



Guidance for New Independent ABA Practitioners

This document aims to provide helpful information for independent practitioners working in ABA for autistic and/or learning disabled clients in the UK.

The *UK-SBA Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct* is referenced in text boxes throughout this document. The complete Code can be found at <https://uk-sba.org/about-uk-sba/ethics/>.

What is ABA?

ABA stands for 'Applied Behaviour Analysis'. ABA is a science that helps us understand why people behave in particular ways, including how they acquire skills or develop challenging behaviours. The science of ABA has been used to develop a number of therapies and strategies to help people change behaviour and be more successful across a range of life domains. Although there are many ways in which ABA can be applied, this document focusses exclusively on issues relating to autism.

Therapies grounded in ABA, such as Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI), are among the best examples of evidence-based therapies for autism. There is a wealth of evidence that has been published, reviewed and, in most cases, independently replicated, which demonstrates the effectiveness of ABA-based teaching programs for individuals with autism.

For autistic children, ABA-based programs typically focus on teaching skills, such as communication, playing, toileting, eating a wider variety of foods, and academic and school-readiness skills. Programs might also target reducing dangerous behaviours, such as biting, hitting, self-injury or running away.

Where do I start?

The first thing to know is where you might be likely to find a job as a behaviour analyst. There are a few different ways for you to work in ABA, including working on a 'home program', in an ABA school, or in an ABA clinic.

Below is a list of ABA schools, clinics, and companies providing home programs. The lists are not exhaustive and UK-SBA does not endorse any of these organisations or individuals. They are meant to give you some examples of where ABA-based therapy is applied for autistic individuals. If we have missed out a provider that should be on the list, you can let us know at uksba.sig.indep.practitioners@gmail.com

ABA Schools

There are some schools who use ABA (more information at <http://www.abaschools.org.uk/> and <https://www.abaa4all.com/schools-list-1>).

ABA school examples:

www.beyondautismschools.org.uk
www.snowflakeschool.org.uk
www.marketfieldschool.co.uk
www.treetopsschool.org
www.kingsmillschool.co.uk

ABA clinic examples:

www.firstbridgecentre.com/

www.carboneclinic.co.uk

www.thearkcentre.org

www.bloomingtree.co.uk

<https://abaclinic.southwales.ac.uk/clinical-services/early-intervention-service/>

ABA company examples:

www.skyboundtherapies.co.uk

www.headstartaba.org

www.beamaba.com

www.childautism.org.uk

www.ukyap.org

www.autismpartnership.com

www.autismfledglings.com

Independent ABA Consultants:

There are many independent ABA Consultants working with clients in the UK, both on home programs and consulting with schools. Their details can be found on the UK-SBA register (<https://uk-sba.org/search/>). Often, when you see an advertisement for an ABA tutor/therapist, this will have been listed by the consultant.

What do the different job titles in ABA mean?

There are a number of different jobs in behaviour analysis, depending on the person's qualifications and skills. Some companies will employ a range of people in different roles; in other cases (e.g., on home programs), an ABA Consultant will help the family find people for those roles (and then those individuals work as independent contractors rather than employees). The types of roles, as well as the qualifications required and their range of responsibilities, are listed below.

ABA Consultant / Case Manager / BCBA (Board Certified Behaviour Analyst)

ABA programs should be managed by a consultant (sometimes called a case manager).

The consultant/case manager/BCBA should:

- Have a formal certification in Behaviour Analysis (e.g. BCBA/MSc in Behaviour Analysis)
- Provide references from other families they have worked with
- Be on the UK-SBA Register (<https://uk-sba.org/register-as-a-behaviour-analyst/find-a-behaviour-analyst/>)
- Hold an Enhanced DBS check*
- Have public and professional liability insurance
- Have up-to-date safeguarding training

The consultant/case manager/BCBA will:

- Conduct assessments to determine the client's learning needs
- Design the client's program
- Train the whole team who is working with the client
- Design data collection systems to monitor the client's progress
- Review client progress and data regularly
- Update the client's program regularly
- Be willing to attend meetings to discuss the client, such as EHC meetings, annual reviews, etc.
- Be willing to write reports for such meetings (they might charge additionally for these reports)
- Help the family set up a home program team

Clients (or their families) should have frequent contact with the consultant (typically once per month). The consultant also should arrange a communication system among team members and family (e.g., WhatsApp group, Slack workspace, email chain) to ask questions, share information and keep in contact.

A team might also have an **ABA supervisor**. If there is a supervisor on the team, the client and team typically will see the consultant less often.

ABA Supervisor / BCaBA (Board Certified assistant Behaviour Analyst)

A supervisor should:

- Have a formal education and/or certification in Behaviour Analysis (e.g. BCaBA/BSc or MSc in Behaviour Analysis)
- Provide references from other families they have worked with
- Be on the UK-SBA Register (<https://uk-sba.org/register-as-a-behaviour-analyst/find-a-behaviour-analyst/>)
- Hold an Enhanced DBS check*
- Have public and professional liability insurance
- Have up-to-date safeguarding training

A supervisor will:

- Be in regular contact with the consultant/case manager/BCBA
- Be responsible for updating the consultant on the client's progress
- Know the client extremely well (many supervisors conduct weekly 1:1 sessions)
- Update and train the team on the program
- Ensure timely data collection and data review
- Update data collection methods and analysis

Although the consultant is responsible for designing the client's program, making decisions on program changes, and training the team, "**tutors**" are required to implement the programs. Because ABA-based therapies typically require 10-30 hours per week of work with the client, there is likely to be more than one tutor on the team. Some tutors might have a background in psychology, childcare or teaching, but this is not necessary, as the consultant will provide the training they need to implement the program with the client.

ABA tutor / therapist / RBT (Registered Behaviour Technician)

An ABA tutor should:

- Above all, be kind, safe, fun and committed to helping the client
- Be on the UK-SBA Register (<https://uk-sba.org/register-as-a-behaviour-analyst/find-a-behaviour-analyst/>)
- Hold an Enhanced DBS check*
- Have public and professional liability insurance
- Have up-to-date safeguarding training
- Attend all team meetings
- Be receptive to training
- Follow the consultant's program
- Arrive to sessions prepared – on time, dressed appropriately, 'emotionally ready', have resources with them (data sheets, teaching materials needed for the program, toys/games).

Where do I find clients/teams to work with?

If you choose to work as an independent practitioner, there are a number of places to look for roles.

BCBAs / BCaBAs / RBTs

<https://uk-sba.org/jobs/view-job-board/>

<https://www.bacb.com/find-a-certificant/>

<https://uk-sba.org/register-as-a-behaviour-analyst/find-a-behaviour-analyst/>

There are many online groups where other ABA parents/carers and professionals post. They're great for asking advice, having a sense of community and finding resources and professionals to work with.

Social networking groups for ABA families

https://www.facebook.com/groups/90374896556/?ref=br_rs

https://www.facebook.com/groups/492377767545577/?ref=br_rs

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2351683885/>

Abacus community: <https://abacus.discussion.community/>

In all of the above places, you may find adverts for clients/teams to work with. Ideally, you should have a phone interview with a family or potential team member before agreeing to meet in person. It is a good idea to have your first meeting in a public place (e.g., a coffee shop).

It's also common for professionals to be recommended to clients through word-of-mouth. For example, a family might recommend a consultant to another family, consultants might recommend a tutor they have worked with previously, or tutors might know other tutors who they can recommend to their client. Having a good reputation and letting your colleagues know your availability helps!

What safeguards do I need to consider?

Insurance

Everyone working as an ABA practitioner should hold professional liability insurance. If you're alleged to have provided inadequate advice, services or designs that cause your client to lose money, professional liability insurance provides cover for legal costs and expenses incurred in your defence, as well as any damages or costs that may be awarded. The UK-SBA does not recommend one particular company and is not affiliated with any insurance companies. In a recent survey, most independent ABA practitioners in the UK stated their insurance was through Towergate Insurance or Hiscox.

www.towergateinsurance.co.uk

www.hiscox.co.uk

Safeguarding training

ABA practitioners should undertake safeguarding training relevant to the population with which they work. Many of these courses can be accessed online. You must ensure the course you undertake is specific for the population you serve. The NSPCC provide a good comparison for what you should be looking for in a safeguarding course:

- NSPCC Safeguarding training – <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training/> The NSPCC also sends out a free weekly current awareness newsletter with practice, policy and research updates to keep you up-to-date with all the latest safeguarding and child protection news - <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/newsletter/caspar/>

DBS check

A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (previously known as a CRB - Criminal Records Bureau - check) helps employers make safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children in England and Wales. In Northern Ireland, the AccessNI provides a similar service. In Scotland, individuals carrying out regulated activities with children and vulnerable adults should apply for a PVG check.

There are three types of criminal record checks (this applies to DBS, PVG and AccessNI): Basic, Standard and Enhanced. A Basic Disclosure provides you with information relating to any unspent convictions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (ROA). There are no eligibility criteria that must be met to obtain a basic disclosure. However, these types of checks are not job specific and are available to anyone for any purpose. A Standard check will show all criminal history; cautions, warnings, reprimands and convictions held on the Police National Computer, with the exception of the DBS filtering rule. An Enhanced DBS details all criminal history; cautions, warnings, reprimands, and convictions held on the Police National Computer, with the exception of the DBS filtering rule. Additionally, an Enhanced DBS with Barred list check checks against the DBS Children and Adult barred list (where appropriate) and information provided by local police forces.

At present, self-employed individuals cannot apply for their own Enhanced or Standard DBS/AccessNI check, only employers can. For this reason, some independent practitioners (typically self-employed) may only be able to obtain an Enhanced or Standard DBS/AccessNI check if they additionally work or volunteer for an organisation. For example, you might shadow one of your clients in school and their school may be able to process a DBS/AccessNI check on your behalf.

If you can apply for a DBS check, you can register for the 'Update Service' for an additional fee of £13 per year. We would recommend everyone does this. <https://www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service>. THIS MUST BE DONE WITHIN 3 MONTHS OF RECEIVING YOUR DBS CERTIFICATE.

There is no official 'expiry date' on a DBS check. Any information included is only accurate at the time the check was carried out. Whether or not to carry out a subsequent check is up to the practice owner/employer. Some authorities suggest a new check every 3 years.

May I get my DBS/AccessNI check through the UK-SBA?

Unfortunately, no. We have spent considerable resources in our attempt to identify a route for independent practitioners to apply for an enhanced DBS/AccessNI through UK-SBA. However, as the law currently stands, we are not able to process DBS/AccessNI checks for our members, as we are not an "employer". If you are an independent practitioner and only able to provide a Basic check, this will be accepted for membership until the relevant legislation changes.

Note: If you are an independent practitioner and are not able to get a Standard or Enhanced check through an employer, you can apply for a Basic DBS check using the online application route:

England and Wales:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/basic-dbs-checks-guidance#otherwaystoapply> For more information, please see:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-eligibility-guidance>

Scotland:

<https://www.mygov.scot/apply-for-pvg/>

Northern Ireland:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/accessni-criminal-record-checks>

Registering with HMRC as being self-employed:

If you start working for yourself, you're classed as a sole trader. This means you're self-employed - even if you haven't yet told HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). See <https://www.gov.uk/working-for-yourself>

How do I access professional development opportunities?

ABA is a field with a vast scope and its research and methodologies are constantly growing and evolving. Through professional development, you can further your skills and keep up-to-date with current practice. ABA Schools and clinics often provide training 'in-house'. On home programs, training should be provided by the consultant and supervisor, as well as overlaps with team members to provide 'hands on' training. Practitioners also should seek out their own training and further education through reading journal articles and books, listening to podcasts and attending trainings and conferences. Attending UK-SBA events is a great way to learn new things and become involved in the behaviour analytic community: <https://uk-sba.org/events/>

Other training opportunities can be found at:

- Child Autism UK tutor training - www.childautism.org.uk/for-aba-tutors/aba-tutor-training/
- Beyond Autism tutor training - www.beyondautism.org.uk/our-services/training/

Further education in ABA:

- University of Kent – PCert, PDip, MSc - www.kent.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/105/applied-behaviour-analysis
- University of South Wales - BSc, PDip, MSc - <https://www.southwales.ac.uk/courses/msc-behaviour-analysis-and-therapy/>
- Bangor University - PCert, PDip, MSc - www.bangor.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/applied-behaviour-analysis-msc-pgdip-pgcert
- Ulster University – MSc - <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/courses/202021/applied-behaviour-analysis-20998>
- Queens University Belfast – MSc - <https://www.qub.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate-taught/applied-behaviour-analysis-msc/>

UK-SBA Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct – Relevant Standard

14.6 Registrants undertake any relevant training, including safeguarding training, specific to the setting or population with which they work.

How much should I charge for my services?

The UK-SBA does not provide advice on rates of pay for legal reasons. Independent practitioners typically set and negotiate their own hourly rates with families, increasing their rate annually as their level of training and experience increases. You could ask the consultant of the team for advice when first starting out and unsure of what your rate should be. Typically, practitioners send invoices at the end of each month, which detail the nature of the work, the dates the work was conducted, the time spent on the work for each date, and the charge for the work.

Do I need a contract to work as an independent practitioner?

All independent practitioners should have a contract between themselves and their clients, and with any individuals they directly employ. This ensures that all your expectations are clear, in writing, and agreed by both parties. Contracts also help ensure you have consent from clients to undertake particular aspects of your work, but additional written consent might be needed, particularly as programs change. It is highly advisable to seek legal advice in constructing your contract.

UK-SBA Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct – Relevant standards

21. FEES, CONTRACTS, FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

21.1 Registrants are honest, open and clear in relation to any and all financial matters concerning clients, service delivery, training and provision of supervision.

21.2 Before providing services, Registrants explain fully to clients: fee levels and structure, terms and methods of payment and any charges that might be imposed for, for example, non-attendance or cancelled appointments.

21.3 Registrants clarify the terms on which they offer services in advance of clients incurring any financial cost or obligation or other costs or liabilities reasonably foreseen by the Registrant.

21.4 After consultation with potential service recipients, Registrants prepare a contract outlining responsibilities of all parties, the scope and nature of the services to be provided and the Registrant's commitment to the UK-SBA Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct. The contract must be agreed and signed by all relevant parties before service provision begins.

What is GDPR and does it apply to my work as an independent practitioner?

GDPR is the general data protection regulation that applies to most UK businesses (including self-employed individuals). The GDPR will levy harsh fines against those who violate its privacy and security standards, with large financial penalties. All independent practitioners must be GDPR compliant. Information about GDPR policies should be included in your contract. For more information, see <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>

UK-SBA Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct – Relevant standards

5. PRINCIPLE: Confidentiality

5.1 Registrants ensure information pertaining to present and past clients, professional colleagues and/or organisations they have worked with or for remains strictly confidential. They protect all such information from unauthorised disclosure.

5.2 Registrants take necessary and appropriate steps to ensure personal information, practice reports, data sets and other records pertaining to Behaviour Analysis services are stored securely with access restricted to relevant concerned parties only. Examples of relevant concerned parties may be fellow professionals working collectively on a behaviour intervention or skill building programme for an individual, group or organisation (as in a single case, a whole-class project, or an Organisational Behaviour Management project).

5.3 Where Registrants are supervising the implementation of Behaviour Analytic services by others, Registrants ensure all other personnel are aware of and adhere to principles of confidentiality.

5.4 Communications or sharing of information on the basis of client consent or as required for safeguarding purposes do not constitute a breach of confidentiality.

Some tips on professional conduct

Our behaviour plays a significant role in how people think about us, as well as in what they think of behaviour analysis. Conducting ourselves professionally is paramount. Whatever expectations an 'office job' might have, many of the same rules apply to being an ABA professional.

- Be on time! Arriving when you are scheduled to arrive (and staying until you are scheduled to leave) shows you are reliable, and that you value other people's time and your commitments.
- Arrive prepared – appearance. As with any professional, you dress professionally and appropriately for the role.
- Arrive prepared – mentally. When working with clients, your sole focus should be on the client. If you don't feel able to put personal issues aside, consider taking some time off.
- Arrive prepared – resources. Most ABA professionals bring their own toys, activities and items specific to each client with them. The greatest professionals get to know their clients' likes and dislikes and take great pleasure in finding things they know will motivate them to learn! Families will often provide most of the resources needed but arriving prepared and showing that you're willing to go the extra mile for a client makes such a difference.
- Arrive prepared – physically. Working as an ABA professional can sometimes be physically demanding. If you're unwell or not physically able to conduct a session, consider taking some time off.
- Know your boundaries and limits. The ABA program should be clearly outlined by the consultant. If you're asked to do anything you haven't been trained to do, or is outside the work specified by the program or the duties specified in your contract, contact the supervisor or consultant immediately.
- Be honest about your understanding and abilities. It is okay not to know! If something is mentioned that you don't understand, say so.
- How does the client react when you walk into a room? They should be happy to see you! If not, ask your supervisor/consultant or consultant for help.
- Leave a good impression. Ensure the home or school environment is as clean/tidy as it was when you arrived.
- Respect client confidentiality. We typically refer to clients by their initials. Don't discuss the case / family / home situations / etc with anyone outside the team.

What things are important to consider when joining a team / family?

- What is the structure of the current team? Is there a Consultant? Supervisor? Having a team is important, each member plays a distinct role.
- What education and credentials do the other team members have? BCBA / BCaBA/MSc? Having experienced and qualified team members is important for the success of the program.

- What training is being offered? What length of training, with whom, how will progression be monitored? Whether formal training or 'in house' training, on ABA principles or about the individual child, training is crucial to any individual's career progression.
- Are overlaps with other team members offered for 'on the job' training? Overlaps between team members ensure consistency in approaches and provide hands on training.
- What hours can you realistically commit to? Being an ABA tutor isn't your typical 9-5. Make sure you plan for breaks, lunch breaks and time off. Also, make sure you allow plenty of time for travel between clients.
- How long can you realistically commit to? If a family is investing in you by training you, it's only fair that you're honest and up front about how long you could potentially commit to work with them.

Compiled by the UK-SBA Independent Practitioners Special Interest Group