

Board Certified Behaviour Analysts: What to Expect



1. What qualifications does one need to have be designated as a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA) in Ontario?

A Board Certified Behaviour Analyst is someone with a graduate-level certification in behaviour analysis. They must complete Master's degree which includes coursework in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), complete practical fieldwork in ABA, and pass the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) national examination. BCBA-Ds are those who have also completed a PhD in a field related to behaviour analysis.



The BCBA-D designation is not a separate certification, so BCBA-Ds function in the same capacity as independent practitioners providing behaviour analytic services.

2. What is the role of a BCBA in supporting someone with autism?

BCBAs act as clinical supervisor for those using ABA to teach children, youth, and adults on the autism spectrum. ABA is best known for its success in helping people with autism and other developmental disabilities develop cognitive, language, social, and self-help skills.

A typical ABA program setup for children and youth includes an instructor therapist (IT) who works directly with the client, a senior therapist (ST), and a clinical supervisor (CS). In some cases, if the senior therapist is a BCBA, they may act as both the CS and CT.

The BCBA should regularly observe therapy sessions, review programs, monitor progress by looking at data, and ensure that the programming meets the needs of the client.

Some BCBAs work in a consultative capacity as part of a multidisciplinary team with other professionals. In that case, they may provide recommendations to the client/family and meet the client less frequently.

3. Why might an autistic person need to see a BCBA?

Autistic people would need to see a BCBA if they are receiving ABA services. A BCBA should always be involved in an ABA program. The clinician will typically start the program with an assessment to determine strengths and areas for improvement. With input from the caregiver(s) and the autistic person, goals will then be set and prioritized.

4. Why might an autistic person need ABA services?

ABA is a type of therapy that uses positive reinforcement to improve social, communication, and learning skills, something many autistic children struggle with, and to teach healthy alternatives to harmful behaviours (self-injury, aggression, etc.). The goal should be to give children the necessary prerequisites to learn naturally from their home, school, and community environments.

5. What are some questions I should ask a BCBA to gain an understanding of their experience and knowledge of autism?

BCBAs are required to work within the scope of their experience and competency. You can ask a BCBA if they have experience that aligns with the specific needs of the client. Not every BCBA will be a good fit for the needs of the autistic person and their family, so it is best to discuss specific goals, wants, needs, and expectations up front to ensure they will be a good fit. Some questions you can ask include:

- What age groups do you serve?
- Do you have experience working with_____? (e.g. children who engage in severe self-injurious behaviour, children that use sign language, etc.)
- What training/experience have the therapists working directly with my child received? (e.g. Registered Behaviour Technician certification)
- How will you determine what to teach my child?
 - They should complete assessments such as the ABLLS-R or VB-MAPP.
- How often will we meet to review progress?
 - Typically, a review of the child/youth's progress will occur every 6 months at a minimum.
- How often will the BCBA or ST observe sessions?
- What are your expectations for the family?
- How will you determine when my child no longer need services?

6. Many autistic people experience sensory challenges; how can a BCBA and/or their staff mitigate this?

Knowing which specific sensory challenges exist in advance is helpful. For example, if noise is a concern, any music playing in the therapy setting would be turned down or off during sessions. Lighting can also be dimmed. If perfumes or other scents are a concern, they would be eliminated as much as possible during the sessions. If the client has a comfort object/toy, they may be encouraged to bring it with them.

ABA teams are often flexible in where the appointments/sessions take place and may be

able to cater to what is most comfortable for the client, e.g. in the BCBA's office, in the client's home, via virtual telepractice platforms, or in community settings such as school, center or daycare, if permitted.

7. What are some recommendations for before a first appointment with a BCBA?

It is a good idea for the client/family to write out strengths, weaknesses, and challenges before meeting with the BCBA. It is also beneficial to let them know about any cultural observances, considerations, dietary restrictions/preferences, or general needs/wants of your family.

8. Can a BCBA work with other professionals in supporting autistic people, such as occupational therapists (OT), speech and language pathologists (SLP), or schools?

Yes. BCBAs often work with clients who are also working with an SLP or OT. It is a good idea for families to provide consent to allow professionals to share information with each other. This is especially important if they are working on some of the same goals, to ensure that their treatment recommendations align.

9. What is the typical fee for a BCBA? Is there funding or financial assistance available to families?

Private BCBAs typically charge between \$50-150/hour. For ABA programs funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, there may be a maximum hourly rate that will be reimbursed.

ABA services are not covered by OHIP or most private insurance plans. ABA programs supervised by a BCBA are eligible for funding under the Ontario Autism Program (OAP). In December 2021, all Clinical Supervisors of ABA must hold a BCBA credential.

To register for the Ontario Autism Program, your child must:

- Be under the age of 18.
- Currently live in Ontario.
- Have a written diagnosis of autism from a qualified professional.

For more information, go to: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-autism-program>

References

www.Bacb.com

https://www.bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Behavioral-Treatment-of-Autism-and-Other-Developmental-Disabilities-Fact-Sheet_210108.pdf

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-autism-program>

<https://oaproviderlist.ca/resources-providers/qualification-requirements>

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