just eat the book. We support both paths...*



# Get Clear on What You Want

*These questions will help you right now, so you can start making progress. But they'll also help you get ready for your first ABA intake meeting.*

## Ask Yourself the Following Questions

### **What are you struggling with the most right now?**

(e.g., communication, meltdowns, eating, sleep, transitions, routines, play)

### **What do you wish felt easier at home?**

(Think about your mornings, meals, outings... what part of your day feels hardest?)

### **If you could make one thing better this month, what would it be?**

(It might be fewer tantrums, more connection, a smoother routine. No wrong answers.)

*P.S. There's a printable version of these questions at the end of this guide.*

# 1

## Get Clear on What You Want

### Why This Matters

Therapies will give you goals.  
Schools will give you checklists.  
But **your values should shape the plan.**

When you define what matters most, you'll:

- Know **what to prioritize**
- Spot the right therapy fit faster
- Feel less like you're reacting

### Watch This

Let's be real, after the diagnosis, you've probably heard **mixed things** about ABA therapy.

This short video gives you the honest truth:

- **What ABA actually is** (without the jargon)
- Why some people criticize it
- What to look for in a provider



[Click here to watch](#)

Or, scan the code





## Start With This Play Method

When therapy hasn't started, most parents feel like they're stuck.

You've got a diagnosis. You've got the waitlist. But **what are you supposed to do today?**

It's confusing. And most of the advice you find online either feels too clinical or completely overwhelming.

## Join, Add, Wait Play

**For Connection. For Communication. For Real Progress.**

You don't need to be a therapist to help your child grow.

You just need to know **how to play** in a way that feels natural, and builds connection.

Here's the truth:

You are already the most powerful part of your child's learning.

You don't need a protocol.

**You need to learn to play.**



*Not pictured: the 17 times I tried to join before he let me in.*



## Start With This Play Method

*A simple way to build connection and communication through play.*

### The Join, Add, Wait Play Method



#### **First: Join**

Sit next to your child and do what they're doing.

If they're spinning a car, spin a car.

No instructions. No questions. Just follow their lead.



#### **Next: Add**

Once you're "in," add something new:

A sound. A block. A gesture. A funny reaction.

You're keeping the play going — not taking it over.



#### **Then: Wait**

Pause. Give space.

Look interested, not demanding.

Wait for a smile, a vocalization, or a shared moment.

#### **Why it Works:**

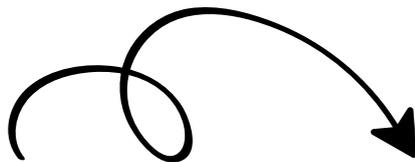
You're showing your child that you're safe, fun, and worth interacting with, which is the real foundation for learning.

# 2

## Start With This Play Method

### Want More?

We created a **full eBook** that walks you through exactly how to play at home, with examples, toy ideas, and scripts for tricky moments.



[Click here to download](#)



**Watch This**

[Click here to watch](#)

Or, scan the code

Prefer to see it in action?

This quick video walks you through exactly how to use the Join, Add, Wait method at home.

You'll learn:

- What natural play actually looks like
- How to follow your child's lead
- What to do if they walk away (hint: it's not failure)



## Find the Right Fit for You

You're told ABA is evidence-based.

You're told to get a referral.

Then, you're told to wait.

But, no one really tells you what to look for or how to know if a provider is any good. And the truth is...

## Not All ABA is Created Equal

### 3-Tier ABA, 1-Tier ABA, BCBA, RBT?

We've seen incredible, family-centered ABA.

And we've seen programs that were rigid, confusing, or completely disconnected from what a child actually needed.

**You shouldn't have to guess.** And you definitely shouldn't have to settle.

That's why this step is all about giving you real tools to **make sure your provider is a good fit**, for your child and your family.



*Ana has seen the best and worst of ABA, both as a BCBA and as a sibling of someone with autism.*



## Find the Right Fit for You

### 3 Signs You've Found a Good BCBA

You don't need to be an expert in behavior science, you just need to ask the right questions and trust what you see.

Here are 3 signs you've found the right fit:

#### **1. They coach you, not just your child.**

A good BCBA makes sure you feel supported, not sidelined. They invite you into the process and explain what's happening in plain English.

#### **2. They individualize instead of using a one-size-fits-all program.**

Your child isn't a checklist. And their therapy shouldn't be, either. Look for someone who asks about your values, your routines, and what progress means to you.

#### **3. They care how it feels not just what's being taught.**

The best BCBA's know behavior change means nothing if the child is stressed, confused, or disconnected. Progress should feel joyful, not pressured.



If you don't see these? It's okay to ask questions. And it's okay to walk away.

# 3

## Find the Right Fit for You

### Want More Guidance on Choosing a Provider?

We wrote a full post breaking down exactly **what to look for in a great ABA program**, plus what most websites won't tell you. It's honest, practical, and based on real conversations we've had with **families in your shoes**.



### Read This

This post breaks down what actually matters when choosing a provider, no fluff, no jargon, just honest guidance.

[Read the full post](#)

Or, scan the code



	Jaykap	2020 Behavior	Kyo	ACES	Thumpet	Skilled Therapy
Therapist Hours	BCBA	BCBA	RBT	RBT	RBT	BCBA
Contract Size	Low	Low	Med/High	High	High	Very Low
Age Ranges	Early Childhood	Toddlers to Teens	2-18	18 months to Adult	Infants through	Preschool Younger kids
Insurance Accepted	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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**Real Parent Questions**

### Best ABA Therapy in the Bay Area: A Simple Guide for Parents Comparing Providers

When your child is diagnosed with autism, one of the first things people say is, "You should start ABA..."

You'll learn:

- What really matters when choosing an ABA provider
- How to tell if a BCBA is the right fit, even before therapy begins
- The #1 mistake most parents make (and how to avoid it)
- What good ABA actually looks like

# The Autism Diagnosis Parent Action Sheet

Your Action Plan While You Wait for ABA

## Step 1: Get Clear On What You Want

Start today and ask yourself the following questions

What are you struggling with the most right now?

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What do you wish felt easier at home?

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If you could make one thing better this month, what would it be?

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## Step 2: Start With Play

[Click here to read the full blog post](#) and learn the Join, Add, Wait method of play.

Identify your child's preferred play activities you will try to join.

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How will you join the play?

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What could you add to the play?

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How will you respond when they react?

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### Step 3: Finding a Good ABA Provider

Use these questions during intake to make sure the provider is a good fit:

How do you support parents during therapy?

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*Look for: Parent coaching, regular check-ins, and collaborative decision-making.*

How do you define progress?

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*Look for: Real-life goals that matter to you (not just percentages or compliance).*

What do you do if a strategy isn't working?

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*Look for: Flexibility, problem-solving, and adjustments based on your child.*

How do you build trust with the child?

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*Look for: Respect, consent, and joyful learning not just "getting to the programs."*

### Need More Support Choosing a Provider?

**Download the full checklist + phone scripts here:**

[The Parent's Script + Checklist for Finding the Right ABA Provider](#)

Includes word-for-word questions, intake tips, and a Bay Area provider directory, so you don't waste time or settle for the wrong fit.

# You've Taken the First Step

Now Let's Build the Full Plan.

This guide gave you 3 high-impact actions you can take today.

But imagine having a clear, step-by-step roadmap for the next 30 days. Not just for ABA therapy, but for the **people around you** too.

That's exactly why we created:

## The Autism Diagnosis Parent Plan

*Because knowing what to do next shouldn't feel impossible.*

A short, self-paced course that helps you:

-  Go from **overwhelmed to confident**... in less than 2 hours
-  Learn how to **support your child at home**... without feeling like you have to be their therapist
-  Learn how to **have emotional conversations** about Autism... even if you have no idea what to say.

[Click to Learn More](#)



*You don't need to figure it all out on your own.*

*This is the plan you've been hoping someone would just hand you.*