



*Therapies are not always delivered in a “pure format.” Some intervention providers who work primarily in one format may use successful techniques from another format.*

Before we get into the types of therapies available, it is helpful to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Although research and experience have revealed many of the mysteries surrounding autism, it remains a complex disorder that impacts each child differently. However, many children with autism have made remarkable breakthroughs with the right combination of therapies and interventions. Most parents would welcome a cure for their child or a therapy that would alleviate all of the symptoms and challenges that make life difficult. Just as your child’s challenges can’t be summed up in one word, they can’t be remedied with one therapy. Each challenge must be addressed with an appropriate therapy. No single therapy works for every child. What works for one child may not work for another. What works for one child for a period of time may stop working. Some therapies are supported by research that shows their efficacy, while others are not. The skill, experience and style of the therapist are critical to the effectiveness of the intervention.

Before you choose an intervention, you will need to investigate the claims of each therapy so that you understand the possible risks and benefits for your child. At first, all of these techniques – ABA, VB, PRT, DTT, ESDM, among others – may seem like alphabet soup to you. You may be confused now, but you will be surprised at how quickly you become “fluent” in the terminology of autism therapies.

For information on different treatment options, turn to the glossary in this kit or visit [AutismSpeaks.org](https://autismspeaks.org) and view the National Standards Project produced by the National Autism Center at [nationalautismcenter.org/about/national.php](https://nationalautismcenter.org/about/national.php).

To view different treatments in video format please visit the Autism Speaks Autism Video Glossary at [autismspeaks.org/what-autism/video-glossary](https://autismspeaks.org/what-autism/video-glossary).

You should also see your pediatrician for more information, so that you can be confident you are making informed choices as you begin to narrow down your options.

## What is Applied Behavioral Analysis?

Behavior analysis was originally described by B.F. Skinner in the 1930s. You may have learned about Skinner and “operant conditioning” when you studied science in school. The principles and methods of behavior analysis have been applied effectively in many circumstances to develop a wide range of skills in learners with and without disabilities.

Behavior analysis is a scientifically validated approach to understanding behavior and how it is affected by the environment. In this context, “behavior” refers to actions and skills. “Environment” includes any influence – physical or social – that might change or be changed by one’s behavior. On a practical level, the principles and methods of behavior analysis have helped many different kinds of learners acquire many different skills – from healthier lifestyles to the mastery of a new language.

Behavior analysis focuses on the principles that explain how learning takes place. Positive reinforcement is one such principle. When a behavior is followed by some sort of reward, the behavior is more likely to be repeated. Through decades of