# Therapies Journey Map

Every child's path looks different, and so does the mix of therapies that supports them. This map is a quick-reference guide to common autism therapies, grouped into three categories, so you can explore what each one is and how it might fit into your family's journey. **Click on the green text below for more resources.**

## 1 Behavioral/Developmental Interventions

Approaches that build skills and independence through structured teaching, play, and everyday routines.




### ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis)

A structured, evidence-based approach that uses reinforcement to build helpful skills and reduce behaviors that get in the way of learning.



### Pivotal Response

A play-based, naturalistic therapy that targets pivotal skills like motivation and self-initiation to create broad improvements across development.



### Natural Environment Training

Teaches skills in everyday settings and routines so children can generalize what they learn to real life.



### DIR Floortime

A relationship-based therapy where caregivers follow the child's lead in play to build emotional connection and communication.



### Early Start Denver Model

An early intervention program for toddlers that blends play and everyday interactions to build social, language, and cognitive skills.




### TEACCH

A structured teaching approach that uses visual supports and organized environments to build independence.

## 2 ABA Concepts & Techniques

A closer look at the building blocks behind Applied Behavior Analysis, the specific techniques and ideas that make up an ABA program.




### ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis)

A structured, evidence-based approach that uses reinforcement to build helpful skills and reduce behaviors that get in the way of learning.



### ABA Controversy

Explores common criticisms of ABA therapy so families can weigh the debate and make informed choices.



### Functions of Behavior

Explains the reasons behind behavior, such as escape, attention, access, or sensory needs, to understand why it happens.



### ABC Contingencies

Breaks down the Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence pattern used to understand and shape behavior.



### Chaining

Teaches multi-step skills by linking individual steps together into one complete sequence.



### Errorless Learning

A teaching method that provides enough support for the learner to succeed from the start, minimizing mistakes.



### Extinction

Reduces an unwanted behavior by removing the reinforcement that had been maintaining it.



### Fading

Gradually removes prompts or supports as a skill is mastered, building independence over time.



### Punishment

Introduces a consequence intended to decrease the likelihood that an unwanted behavior recurs.



### Reinforcement

Uses rewards following a desired behavior to increase the likelihood it happens again.



### Shaping

Reinforces successive approximations of a target behavior until the full skill is achieved.



### Splinter Skills

Addresses isolated skills that develop unevenly compared to a child's overall skill level.

## 3 Talk-Based Interventions

Therapies that use conversation, creativity, and connection to support emotional wellbeing and self-expression.



### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Helps individuals recognize and reframe unhelpful thoughts to manage anxiety, emotions, and behavior.



### Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)

Builds skills in emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and mindfulness for managing intense feelings.



### Art Therapy

Uses creative expression as a non-verbal outlet for communication, emotional processing, and self-esteem.



### Music Therapy

Uses rhythm, song, and instruments to support communication, motor skills, and emotional connection.



### Equine Therapy

Involves interacting with horses to build confidence, communication, sensory regulation, and social skills.

## 4 Clinical & Communication Therapies

Hands-on, professionally guided therapies that build communication, movement, and real-world life skills.



### Speech Therapy

Supports language development, articulation, and social communication skills.



### Physical Therapy (PT)

Builds strength, coordination, and motor skills through targeted movement and exercise.



### PECS

A picture exchange system that gives non-verbal or minimally verbal individuals a way to communicate needs.



### Communication Disorders

Speech and language disorders that can occur alongside autism, so families can tell them apart and know when extra support helps.



### Vocational Rehabilitation

Prepares individuals for employment through skills training, job coaching, and workplace support.



### Modeling

Demonstrates a target behavior or skill for the learner to observe and imitate, often paired with speech and social-skills work.



### Prompting and Cueing

Uses cues and prompts to guide a learner toward a correct response, gradually reduced as skills like speech and movement develop.

## Finding What Works for Your Family

There's no single "right" therapy, many families combine a few of these approaches, and what works best often changes as your child grows. Use this map as a starting point for conversations with your child's care team, and remember that progress looks different for every child.