

Accepting the Spectrum

February 2025 Newsletter

By Grace Majewski, RBT



As the winter season roars on, sickness, flu, and illness are more rampant than ever. Managing illness in children with autism can present unique challenges, such as a disruption of routines, intensified behavioral issues, or them being unable to express feelings/physical discomfort. Moreover, changes in sleep, appetite, and general environment may trigger behavior changes. Continue reading to explore how we can use ABA strategies to support our children when sickness occurs.



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Strategies for supporting children with autism during illness

1. Functional Communication Training

Children with autism may struggle to express discomfort or pain verbally. Functional communication training is a key strategy for teaching children to communicate their needs effectively. By reinforcing appropriate forms of communication (gestures, AAC, or speech), we can reduce problem behaviors related to frustration. Teaching the child to request “help,” express pain, or ask for comfort items when they are sick can be helpful in aiding them to feel heard and understood.



2. Address sensory sensitivities

Children with autism may have heightened sensitivities to sensory stimuli. During illness, certain sensory inputs (such as temperature, light, or noise) may become overwhelming. Creating a sensory-friendly environment may be helpful, which may include dim lighting, reduced noise, weighted blankets/sensory sacks, or other activities that meet their sensory needs.

3. Promote comfort through reinforcement and preferred activities

An effective strategy may be using reinforcement to encourage relaxation and coping behaviors. By identifying and reinforcing behaviors that contribute to comfort, such as calming activities (deep breathing, using sensory toys) or seeking support from caregivers, we can help children manage discomfort in a positive way. Finding your child's individual interests (whether a favorite toy or verbal praise), may help ease the discomfort felt by illness.



4. Ask for accommodations at the doctor or dentist - Please see some recommendations made by our amazing OT, Katie!

- During scheduled appointments, it is important that we communicate our children's individualized needs. Inform your pediatrician about sensory needs and ask if accommodations can be made to advocate for your child. Some sensory specific needs may include comfort items/toys, movement breaks, dimmed/reduced lighting and sound, and distraction techniques like singing or counting.
- Practice at home with toys or stuffed animals! Pretend/role play is an amazing way for our kiddos to get used to real life situations.
- Be open to adjusting the schedule or approach based on your child's needs. Flexibility is key.
- Use positive reinforcement to praise your child for cooperation and positive behaviors during the visit.

Please also see recommendations for sensory friendly dentists, doctors and hairdressers. Shoutout to Kate and Meg for these amazing contacts! Please note that for Husky insured families, a referral may be required.

Commerce Park Children's Dentistry and Orthodontics

Offers specialized tools and techniques for patients with dental anxiety and sensory sensitivities

<https://commerceparkdental.com/>

Bridgeport, Shelton, & Westport CT locations

Smile Ark Pediatric Dentistry

Special needs dentistry in that treats children and adults with mental, physical, or developmental disabilities

<https://www.smilearkct.com/>

Fairfield, CT

Cipes Pediatric Dentistry

Uses the FISH! philosophy to create a positive work culture and patient experiences

<https://cipespediatricdentistry.com/>

West Hartford, CT

New Style Hair Studio

Hairdresser specializes in helping kiddos with autism

<https://newstylehairstudio.com/>

Meriden, CT

Autism Center at The Hospital for Special Care

Developmental services that specialize in autism, autism research

<https://hfsc.org/>

New Britain, CT



Agency News and Staff Updates

Happy Valentines day from Collaborative ABA services, LLC!

Please Welcome Cassandra, BCBA!

My name is Cassandra, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to work at Collaborative ABA Services. I am a board-certified behavior analyst. I am very passionate about working with individuals who are neurodivergent, and I built my educational goals to be of assistance to this particular group. I have experience working with all ages and understand that all stages are critical to milestones in life. When I am not working, I enjoy my time with family and friends. I also love to travel in/out of state and to other countries. I enjoy tasting different cultural foods, reading a good book, and exercising. I am looking forward to working with everyone as a vital team member.



Please Welcome Kate, OT!

Kate is an occupational therapist with over 12 years of OT experience working with children and is really excited to be a member of the ABA Collaborative Team. She graduated from Quinnipiac University with her Masters in Occupational Therapy. She enjoys collaborating with parents regarding their child, and works hard to help them to achieve their fullest potential. She strongly believes it takes a wholistic approach to help a child and their family and feels very fortunate to work in a field where she can do just that. When not playing with kids at work, Katie can be found rock climbing, hiking, and spending as much time as she can outdoors. She lives with her husband Nate, bunny Eggs, and cat Hunny.



Please Welcome Meg, RBT / Social work student

While obtaining her associates in Human Services, Meg discovered her passion for education, advocacy and resource allocation. She went on to receive a Bachelors of Social Work from Elms College, and is currently enrolled in the Masters of Social Work and ABA Graduate Certificate programs at the University of Saint Joseph. Meg has worked as a Registered Behavior Technician since 2020 in the Clinical and Public-School settings. She plans to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and BCBA. She is passionate about family engagement, finding resources, and helping learners reach their highest potential . She enjoys reading, traveling, and adventures with her family.



Please observe a friendly reminder of Collaborative ABA Service's sick policy:

To prevent the spread of communicable diseases, it is our policy that parents/guardians must notify Collaborative ABA Services, LLC staff in advance if your child is sick within 12 hours of a treatment session, preferably the evening before the scheduled session if you know that your child will not be able to participate in the ABA program the next day.

Sickness includes, but is not limited to the following:

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|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| a. Temperature above 100 | g. Flu/Bronchitis | m. Vomit |
| b. Runny Nose | h. Ring Worm | n. Diarrhea |
| c. Coughing | i. Communicable Disease | o. Rash |
| d. Congestion | j. Measles | p. Pink Eye |
| e. COVID-19 | k. lice | q. Strep Throat |
| f. Mumps | l. Chicken pox | r. Staph Infection |

Parents/legal guardians are asked to use the same guidelines used in schools and day care centers. If a child is too sick to attend school or day care, then he/she is too sick to participate in his/her ABA therapy session. ABA therapy will resume as soon as the child's doctor clears him/her of being contagious or the remedy is completed. Parents/guardians must provide documentation of a doctor's note in order for your child to return to ABA treatment. If for home programming, a therapist arrives at the home and the child is sick, the therapist will not be able to work with your child and you will be charged for the session, which will not be reimbursable through insurance, for failure to report your child as sick and adhere to this policy.

Lisa's Coaching Center

Living Under a Microscope

Last week, a client shared her son's school report: four good days, one bad day.

It stopped me in my tracks because it reminded me of the daily reports I used to get about Ben—where every moment of his day was reviewed, recorded, and rated.

This is the reality for so many of our children.

From the moment they are diagnosed, every mood, move, and milestone is tracked, measured, and studied—by teachers, therapists, doctors, and most of all, by us, always watching, worrying, and wondering if we're doing enough.

In other words, they are constantly under a microscope.

It comes from a good place—we want to help them.

Still, living under a microscope comes at a cost—for them and for us.

For them, it means constantly being evaluated and critiqued.

For us, it means parenting starts to feel like a never-ending test, where our confidence rises and falls with every report, every behavior, every tough moment.

So instead of being present with our child, we become their evaluator—constantly measuring, tracking, and assessing.

And while our close attention is important, it can also keep us stuck in problem searching & solving mode.

And in the process, we miss seeing what's already working.

This is why I want to encourage you to Zoom Out.

Instead of focusing on what's missing or what needs fixing, shift your attention to what's extraordinary about your child—their strengths, their progress, and the incredible effort they put in every single day to accomplish things that come easily to others.

When you make this shift, everything changes.

You get to enjoy parenting your unique child, and they get to be recognized for their strengths, resilience, and who they truly are—not defined by their struggles.



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