

Background

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy is one method of treatment for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). There has been an increase in proposed legislation and/or regulations for licensure for ABA therapists and insurance coverage of ABA services. ASHA has learned that—in some states with mandated insurance coverage for ABA services—other medically necessary services, such as speech-language pathology, are not covered under the mandate and are being denied by insurers. In other settings, such as early intervention and schools, ABA therapists in some states may be acting as “gatekeepers” by denying families a comprehensive evaluation and recommending only ABA therapy.

ASHA’s Perspective

ASHA believes speech-language pathologists (SLPs) should be included in any comprehensive assessment for individuals with ASD, as SLPs are able to prioritize intervention objectives and coordinate planning for communicative success. While ABA therapists may work on an individual’s behaviors, SLPs have the educational background that enables them to focus on understanding and use of language, social communication, literacy, speech production, and augmentative and alternative communication. ASHA also believes that insurers should cover all medically necessary services for children with ASD. Individuals with ASD and their families must be provided with the full complement of services designed to meet their individual needs. Allowing individuals without the appropriate education and training to make assessment decisions about communication needs of individuals with ASD may result in an inaccurate assessment and inappropriate recommendations for services to the family.

Decision Makers

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each child with a suspected disability receive a comprehensive assessment by a team of qualified professionals so that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team can develop a coordinated treatment plan. Similarly, the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) program mandates that medically necessary services be provided to children with disabilities. ASHA recommends that a team of qualified professionals be utilized to assess, recommend services and treat individuals with ASD, and that the team members collaborate with one another to maximize resources to ensure positive outcomes for every individual with ASD. ASHA also recommends that decision makers enforce IDEA and EPSDT so that comprehensive evaluation and treatment services are available.



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