

FAMILY RESOURCES

The ABA Activities Kit for Families

26 ready-to-use activities, printable visual supports, and progress trackers you can start using today, for every age from babies to young adults.

26

activities, by age

14

printable templates

0-21

every age covered

What's inside

Jump straight to your child's age, or to the printables. Every activity uses methods grounded in research and explained in plain language.

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Small moments at home are where progress actually happens.

Therapy is a few hours a week. Your child's life is all the other hours. This kit turns everyday moments, snack time, getting dressed, a car ride, into chances to build communication, independence, and confidence, using the same methods a BCBA uses, explained in plain language.

EVERY AUTISTIC CHILD IS DIFFERENT

The same activity can land completely differently for two children the same age, because support needs vary so much. Clinicians describe three levels of support need (DSM-5): requiring support, substantial, and very substantial. So treat the age bands here as a starting point, not a rule. Follow your child's own skills, interests, and support needs over the number, and skip anything that does not fit the child in front of you.

Source: Masi et al., 2017; DSM-5 (APA, 2013). Full list on the References page.

WHY THIS WORKS

When parents are part of the practice, children make stronger gains, especially in communication and connection. You are with your child for the moments that matter most, and that makes you their most powerful teacher.

Source: Althoff et al., 2019. Full list on the References page.

This kit supports professional therapy, it does not replace it. These activities are great for everyday practice and connection. They are not a diagnosis or a treatment plan. If you have concerns, or want a plan built for your child, a BCBA can help, and Alpaca Health matches families with one, often within days.

A note on language: stimming and self-regulation are welcome. The goal is to build skills your child wants, not to change who they are. And more hours are not automatically better, short, warm, and consistent beats long and stressful every time.

Six ideas you'll see in every activity.

You do not need to be an expert. These six simple ideas are the whole toolkit, and the activities show you exactly how to use them.

1 Reinforcement

Catch the good stuff. When something motivating happens right after a behavior, a high-five, a favorite snack, extra play, your child does it more. This is the engine behind every activity in this kit.

2 Prompting (and fading)

Help just enough, then help less. Start with whatever support your child needs to succeed, then slowly pull it back so they are doing it on their own. Fading the help is the whole goal.

3 First-Then

First the task, then the good thing. A simple, predictable order ("first shoes, then park") that takes the stress out of transitions and makes expectations clear.

4

Task analysis

Break big skills into small steps. "Brush teeth" is really ten little steps. Teach one at a time and the impossible becomes doable.

5

Modeling

Show, do not just tell. Demonstrate the skill, in person or on video, so your child can watch and copy. Many autistic children find it easier to learn by watching than by listening.

Source: Bellini & Akullian, 2007

6

Learning through play

Teach in real life, through play. Skills learned during everyday moments and play tend to stick better and carry over more than skills drilled at a table.

Source: Schreibman et al., 2015

Where should you start?

These bands overlap on purpose, they are a starting point, not a rule. Many activities work a few years on either side. Find the band that sounds most like your child right now, then borrow freely from the bands around it. Always trust what fits your child over the number.

0-3

Babies & Early Years. Play, imitation, first words, and calm routines. Follow your child's lead.

3-5

Preschool. Communication, early thinking, visual schedules, and cooperating with daily routines.

6-10

School Age. Conversation, social situations, coping skills, chores, and focus.

11-13

Tweens. Hygiene, emotions, friendships, boundaries, and real-world money.

14-21

Teens & Young Adults. Cooking, jobs, self-advocacy, community outings, and daily independence.

One at a time. You do not need to do all 26. Choose one activity that fits a real goal this week. Small and consistent wins.

ACTIVITY 01

Copycat Games

Ages 0-3

Imitation & connection

5 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Just you and your child
- Optional: two of the same toy (two shakers, two cups)

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Get face to face, down at your child's level.
- 2 Copy **them** first. If they bang a cup, you bang a cup. This gets their attention.
- 3 Once they notice, do a small new action and wait: clap, tap your head, make a sound.
- 4 Celebrate any attempt to copy you, even a rough one, with a big smile.
- 5 Keep it playful and short. Stop while it is still fun.

★ THE ABA BIT

Imitation + joint attention (NDBI). Copying back and forth is how babies first learn that people are interesting and worth tuning into. That shared attention is the foundation under talking, playing, and connecting. Following your child's lead first is what makes them want to follow yours.

Source: Schreibman et al., 2015

TRACK IT

Does your child notice and turn toward you when you copy them? Over a week, look for more back-and-forth turns.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If they are not engaging, get more animated or copy a movement they love. Some children connect through movement or sound before faces.

ACTIVITY 02

Name What They Reach For

Ages 0-3

First words & requesting

Throughout the day

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- The things your child already wants (snack, toy, up, out)

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Notice the moment your child reaches, points, or fusses for something.
- 2 Hold it close, pause, and say the one word clearly: "cup."
- 3 Wait a few seconds. Give them a real chance to make a sound or gesture.
- 4 Any attempt counts: a sound, a look, a reach. Hand it over right away.
- 5 Say the word again as they get it: "cup! you wanted the cup."

★ THE ABA BIT

Requesting in the natural environment (NET). The strongest motivation to communicate is wanting something. By pausing at the exact moment your child wants something and giving them the word, you turn everyday wants into language practice, with a built-in reward (they get the thing).

TRACK IT

Count how often your child makes a sound or gesture to ask, rather than only fussing or grabbing.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If waiting causes frustration, shorten the pause. Start by accepting any sound, then slowly shape it toward the word.

ACTIVITY 03

The “First-Then” Snack

Ages 0-3

Communication & transitions

5 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A snack your child likes a little
- A snack your child *loves*
- Two small plates or bowls

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Put both snacks where your child can see them.
- 2 Say it simply and point: **“First cracker, then berries.”**
- 3 Wait. Let your child take the first snack. Do not rush or repeat too much.
- 4 The moment they take it, give the loved snack right away with warm praise.
- 5 Try it again through the day with different snack pairs.

★ THE ABA BIT

First-Then + reinforcement. This is the building block under every transition you will ever do. Most overwhelming moments at transitions happen because your child does not know what is coming next. “First-Then” makes the sequence visible and predictable, and the loved snack is a natural reward that makes it click.

TRACK IT

How many “First-Thens” did your child accept, out of how many you tried? Aim for 8 out of 10 before fading the words.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

The second snack may not be exciting enough, test what they truly love most. Or shorten it: “first one bite, then...”

ACTIVITY 04

Sensory Bin Discovery

Ages 0-3

Exploration, requesting & calm

10-15 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A big bowl or bin
- A filler (dry rice, oats, water, pasta)
- Scoops, cups, small hidden toys

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Fill the bin and sit down with your child, no goal, just explore together.
- 2 Hide a favorite small toy and act delighted when they find it.
- 3 Hold the scoop back slightly so they reach or ask for it, then hand it over.
- 4 Name what they feel and do: "scoop," "pour," "so soft."
- 5 Let them lead. If they just want to run their hands through it, that is great.

★ THE ABA BIT

Natural-environment teaching + requesting. Open-ended sensory play builds focus, fine-motor skills, and language all at once, and many autistic children find it genuinely calming and regulating. Holding the scoop back creates a natural, low-pressure reason to communicate.

TRACK IT

Notice how long your child stays engaged and whether they ask for items. Both tend to grow with practice.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If a texture is too much, switch to a dry one (rice over slime). Sensory comfort is the point, never force a texture.

ACTIVITY 05

Song-and-Gesture Routines

Ages 0-3

Anticipation & imitation

5 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A few simple songs with actions (Wheels on the Bus, Itsy-Bitsy Spider, pat-a-cake)

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Sing the same song with the same gestures, daily, until it is familiar.
- 2 Once your child knows it, pause right before the exciting part and wait.
- 3 Look expectant. Let them fill in the gap with a sound, gesture, or eye contact.
- 4 The moment they do, finish the line with energy as the reward.
- 5 Slowly leave bigger gaps for them to fill.

★ THE ABA BIT

Anticipation + imitation. Predictable songs let your child learn what comes next, then the pause invites them to communicate to make the fun continue. It builds gestures, sounds, and turn-taking, the early ingredients of conversation.

TRACK IT

Watch for your child filling the pause on their own, with a sound, sign, or movement.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If they do not fill the gap yet, model it for a few days first. The waiting works once the song is truly familiar.

ACTIVITY 06

Picture Requesting

Ages 3-5

Communication for limited speech

10 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Photos or simple pictures of 3-4 favorite things
- Tape or a small binder/velcro strip

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Take clear pictures of things your child loves (a specific snack, a toy, the iPad).
- 2 Keep the loved item in sight but out of reach.
- 3 When they want it, help them hand you the matching picture.
- 4 The instant they give you the picture, hand over the item and name it.
- 5 Slowly expect the picture-hand-over with less and less help from you.

★ THE ABA BIT

Picture exchange (PECS-style). For children with little or no speech, handing over a picture is a real, powerful way to communicate, and it often reduces frustration because they finally have a way to be understood. Research shows picture exchange increases how often children start communicating on their own.

Source: Howlin et al., 2007

TRACK IT

Count independent picture exchanges (no help from you). Watch this number climb week to week.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If they drop the picture or grab the item, gently block the grab and guide the exchange. Keep the wanted item truly motivating.

ACTIVITY 07

Sort and Match

Ages 3-5

Early thinking & attention

10 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Everyday objects in 2-3 categories (socks by color, blocks, toy animals)
- Two or three bowls or baskets

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Start with just two clear categories: red socks vs. blue socks.
- 2 Show one example: "red goes here, blue goes here."
- 3 Hand your child one item at a time and let them place it.
- 4 Praise correct sorts warmly; gently guide the tricky ones without making it a test.
- 5 Add a third category once two feels easy.

★ THE ABA BIT

Matching & discrimination + reinforcement. Sorting teaches your child to notice how things are the same and different, an early-thinking skill that feeds language, math, and following directions. Using real household objects keeps it concrete and useful.

TRACK IT

How many items can your child sort correctly with no help? Note when they are ready for a new category.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

Too hard? Make the categories more different (big vs. small, not light-blue vs. dark-blue). Build up from there.

ACTIVITY 08

Morning Visual Schedule

Ages 3-5

Independence & smoother mornings

Set up once, use daily

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- The printable schedule template in this kit
- Photos or drawings of each morning step

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 List your real morning steps: wake, potty, dressed, breakfast, teeth, shoes.
- 2 Add a picture for each step on the schedule template.
- 3 Walk through it together each morning: "what is next? check it off."
- 4 Let your child move or flip each card as they finish, that part is motivating.
- 5 Keep it in the same spot every day.

★ THE ABA BIT

Visual supports. Many autistic children process pictures more easily than spoken instructions. A visual schedule shows the whole morning at a glance, which lowers anxiety, cuts down on nagging, and builds independence. Visual schedules are one of the most well-established supports there is.

Source: National Standards Project, 2015

TRACK IT

Count steps your child does without a verbal reminder. The schedule is working as that number grows.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If mornings still stall, shrink the schedule to the 3 hardest steps. Add the rest back once those flow.

ACTIVITY 09

Roll, Wait, Take Turns

Ages 3-5

Social play & patience

10 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A ball, or any simple back-and-forth toy
- Optional: a simple turn-taking board game

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Sit facing each other and roll a ball back and forth.
- 2 Name the turns out loud: "my turn... your turn."
- 3 Build in a tiny wait before their turn so "waiting" gets practiced.
- 4 Add a third person or a simple game as turn-taking gets easier.
- 5 Keep it warm and fun, not a drill.

★ THE ABA BIT

Turn-taking & social play. Turn-taking is the skeleton of friendship and conversation: I go, you go, I wait. Practicing it in an easy, fun game builds the patience and back-and-forth your child will use with peers later.

TRACK IT

How many back-and-forth turns can your child manage before losing interest? Watch it stretch.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If waiting is hard, make turns very fast at first, then slowly add a beat of waiting.

ACTIVITY 10

Feelings Match

Ages 3-5

Naming emotions

10 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- The printable emotion cards in this kit
- Optional: a mirror

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Start with two clear feelings: happy and sad.
- 2 Make the face yourself and name it: "this is happy."
- 3 Ask your child to find the matching card, or make the face in the mirror.
- 4 Tie it to real life: "you are smiling, you feel happy."
- 5 Add new feelings slowly: mad, scared, tired, calm.

★ THE ABA BIT

Emotion recognition. Naming feelings is the first step to managing them. When children can label what they feel, they are better able to ask for help instead of only showing it through behavior. Start simple and build the emotional vocabulary over time.

TRACK IT

How many feelings can your child name or match? Note the new ones they pick up.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

Keep it to 2-3 feelings until those are solid. Use photos of your child's own expressions if that helps it click.

ACTIVITY 11

Getting-Dressed Token Board

Ages 3-5

Cooperation with hard routines

Daily

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- The printable token board in this kit
- Stickers or tokens
- A small reward your child chooses

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Pick one routine that is a struggle, like getting dressed.
- 2 Break it into a few steps; each finished step earns one token.
- 3 Let your child place each token themselves, that is part of the reward.
- 4 When the board is full, they get the reward they picked.
- 5 Slowly require a bit more before each token as it gets easier.

★ THE ABA BIT

Token economy + task analysis. A token board makes effort visible and progress feel achievable. Your child can see exactly how close the reward is, which turns a daily battle into a game they are winning. It is the same reinforcement system used in therapy, simplified for home.

TRACK IT

Note how much help each step needs. Over time, the same board should need fewer prompts.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If they lose steam, shorten the board (3 tokens, not 10) so the win comes fast, then lengthen it.

ACTIVITY 12

A Social Story for Tricky Moments

Ages 6-10

Preparing for hard situations

15 min to make, read often

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Paper or a slideshow
- Photos of the real place or people, if you can

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Pick one situation your child finds hard: a haircut, a fire drill, a birthday party.
- 2 Write a short, calm story from their view: what happens, step by step.
- 3 Include what they can do and feel: "it may be loud. I can hold my ears. Then it ends."
- 4 Read it together calmly, well before the event, a few times.
- 5 Read it again right before the real thing.

★ THE ABA BIT

Social narratives. Surprises are stressful. A social story walks your child through what will happen and what they can do, so the real moment feels familiar instead of scary. Personalizing it with real photos and their own coping moves makes it land.

Source: Steinbrenner et al. (NCAEP), 2020

TRACK IT

Notice if the situation gets a little easier each time. Less distress is the win, not zero distress.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If it is not helping, the story may be too long or too abstract. Cut it to 4-5 simple sentences with pictures.

ACTIVITY 13

Conversation Tennis

Ages 6-10

Back-and-forth conversation

10 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Just the two of you
- Optional: a soft ball to pass on each turn

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Explain the game: a chat is like tennis, the ball goes back and forth.
- 2 You say something and ask a question. They answer and ask one back.
- 3 Pass the ball on each turn to make the back-and-forth concrete.
- 4 Start with their favorite topic so it is motivating.
- 5 Praise good "returns": "nice, you asked me a question back!"

★ THE ABA BIT

Conversation & social skills. Many autistic children love to share about their interests but find the back-and-forth tricky. Making the turns visible (the ball, the question-back) teaches the rhythm of conversation in a low-pressure way they can feel.

TRACK IT

Count how many back-and-forth exchanges you reach before it drops. Watch it grow over weeks.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If asking-a-question-back is hard, give them a few starter questions on a card to choose from.

ACTIVITY 14

Break It Down: A Chore, Step by Step

Ages 6-10

Independence & responsibility

Builds over weeks

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- One real chore (pack the school bag, feed the pet, set the table)
- Optional: photos of each step

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Pick one useful chore your child is almost ready for.
- 2 Write the steps with them, in order, as small as needed.
- 3 Do it together first; you do the hard steps, they do the easy ones.
- 4 Each week, hand over one more step to them.
- 5 Praise the effort and let them own the finished job.

★ THE ABA BIT

Task analysis + chaining. Big tasks feel impossible until they are broken into small steps. Teaching one step at a time ("chaining") lets your child build a real, useful skill and the confidence that comes with doing something themselves.

TRACK IT

Keep a list of steps they can do alone vs. with help. Watch the "with help" side shrink.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

Stuck on one step? Break that step into two smaller ones, or add a picture so they do not rely on you.

ACTIVITY 15

Calm-Down Card Deck

Ages 6-10

Coping with big feelings

Make once, use as needed

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- The printable calm-down cards in this kit
- A ring or envelope to keep them together

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 When everyone is calm, talk about what helps when feelings get big.
- 2 Build a deck together: deep breaths, squeeze a pillow, count to ten, quiet corner.
- 3 Practice each card when calm, so it is familiar before it is needed.
- 4 When you see feelings rising, offer the deck: "which one do you want to try?"
- 5 Praise any attempt to use a strategy, even a small one.

★ THE ABA BIT

Self-regulation & coping skills. Children cannot learn a new calming skill in the middle of an overwhelming moment. Building and practicing the deck during calm times means the tools are ready and familiar when feelings get big. Offering a choice also gives your child a sense of control.

TRACK IT

Notice which strategies your child reaches for and whether they recover a little faster over time.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If no card works in the moment, that is okay. Lower demands, keep them safe, and try again later. Prevention beats rescue.

ACTIVITY 16

Homework First-Then + Timer

Ages 6-10

Focus & finishing tasks

Daily

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A visual timer or phone timer
- A clear, motivating reward for after

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Agree on the plan up front: "first 10 minutes of math, then 10 minutes of Lego."
- 2 Set a visual timer so the end is in sight.
- 3 Work in short blocks with real breaks, not one long stretch.
- 4 When the timer ends, the break happens, every time, so the deal stays trustworthy.
- 5 Slowly extend the work block as focus grows.

★ THE ABA BIT

Antecedent strategy + reinforcement. Open-ended tasks feel endless, which fuels avoidance. A timer makes the work feel finite, and a guaranteed break afterward gives your child a reason to push through. Keeping your promise on the break is what makes the whole system work.

TRACK IT

Track how long your child works before needing a break. Stretch it slowly, not all at once.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If 10 minutes is too long, start at 3. A short block they finish beats a long one they melt down over.

ACTIVITY 17

Be the Star: Video Modeling

Ages 6-10

Learning any new skill

15 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A phone to record
- A skill to teach (washing hands, greeting a friend, tying shoes)

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Pick one specific skill and break it into clear steps.
- 2 Record a short clip of the skill done well, by you, a sibling, or your child on a good try.
- 3 Watch the clip together, calmly, a few times before practicing.
- 4 Then practice the real thing right after watching.
- 5 Re-watch as a refresher whenever the skill slips.

★ THE ABA BIT

Video modeling. Many autistic children are strong visual learners and find watching a video less demanding than live instruction. Research shows video modeling reliably teaches social, daily-living, and communication skills, and the skills tend to stick and carry over to new settings.

Source: Bellini & Akullian, 2007

TRACK IT

Note how much help the skill needs before vs. after watching. Watch the help fade.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If your child resists being filmed, model with a sibling or a doll, or film just your hands doing the steps.

ACTIVITY 18

The Hygiene Routine Checklist

Ages 11-13

Self-care & growing up

Daily

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- The printable checklist in this kit
- Their own labeled hygiene supplies

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Make the checklist together so it feels like theirs, not a list of orders.
- 2 Break each routine into clear steps (shower, deodorant, brush, dress).
- 3 Post it where the routine happens, like the bathroom mirror.
- 4 Let them check off each step; the checklist prompts them, not you.
- 5 Step back as it becomes habit, the goal is they own it.

★ THE ABA BIT

Self-care task analysis + visual supports. Puberty brings new hygiene needs right when tweens want more independence and less nagging. A checklist hands the reminders to a chart instead of to you, which protects your relationship and builds genuine self-reliance.

TRACK IT

Count steps done without a reminder from you. That number going up is the real progress.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If a step is skipped a lot, add a picture or a specific cue ("deodorant: 2 swipes each side"). Keep it matter-of-fact.

ACTIVITY 19

The Feelings Thermometer

Ages 11-13

Spotting and managing emotions

Make once, use daily

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Paper or the printable in this kit
- Markers

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Draw a thermometer with zones: green (calm), yellow (bothered), red (too big).
- 2 Together, list what each zone feels like in their body (tense hands, fast heart).
- 3 List one or two things that help in yellow, before it reaches red.
- 4 Check in daily: "where are you on the thermometer right now?"
- 5 Use it to catch yellow early and try a coping tool before red.

★ THE ABA BIT

Emotion regulation. The skill that prevents the biggest moments is noticing feelings early, while they are still manageable. A thermometer gives your tween shared language to spot "yellow" and act before it becomes "red," building real self-awareness.

TRACK IT

Notice if your tween can name their zone on their own, and catches "yellow" earlier over time.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If naming feelings is hard, focus on body clues first ("hot face, tight fists"). The label can come later.

ACTIVITY 20

Friendship & Boundaries Role-Play

Ages 11-13

Social confidence & safety

15 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Just the two of you
- A few real situations your tween has faced

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Pick one real, low-stakes situation: joining a group, saying no, handling teasing.
- 2 Talk through a few good responses together, no judgment.
- 3 Act it out, you play the other person, they practice their response.
- 4 Switch roles so they can see it from the outside.
- 5 Keep it light, and end on a confident note they can reuse.

★ THE ABA BIT

Social skills + role-play. Tween social situations get more complex and unspoken. Practicing real scenarios in private, where mistakes are safe, gives your tween tested responses and the confidence to use them, including how to set and respect boundaries.

TRACK IT

Notice whether your tween uses a practiced response in real life. Ask them how it went, without pressure.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If role-play feels awkward, use characters from a show they like, or write the scripts out first.

ACTIVITY 21

Money in the Real World

Ages 11-13

Life skills & independence

Weekly

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Real coins and bills, or a prepaid card
- A small real budget (an allowance, a store trip)

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Start with a real, simple goal: buy a snack with \$5.
- 2 Practice at home first: counting, "do we have enough?", getting change.
- 3 Do a real trip together, let them hand over the money and take the change.
- 4 Build up to comparing prices or saving for something bigger.
- 5 Talk through choices out loud: "if we buy this, we cannot buy that."

★ THE ABA BIT

Functional life skills. Money is an abstract idea that becomes real through practice with actual coins and real trips. Starting small and concrete builds a skill your tween will use for the rest of their life, and real independence with it.

TRACK IT

Note what they can do alone: counting, paying, checking change, comparing prices.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If full transactions overwhelm, practice one piece at a time (just counting, or just paying) before combining.

ACTIVITY 22

Cook One Simple Meal

Ages 14-21

Independence & life skills

Builds over weeks

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- One simple meal your teen likes (eggs, a sandwich, pasta)
- The ingredients
- The step-list template from this kit

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Pick one meal your teen actually wants to eat.
- 2 Break it into small steps together (copy our example sheet).
- 3 Do it together first, you do the hard steps, they do the easy ones.
- 4 Each time, hand over one more step to them.
- 5 Step back as confidence grows. Praise the effort, not just the result.

★ THE ABA BIT

Task analysis + chaining. Task analysis means breaking a big skill into small teachable steps. Chaining means mastering one step at a time until your teen can do the whole thing alone. It is exactly how a BCBA teaches independence, and it works for cooking, laundry, or any multi-step routine.

TRACK IT

Which steps can your teen do alone now, versus with help? Update it weekly and watch the “with help” list shrink.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

A step may be too big, split the sticky one in two. Or add a photo of each step so they do not rely on you.

ACTIVITY 23

Practice the Interview

Ages 14-21

Jobs & adult readiness

20 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A phone to record (optional but powerful)
- A few common interview questions

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Pick 3-4 real questions: "tell me about yourself," "why this job?"
- 2 Talk through a strong answer for each, in their own words.
- 3 Do a mock interview; record it if your teen is willing.
- 4 Watch it back together and pick one thing to improve, plus two things they did well.
- 5 Run it again. Confidence grows with reps.

★ THE ABA BIT

Role-play + video modeling. Interviews and workplaces run on unwritten social rules that can be taught directly. Practicing real questions and watching the playback lets your teen see themselves and adjust, which research shows is an effective way to build social and real-world skills.

Source: Bellini & Akullian, 2007

TRACK IT

Note clearer answers, eye contact if that is a goal, and calmer delivery across practice runs.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If recording adds pressure, skip it and just role-play. Build up to the camera once they are comfortable.

ACTIVITY 24

Self-Advocacy Scripts

Ages 14-21

Communication & self-determination

15 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Index cards or a notes app
- Real situations where speaking up is hard

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 List moments your teen finds hard: needing a break, not understanding, disagreeing.
- 2 Write a short, ready-to-use script for each: "I need a minute," "can you repeat that?"
- 3 Practice saying them out loud until they feel natural.
- 4 Role-play using them in real situations.
- 5 Celebrate every real-life use, this is a powerful adult skill.

★ THE ABA BIT

Communication + self-determination. Being able to ask for what you need, a break, help, clarification, is one of the most important skills for adult independence and self-respect. Ready-made scripts remove the in-the-moment pressure of finding the words.

TRACK IT

Notice when your teen uses a script without prompting. Each real use is a meaningful win.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

Keep scripts short and in their own voice. If one feels unnatural, rewrite it together until it fits them.

ACTIVITY 25

The Community Outing

Ages 14-21

Real-world independence

30-60 min

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A real destination (cafe, store, bus route)
- A simple plan or checklist

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Pick one real outing with a clear goal: order a drink, buy one item, ride one stop.
- 2 Plan it together first: what to say, what to bring, what might go wrong.
- 3 Go together, but let your teen lead the interaction.
- 4 Step back a little more each time, eventually watching from nearby.
- 5 Debrief afterward: what went well, what to try next time.

★ THE ABA BIT

Community skills + generalization. Skills practiced at home need to transfer to the messy real world. Real outings, with you fading into the background, are how your teen learns to handle ordering, paying, and the unexpected, the actual stuff of independent adult life.

TRACK IT

Track how much of the interaction your teen handles alone, and how much support they still need.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If a full outing is too much, practice the exact script at home first, then do just one piece in public.

ACTIVITY 26

The Independence Checklist

Ages 14-21

Daily living & self-management

Daily

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- The printable checklist in this kit, or a phone reminder app

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Together, list the daily-living tasks that matter: meds, laundry, charging devices, schedule.
- 2 Turn it into a checklist your teen owns and runs themselves.
- 3 Move reminders from you to the checklist or phone alarms.
- 4 Review weekly together: what is working, what needs a tweak.
- 5 Step back as tasks become automatic.

★ THE ABA BIT

Self-management + daily living skills. Adult independence is really a stack of small daily routines. A checklist your teen manages themselves shifts the responsibility off you and onto a system they control, which builds genuine self-management instead of dependence on reminders from a parent.

TRACK IT

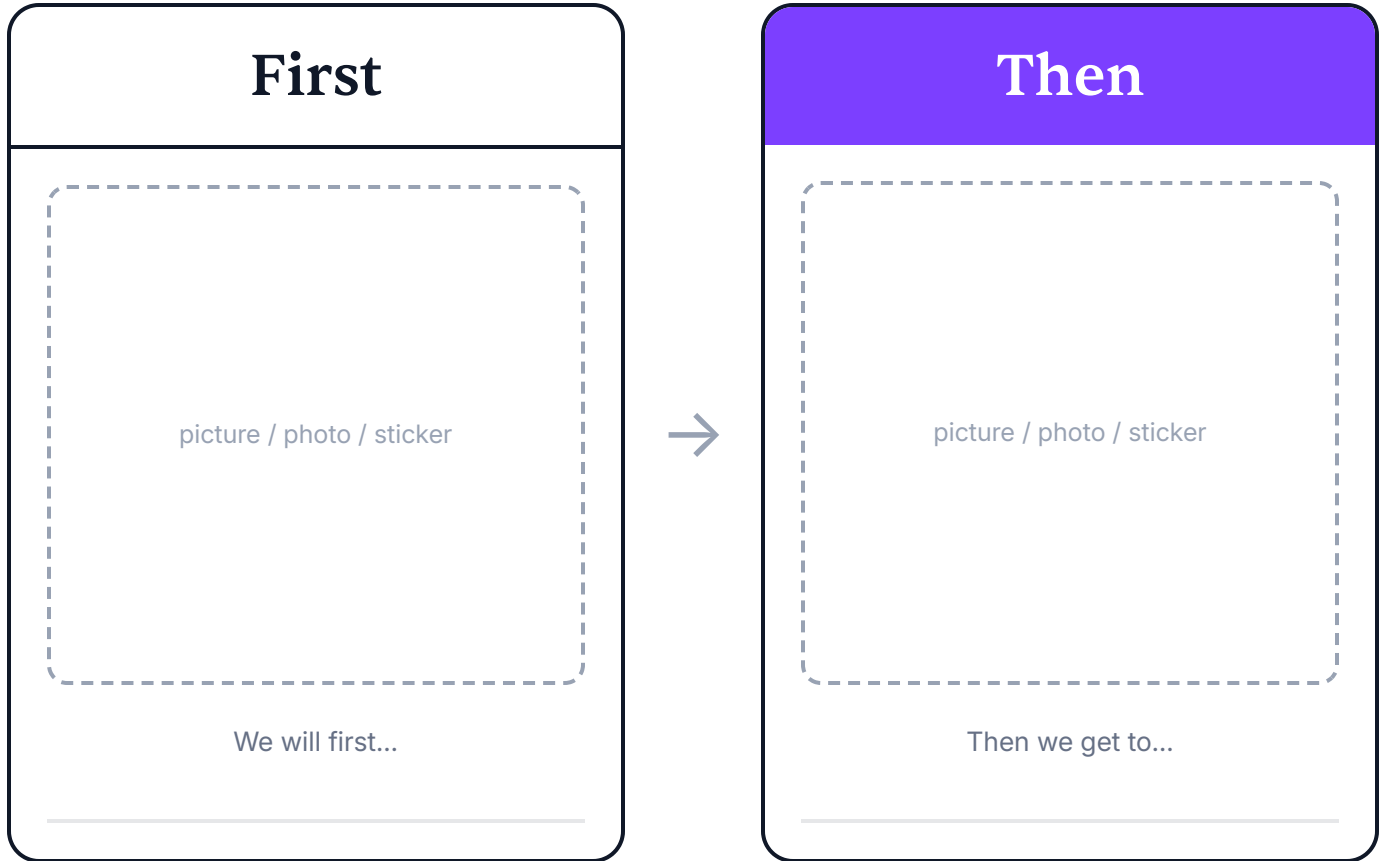
Count tasks done without any reminder from you. That is the clearest measure of growing independence.

IF IT'S NOT WORKING

If too many tasks overwhelm, start with the 3 most important and add more once those are routine.

First-Then Board

Draw, print a photo, or add a sticker for each side.
Point to "First," then "Then," before a transition.



How to use it: Put the "have-to" activity on the left and a motivating one on the right. Keep it short and predictable. As your child learns the routine, you can fade the board out, it has done its job once the sequence feels familiar.

Now • Next • Later









For longer stretches: show three steps at once so your child can see the whole plan.

The image shows three vertical panels, each representing a time period: 'Now', 'Next', and 'Later'. Each panel is a rounded rectangle with a black border. The top section of each panel is a header with the word 'Now', 'Next', or 'Later' in a bold, black, serif font. Below the header is a large dashed-line square box containing the word 'picture' in a light gray font. At the bottom of each panel is a solid horizontal line. The 'Later' panel is distinguished by a solid purple header background.

How to use it: Great for outings, appointments, or a busy afternoon. Update it as you go, slide "Next" into "Now" when each step is done so there is always a clear plan in view.

Daily Visual Schedule









Add a picture and a word for each step. Check off each one as your child finishes it.

1		_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2		_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3		_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4		_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5		_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
6		_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
7		_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
8		_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

How to use it: Keep it in the same spot every day. Walk through it together: "What is next?" Let your child check off or move each step, that small win is part of what makes it work.

Daily Schedule — Example

Here is a filled-in morning, so you can see how it works.


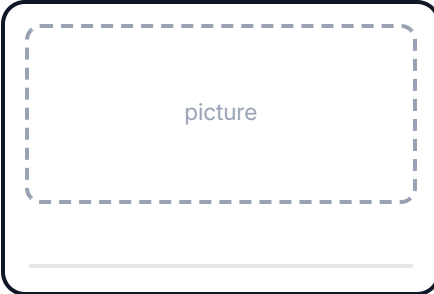

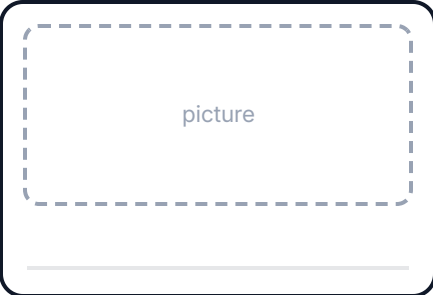
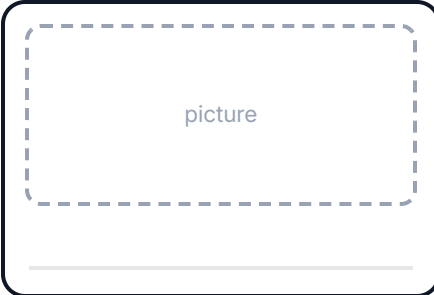
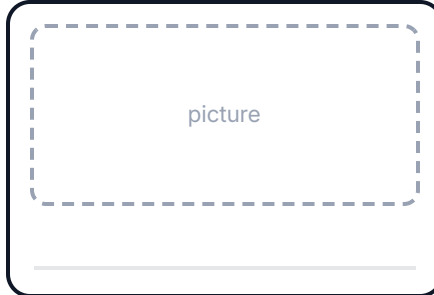
1		Wake up	<input type="checkbox"/>
2		Breakfast	<input type="checkbox"/>
3		Brush teeth	<input type="checkbox"/>
4		Get dressed	<input type="checkbox"/>
5		Shoes on	<input type="checkbox"/>
6		Pack bag	<input type="checkbox"/>
7		School	<input type="checkbox"/>
8		After school	<input type="checkbox"/>

Make it yours: Use the blank version on the previous page. Take real photos of your child doing each step, those work even better than drawings because your child recognizes themselves.

Choice Board

Offer 2 to 6 real choices. Letting your child choose builds communication and lowers power struggles.

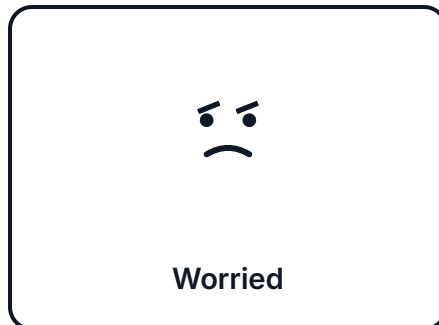
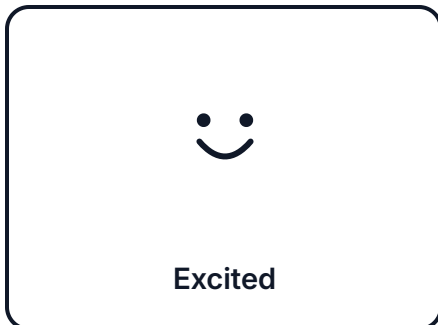
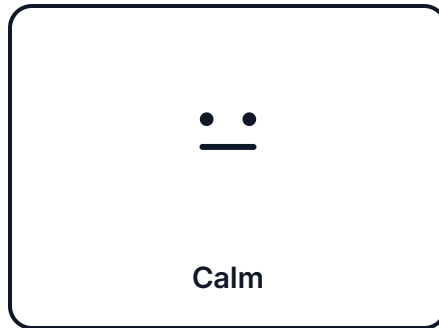
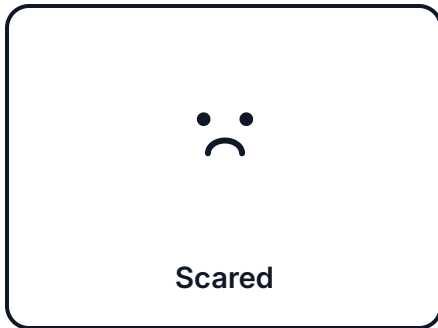
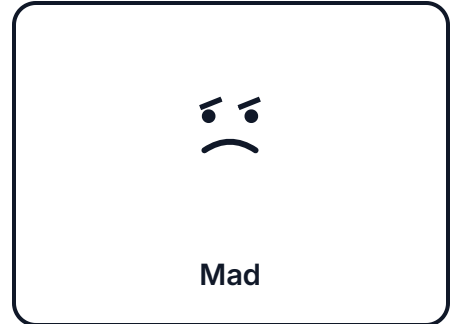
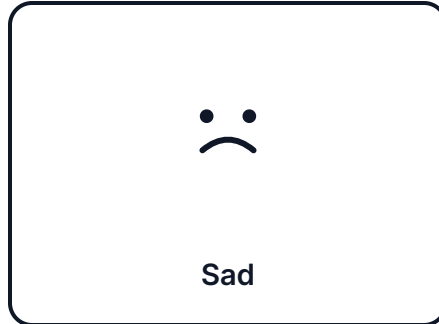
I would like to...

 <p>picture</p>	 <p>picture</p>	 <p>picture</p>
 <p>picture</p>	 <p>picture</p>	 <p>picture</p>

How to use it: Fill the boxes with real options (snacks, toys, activities). Ask your child to point to or hand you their choice, then honor it. Choice-making is a powerful, low-pressure way to communicate.

Feelings Cards

Cut these out. Use them to name feelings, build a calm-down routine, or play Feelings Match.



How to use them: Start with two or three feelings your child sees most. Name your own feelings out loud too, "I feel happy", so your child learns feelings are normal and shared.

Calm-Down Cards

Build the deck together when calm. Practice each one before it is needed.

Take 5 breaths

Breathe in slow, out slow. Count each one.

Squeeze something

A pillow, a stress ball, a big hug.

Quiet space

Go to your calm spot until you feel ready.

Count to ten

Slow and steady, out loud or in your head.

Ask for help

Use your words or your card: I need help.

Move your body

Jump, stretch, push the wall, take a walk.

How to use them: When you see big feelings rising, offer the deck and let your child pick: "Which one do you want to try?" Choosing gives them a sense of control, which itself helps.

Token Boards

Each finished step earns a token. Fill the board, earn the reward. Pick the size that fits your child.

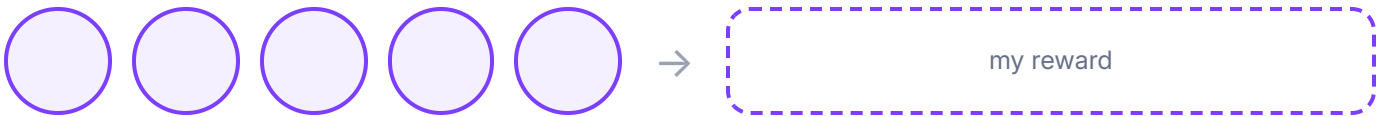
Starter board – 3 tokens

I am working for: _____



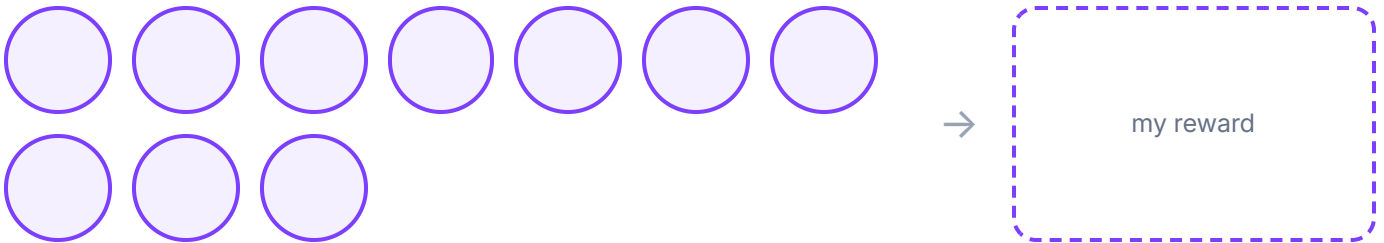
Building board – 5 tokens

I am working for: _____



Challenge board – 10 tokens

I am working for: _____



How to use them: Start small so the first win comes fast, then grow the board. Let your child place each token themselves. Always deliver the reward when the board is full, that trust is what makes it work.

Reward Menu

Brainstorm rewards with your child. The best ones are things they genuinely want, and most are free.

Quick wins	Medium	Big goals
e.g. high-five, sticker, favorite song <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	e.g. 15 min screen time, choose dinner <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	e.g. outing, special activity, sleepover <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

How to use it: Let your child help build this list, motivation is personal. Mix in free rewards (extra play, one-on-one time) so the system stays sustainable. Refresh it when something stops being exciting.

What We Both Agree To

A teen-friendly agreement, written together.
Collaboration beats rules imposed from above.

I will...

And in return...

Signed (teen)

Signed (parent)

Date

How to use it: Write it together, as equals. Keep promises realistic and specific on both sides. Revisit it weekly and adjust, an agreement your teen helped write is one they will actually follow.

Behavior Notes (A-B-C)

When something tricky happens, jot down what came before, what happened, and what came after.

WHEN	BEFORE (what was happening?)	WHAT MY CHILD DID	AFTER (what happened next?)

Why this helps: Behavior is communication. After a week of notes, patterns appear, what tends to set off hard moments, and what your child is trying to get or avoid. That is gold for you and for your BCBA.

Count It

Pick one thing to count, a word used, a skill tried, a behavior. Tally it each day.

What I am counting: _____

DAY	TALLY	TOTAL
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Why this helps: Counting turns a vague feeling ("today was rough") into something you can see. Watching a skill go up, or a hard behavior go down, tells you whether what you are doing is working.

Weekly Skill Tracker

List the skills you are working on. Check the day each one was practiced.

SKILL WE ARE WORKING ON	M	T	W	T	F	S	S

How to use it: Keep it to two or three skills at a time. A check just means you tried, consistency matters more than perfection. Bring this to your next BCBA session.

Bring This to Your BCBA

A few notes before your next session make it far more useful. Your BCBA can build on what you have seen at home.

WHAT WENT WELL THIS WEEK

WHAT FELT TRICKY

ACTIVITIES WE TRIED (AND HOW THEY WENT)

QUESTIONS FOR OUR BCBA

You are part of the team. No one sees your child the way you do. The notes you bring make your BCBA's plan sharper and more personal. Do not have a BCBA yet? Alpaca Health can match you with one, often within days.

Some things are easier with a BCBA in your corner.

This kit is a strong start. But some moments call for a professional who can build a plan around your specific child. Reach out if you notice:

- New or intense behaviors, or anything that feels unsafe for your child or others.
- You feel stuck, you have tried, and progress has stalled.
- Your child was recently diagnosed and you want a clear, personalized plan.
- You simply want expert guidance and someone to share the load.

Get matched with a BCBA, often within days.

Alpaca Health connects families with vetted, in-network Board Certified Behavior Analysts, at home, in clinic, at school, or by telehealth, across Colorado, Texas, North Carolina, and Hawaii. We handle the insurance paperwork. You focus on your child.



[Start your intake →](#)

Scan to start

<https://secure.alpacahealth.io/signup>

References

The methods in this kit are grounded in published research and established evidence-based practice. Key sources:

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This kit is for education and support. It is not medical advice, a diagnosis, or a treatment plan. Always consult a qualified professional for guidance specific to your child.