

Autism vs Behavior: Understanding What Your Child Is Communicating

“Is this autism, or is my child just acting out?” It’s a question many parents ask, often in the middle of a moment that feels overwhelming. Your child refuses to follow a direction, drops to the floor, screams, or lashes out, and you’re left trying to make sense of it in real time.

Do you correct it? Do you comfort them? Do you let it go?

For many families, the hardest part isn’t the behavior itself, it’s not knowing what it means. Some behaviors reflect how your child experiences the world while others are their way of communicating a need, especially when they don’t yet have the words or skills to express it differently. But when those two things look similar on the surface, it can be difficult to tell them apart. That uncertainty can lead to a frustrating cycle:

- ⇒ Trying to “correct” something your child can’t control
- ⇒ Missing opportunities to teach a skill they actually need
- ⇒ Feeling like nothing is working, even when you’re doing your best

Many parents of children with autism experience this exact confusion and struggle to interpret behaviors and determine how to respond effectively (Ooi et al., 2016). And it’s not because they aren’t paying attention. It’s because no one has clearly shown them what to look for. That’s where we come in.

At ABA Direct, we don’t expect parents to figure this out on their own. We show you exactly what to look for, and what it means in real time.

We help you notice patterns, such as:

- ⇒ *When* the behavior happens (during tasks, transitions, or specific situations)
- ⇒ *What happens right before it* (a demand, a change, a loss of access)

⇒ *What happens after* (does your child get out of something, gain attention, or get what they want?)

These patterns help us understand the function of behavior—what your child is trying to gain, avoid, or communicate. From there, we help you to ask the right questions:

⇒ Is my child trying to escape something?

⇒ Are they seeking attention or connection?

⇒ Are they trying to get access to something they want?

⇒ Are they responding to sensory input?

Instead of asking “*Is this autism, or is my child just acting out?*”, you begin to consider “*What is my child trying to communicate—and what do they need from me in this moment?*”. And we don’t just explain this once, we walk through it with you. We provide parent training and ongoing support that break down your child’s behavior step by step, model what effective responses look like, and help you practice those strategies in the environments where they matter most—at home, at school, and in everyday routines. As your child grows and their needs evolve, we also adjust those strategies so they continue to work in their daily life.

This kind of guidance makes a measurable difference. When you’re taught how to interpret and respond to behavior, your child is more likely to show improvements in communication, adaptive skills, and meaningful reductions in challenging behavior (Cheng et al., 2023; Scahill et al., 2016; Hardan et al., 2015). Just as importantly, you begin to feel more confident in how you respond. You’re no longer guessing. You’re responding with clarity, confidence, and a plan.

Understanding what your child is communicating is the key to responding effectively. Your child is already communicating, whether it’s understood or not. Will you keep reacting in

the moment, or start responding with intention? With the right guidance, you can learn to recognize those patterns and respond in ways that actually help. When you do, everything changes. Your child no longer has to rely on behavior alone—they begin to communicate more clearly and no longer have to struggle to be understood.

Need Support with ABA Services?

If you're a parent or caregiver, you can get started by completing our [Intake Form](#) or reaching out through our [Contact Form](#).

If you're a BCBA or RBT looking for a more supportive work environment, we invite you to [join our team](#).

 **Email:** Abadirectllc@gmail.com

 **Phone:** 770-865-7722

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