

ABADESK

A Guide For The Fun Clinician

ABA BASICS

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BY [EUGENIA LOGVINOVA](#) · PUBLISHED MARCH 16, 2020 ·
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It's the end of the world as we know it!

Ok, that's a little dramatic, but schools are closed – some for as many as 6 weeks. Kids are home or with relatives, they're out of their routine, you're out of

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your routine, everyone is stressed, and NO ONE CAN FIND ANY DARN TOILET PAPER!

What we can help you find is a little order among the chaos. We've put together some tips and visuals to keep your grey hair collection to a minimum.

Basic Strategies

Keep it positive. Everyone will be a little stressed from being cooped up at home. Try your best to be aware of HOW you're interacting with your kids. Engage more. Play more. Praise more! Remember that yelling and punishing is often more for you than for them. Sure, hold boundaries, but try to keep your cool. You can always send a fellow parent a ranting text later to blow off some steam.

Give credit where credit is due.

Recognize that change is hard for everyone, including your kids. See them doing something you want to see more of? Throw them some praise, affection, or even a little treat. This goes for ANY behavior – whether they're going above and beyond or just doing what's expected. Do they usually lose their cool in a certain scenario, and this time they tried to keep it together? THAT'S A MAJOR WIN! Let them know how great they're doing!

Break up the day. Whether you're big on planning or more lax in nature, breaking

🗣️ Kayla from AllDayABA on Prompt Hierarchy

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up the day can help everyone have something to look forward to. It also prevents kids from turning into grumpy little screen-faced zombies. There's no need for a strict schedule, but here's an example of what the day could look like.

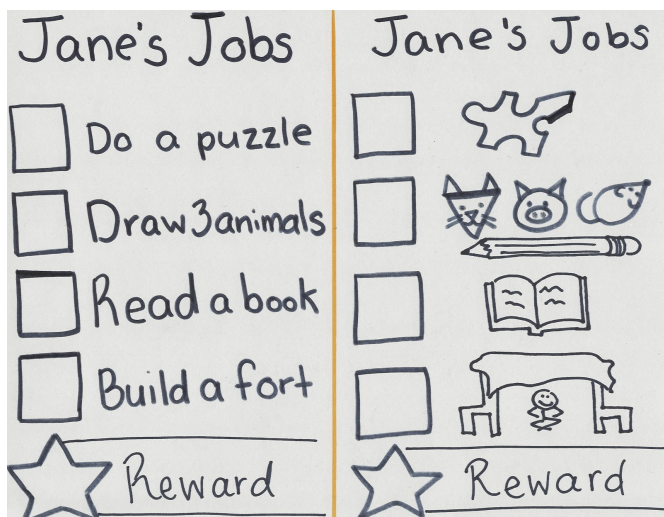
Time	Activity	Materials needed	Things to Remember
8:00 - 9:00	Wake up routine (get dressed, eat breakfast, brush teeth, talk about the plan for the day)	Clothes laid out Breakfast decided on	Offer two choices for breakfast and be okay with either If you pick out clothes for your child, be flexible if they want something else.
9:00 - 10:00	Outside Activity	Ideas: tag, hide and seek, soccer, superheroes	Stay close to home if possible; if you don't have a yard go for a nature scavenger hunt in your apartment complex or neighborhood
10:00 - 11:00	TV/Movie/Tablet Time	Popcorn or other healthy snack	Let the TV take over for a while. If they have a favorite show or movie, put it on. If you have more than one child, and they can't decide - they can watch on different devices.
11:00 - 12:00	Lunch and free time	Easy-to-make foods (even better if kids can assist)	Plan for what your child CAN do; if they can gather items or open packages, start there.
12:00 - 1:00	Life Skills	Assign chores to your kids that are age and skill level appropriate. Wipe down counters, load the dishwasher, sweep floors,	Make sure you aren't asking too much, but don't ask too little either. Hold firm, but modify the demand if you realize you bit off more than you can chew.
1:00 - 2:30	Academics	Highly preferred items Items for completing the activities Timer Token board Educational apps	Make sure you have plenty of rewards readily available to give out for completing or attempting tasks. Make sure to take plenty of breaks. We typically do about 15 minutes on, and then take a run around/dance break.
2:30 - 3:30	TV/Movie/Tablet Time	Popcorn or other healthy snack	Let the TV take over again.
3:30 - 5:00	Independent play	Preferred toys that you child can play with alone or with siblings	Set up "play stations" with different options for kids to play with. Use a visual to remind them of their options.
5:00	Dinner prep and meal	Lay out what steps kids can help with me and assign them tasks Make it fun - have a playlist to dance while you cook	Pick meals that all members of the family like. It's okay if you eat the same thing everyday for a week.
7:00	Bedtime (10 minute clean up, jammies on, brush teeth, go potty, lay down)	Laid out pajamas	Have some flexibility but make sure that you stick to the core requirements. If you say you're only going into their room once, then only go ONCE.

Use visual supports. Visuals are great for reminding kiddos what to do and even how to do it. No need to scour the internet for perfect images. Hand-

drawn doodles work just fine! If your kiddo can read, even better – just write some words on a sheet of paper, stick it on the wall, and call it a day! Here's an example of what you could put up to remind kids of leisure items they can access so they don't get bored an hour into Monday.



Give them a to-do list. If they have a hard time entertaining themselves, you can give them a to-do list to complete. As soon as they're done with their list, they can access a reward! Make sure that the tasks on the list are things they can do INDEPENDENTLY! If they're still learning to read, then have pictures instead of words. Here's an example of both.



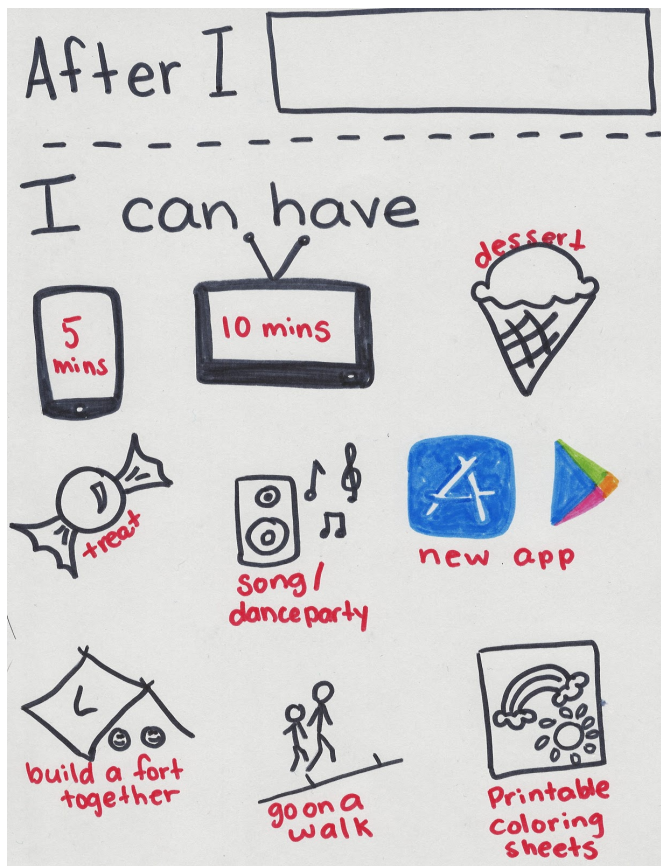
Help them to help themselves. If you notice they're having a hard time doing things independently, problem solving, or just generally communicating their needs, you can use these moments to teach self-advocacy. Whether they're fully verbal or still building language skills, there's always room to grow.

If they want something they can't reach or need you to do something for them, teach them to request it. Make sure to HONOR THOSE REQUESTS IMMEDIATELY if you'd like them to continue using these new words or phrases.





Set up a reward system. If you'd like your kids to be more independent, kind, or helpful, rewards are a great place to start. It can be something as simple as "clean your room, and then you can watch some TV" to "You earn a token each time you play a game with your brother. Once you have 5 tokens, you can trade them in for a prize on the menu." A token is just an object of any kind that represents a reward (like we exchange money for goods). You can use pebbles, coins, stickers, or anything else you may have multiples of. You can even draw 5 empty boxes on a sticky note and draw a star in a box each time your child engages in the desired behavior. Here's an example of a simple reward menu.



Take care of yourself. Shifting to a full-time stay-at-home-parent role can be rough, so don't be afraid to delegate. Take a breather whenever you can. Make sure YOUR needs are being met, too. If things get to be too much, have your partner take over. If an older sibling can take on some duties, then please let them. They might not be the happiest about it, but that's what we do for the people we love. Maybe give them added privileges in exchange for their hard work.

Things to Remember

Deliver rewards IMMEDIATELY. Make sure rewards for behavior are not only available, but follow through with providing them as soon as your child

demonstrates the desired behavior. This is an essential if you want them to do it again. You can always work on extending time that children can wait later, but in the beginning, when you're trying to establish a routine, it's important to follow through quickly with the delivery of your rewards.

Choose your battles. Only give demands (instructions) that you plan on following through on. If you don't have the time or the patience to help them get dressed, let them hang out in their jammies. If you can't handle the meltdown that will ensue when you tell them to clean their room, then hold off until you're in the right headspace (and have the right reward waiting for a job well done).

Set limits on access to highly preferred items. Any items you're using as rewards should NOT be accessible unless earned. If they had free access to those items, then they wouldn't hold any value. Think about what happens when you eat too much pizza. After eating too much pizza, you're probably no longer motivated to eat more. Conversely, if you haven't had pizza in a while and suddenly someone offers you some, you might be very motivated and do just about anything to get it. Because of this, it's best to try your hardest to control access to highly preferred items.

Embrace the help of siblings. Siblings can be, with some guidance and coaching, great peer models, and in some cases, surrogate parents when you need to take a breather. Siblings can excel at teaching turn taking, sharing, appropriate play, sharing attention, and appropriate communication.

Make sure your demands are “do-able.” When giving your child/children directions, make sure that what you’re asking is something that is within their current skillset. Is it something they can already do? If not, is it something that you will need to teach them to do? Here are some MUSTS when you’re placing demands (instructions or directions).

- The task is already within the child’s skillset.
- The instruction is concise and polite (“get your shoes”) vs “hey, can you please stand up and go get your shoes and bring them over here now?”
- The instruction should be a statement, NOT a question. If you ask “do you want to put your shoes on?” and they say “no,” then you should honor their appropriate refusal. Instead, say “put your shoes on,” so they see that it’s not optional.
- Stay in close proximity when giving the instruction so you are in a position to get/keep them on track,

offer help, or praise them for cooperating.

- Know when to scale back. If you realize the instruction was too hard for them to do independently or there are other factors getting in the way, abort the mission like it's your idea (before they get off task or engage in some un-fun behavior). "Actually, I'll pick up the legos. Just pass me the lid."

Try to have more positive than negative interactions with your child.

Sometimes we have to say "no." That's just part of being a parent. However, if you find that throughout the day you're saying no or correcting your child's behavior more often than praising and rewarding, you may be caught in what is sometimes referred to as a criticism trap. This can be very taxing on your relationship with your child as well as your stamina as a parent. Try to put down the red pen and focus as much as possible on the good things your child is doing. Be deliberate and consistent in praising and rewarding these opportunities, at least in the beginning. The more positives you have throughout the day helps in those moments when you have to say "no," give a correction, or even deliver a negative consequence. To help with this, pick 1-3 behaviors or skills you want to focus on for rewarding and praising throughout the day. When your child does the "wrong thing," say or

demonstrate what you want them TO do, instead of yelling about what they shouldn't do and generally blowing a fuse (trust us, we've been there, too).

Be firm, but flexible. Flexibility is often underrated. Sometimes our demands are unreasonable and sometimes the child simply can't do what you've asked in that moment. It's okay to realize things have gone too far and it's time to back down on your expectations. This doesn't mean abandon your expectations, but rather adjust them in the moment. Sometimes the most human thing to do is make things a little easier so you can both come out with a win.

Give choices – lots of them. Now, what we mean by choices is to provide structured options. The expectation you have might be the same, but how the child completes the task might be up to them based on the choices you provide. For example, instead of "take your bath," you might say, "you can take a bath with bubbles or you can take a bath without bubbles; which do you want?" The expectation is still that bath time is going to occur, but they get a say on the kind of bath they take.

Empathy, empathy, empathy. For yourself, for your children, for the situation. A significant change in routine is hard on everyone. Going from the structure of school or therapy to now

being home all day is difficult for your child. Shifting from working full-time or having free time to take care of things to being a full-time parent is a big change for you, too. It's okay to admit that it's too much. It's going to be messy. It's going to be loud. Try to calm the chaos as much as you can and let go of trying to control it.

Tackling Academics

If you don't use it, you lose it – literally & figuratively. To maintain academic skills and even the tolerance for non-leisure activities, we recommend incorporating them into your day. These are also great opportunities to work on transitioning off of preferred activities. (Hint: praise/reward awesome or even okaytastic transitions). If learning materials have been sent home in the past, use them as a reference. If your child currently has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), then you should have been provided with a copy during their most recent IEP meeting. Keep in mind that this is for ideas only. You shouldn't be expected to have the resources that the school would have nor the training on how specifically teach these skills. It's okay if you aren't doing it the way the school does it. However, it doesn't mean you can't find ways to provide opportunities to practice those skills in their natural environment – home.

Who says we have to work at a table?

ANYTHING can be turned into a game.

- Need practice counting to 10? Play hide and seek!
- Want them to recognize sight words? Write each word on a large piece of paper, scatter them on the ground, and have them jump on the words you name.
- Working on adding? Have them add up bits of snack foods, rewarding correct responses with nibbles!
- Learning 1:1 correspondence? Play any board game that requires moving a certain amount of steps.
- Need practice with writing? Have them write action words on a dry erase board for you to follow, like instructions.

Embrace technology. There are TONS of apps geared toward teaching academics in a fun way. Review the links in the bullets below for app ideas. On the iPads & iPhones, you can set up Guided Access, so they're locked into a certain app, preventing the "you should be working, not watching YouTube" battle. Here's how!

<https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT202612>

- <https://www.parents.com/fun/entertainment/gadgets/best-educational-apps-for-kids/>
- <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/electronics/g28212386/best-apps-for-kids/>

- <https://talkingparents.com/blog/march-2019/top-educational-apps-for-kids>

Need More Skills to Work on?

Attending- Is your child able to pay attention to a task or activity? Work on *gradually* increasing the time they can pay attention to a given task by removing distractions, redirecting as needed, and rewarding any bit of progress. If they can now watch 1 minute of a tv show, great! The end goal might be 20 minutes, but you have to start somewhere.

Promoting independence- Are we allowing them to at least try to do it by themselves first before we give guidance or take over? Provide opportunities for them to demonstrate particular skills as independently as possible. Reward every little win, even if it's not perfect.

Transitioning- Moving from one activity to another, or from one location to another. Maybe your child needs to practice giving up a highly preferred item or activity in exchange for another highly preferred item or activity, or going from something that is highly preferred to something less preferred. Can you guess what helps? Rewards! (shocking). Refer back to the “choosing your battles” tip for this one, too.

Daily Living Skills- Potty training, hand washing, brushing teeth, dressing,

undressing, combing hair, bathing, cleaning up, doing laundry, making snacks... man, being a human is hard work! Remember those visuals we talked about? They come in really handy here. Check out the Pictello app if you want to create custom “stories” or display instructions one-by-one and have the app read the instructions aloud. Kids can “turn the page” when they’re ready for the next step.

Imitation– Imitation is how we can learn literally anything. It’s what we call a pivotal skill. Play games that require imitating the motor (physical) or verbal actions of another person. This could include one-step or multiple-step actions, simple sounds or even complete phrases. A fun way to work on this is to play Just Dance! If you don’t have it, you can use the YouTube version, so kids can dance along with the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLz0KsHvRF_y06aCY4St4u_AUmLY6RUSHl

Listener skills– Listener skills require a child to follow a given direction, starting off with simple one-step instructions like “touch your head” or “stand up.” Simon Says is a fun way to do this, especially if they have siblings that can join in on the fun. Maybe start off without the “Simon didn’t say” piece.

Communication– Making requests, labeling the names of items, describing

items and actions, engaging in conversation, answering questions, and asking questions. Here's a game to work on commenting skills.

<http://blog.abadesk.com/2019/04/22/commenting-board-game/>

Communication is not limited to talking – they can communicate through sign language, gestures, PECS (exchanging pictures of items for the items themselves) <https://pecsusa.com/pecs/>, or with assisted technology. Here's a free app you can customize to include frequently requested items.

<https://www.letmetalk.info/>

Appropriate protesting/Self

Advocacy- Being able to say “no,” “stop it,” and “I need a break” are skills everyone should have. Without this, we are quite vulnerable.

Responding to the Things that Make You Twitch

First, what things is your child likely to do that will make you want to tear your hair out? These are things that we want to develop a plan for. We're trying to avoid the total parent meltdown. You know, the times you lock yourself in the bathroom and cry on the floor? Those times. We don't want those.

- If your kids leave toys out instead of putting them away before they

move on, make sure all toys are out of reach, so they have to come to you (with previous toy in hand) to make an exchange.

- If they watch TV with the volume at full blast, then keep the remote near you.
- If they always fight over who gets to pick the movie they watch, then YOU make the choice for them before even getting to the TV.

Here are a few more ideas:

<http://blog.abadesk.com/2019/04/22/antecedent-strategies/>

Be flexible. You might have to mentally compromise (so you don't compromise your mental health) and remember that some things are not a big deal during this time. As a mom, I HATE dishes in the sink, but, you know what? If the choice is dishes in the sink or my sanity, then the dishes will have to wait.

Here are some real life examples of things that I really want to be a big deal, but aren't

- Dirty dishes
- Shoes scattered across the floor
- Toothpaste in the sink (don't even get me started on this one)
- Clean laundry not put away

You get the picture. None of these things are worth losing your mind over.

Reach out to the pros. If your child has special needs, it's possible that you've had outside professionals help with these behaviors before. It's beneficial to review whatever paperwork you've been provided and figure out if you can follow some of the strategies. In a perfect world, you'll be able to reach out to a qualified person to help you sort all it all out. If your child is currently receiving services (ABA agency or school), reach out and see what kind of support is available. Check out [AnswersNow](#) to connect with parent communities and receive remote consultation from one of their board certified behavior analysts.

Get help. If big, scary behaviors are occurring and nothing you're doing is making a difference, keep calm and maintain safety. Remember that these behaviors are not personal – they are the manifestation of a skill deficit, often occurring to meet a need. Professionals are here to help with these behaviors, and all but two states, private insurances are REQUIRED to cover Applied Behavior Analysis services to individuals with autism. In many states, Medicaid will also cover these services (sometimes even for other diagnoses). In the event that your SAFETY is genuinely at risk, call 911 (emergency situations only).

Links

YouTube Videos

Cosmic Kids Yoga (popular themes turned into yoga)

Frozen | A Cosmic Kids Yoga Advent



Just Dance (have kids dance along with the videos)

Just Dance Kids 2 - The Gummy ...



Mr. Tumble & Friends (teaching sign language)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCynLtJ9E2c34bui4ON0ovGw>

StoryTime At Awnie's House

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbqmjlhzxuAXsjk08k-KP6w>

Websites

www.McHarperManor.com

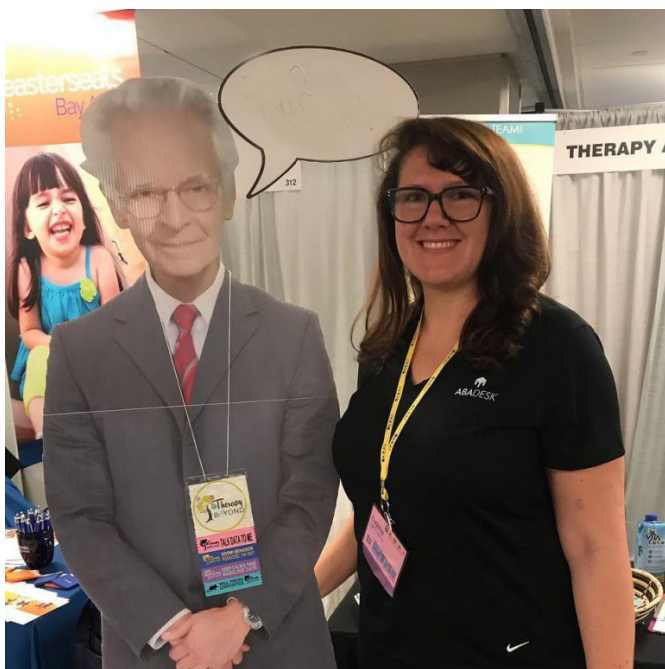
www.funbrain.com

www.jumpstart.com

www.GoNoodle.com

https://l.ead.me/bbTE3n?fbclid=IwAR1CByZ0n4skl_klfxyW1OWZgOs-_5G9hPHnnNgMn4qmf2vfjkerlMSl4

This blog post is a collaborative work between ABAdesk & [Adventures with Autism](#) (Samantha Parnham & Eric Zeissig)



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