

Hiring RBTs When the Resume Isn't Perfect

What to look for and what to walk away from, so you can spot a great technician who has never heard of ABA.



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Why screening matters

RBT turnover is one of the most expensive problems a practice has, and a lot of it starts at the screening stage. Candidates who already have ABA experience on paper are scarce and in high demand. If experience is your filter, you compete for a small pool and pass over people who would have been excellent.

The technical parts of the job are trainable. You can teach data collection, terminology and the plan of care after someone joins your team.

Warmth, patience, curiosity about why a behavior is happening and a willingness to be coached are much harder to teach quickly. Those qualities show up in people who have never heard of ABA, so tick each flag on the next pages as you hear it in the interview.



Good to know

Train the ABA after you hire, and screen for the disposition before you do.

Where promising candidates come from

Look past the resume for people who have already done work like this.

☐ Childcare, daycare, nannying or camp counseling.

☐ Tutoring, paraprofessional work or classroom aide roles.

☐ Caregiving for a family member or sibling with a disability.

☐ Any high-stress, unpredictable workplace.

Service industry, healthcare support, crisis or shelter work. It builds the same muscle, which is staying regulated when the situation is not.

☐ Candidates working toward BCBA certification.

These are your best long-term bet. Offering to support their supervision hours is one of the strongest retention tools you have.

Green flags with the child

☐ **Real warmth and enthusiasm.**

Smiles, open body language and an upbeat, energetic way of answering. They light up more when describing one specific child than when talking about kids in general.

☐ **Patience.**

Comfortable with silence and slow progress. They do not rush to fill a pause in the interview, and they describe waiting for a child without hurrying them along.

☐ **Compassion and empathy.**

Talks about how the child might be feeling as well as what the child did. Assumes there is a reason behind the behavior.

☐ **Creativity and adaptability.**

Offers more than one idea and says "or I could try" without being asked. When you add a complication in the middle of a scenario, they change course and do not repeat their first answer.

☐ **Lets the child lead.**

Describes following the child's interest, joining their play and making the activity fun. They do not describe directing every moment.

How they think and take direction

☐ **Asks why before what.**

Their first instinct is to wonder what is driving the behavior, before they decide what to do about it.

☐ **Considers the environment.**

Mentions what happened right before, along with noise, hunger, sleep, task difficulty or who else was in the room.

☐ **Curious.**

Asks you about the child, the team, the training and the plan of care. Their questions are about the work as well as pay and hours.

☐ **Comfortable not knowing.**

Says "I don't know yet, and this is what I would try first" and does not bluff.

☐ **Open to feedback.**

Can name a specific time they were corrected and what they changed as a result.

☐ **Actively seeks feedback.**

Asks how they will be evaluated, how often they will meet with a supervisor and whether someone will observe a session.

☐ **Adjusts and does not defend.**

When you push back on an answer, they think about it out loud and do not simply restate it.

☐ **Accepts the plan of care as non-negotiable.**

Does not treat it as a starting suggestion they would adapt.

Professionalism and reliability

☐ **Punctual.**

On time or early to the interview, and asks about start times and travel. Treats lateness as something that affects the family's whole day as well as the schedule.

☐ **Proactive communicator.**

Describes telling someone before something becomes a problem.

☐ **Initiative and independence.**

Can give an example of solving something without being told to.

☐ **Comfortable with the physical realities.**

Answers the diaper question plainly, without a long pause, a nervous laugh or a joke to deflect.

☐ **Adapts to the household.**

Treats a family's language, food, routines and rules as information to work with. Asks before assuming.

☐ **Knows when to escalate.**

Would bring the BCBA into a hard parent conversation and would not handle it alone.

☐ **Translates ABA into plain language.**

Can explain something technical to you in words a parent would follow.

☐ **Long-term intent.**

Has a reason for being in the field that extends past this job.

Red flags worth slowing down for

☐ **Compliance or punishment language.**

Says "make them," "don't let them get away with it," "they need consequences" or "hold them to it."
Every plan is about getting the child to comply.

☐ **Uses labels.**

Calls a child bad, manipulative, defiant or spoiled.

☐ **Resists feedback.**

Has a ready answer for everything and cannot name a time they were wrong.

☐ **Reacts without analyzing.**

Jumps to a response with no curiosity about the cause. Every behavior is the same problem.

☐ **Big reactions.**

Raises their voice, gets visibly rattled or irritated, or meets escalation with escalation.

☐ **Discomfort with the physical side.**

A long pause, a nervous laugh, a visible recoil or "would someone else handle that?" when you ask about drooling, toileting accidents, food smearing, spitting or biting.

☐ **Scripted answers.**

Polished and generic. They answer the question they prepared for, whatever you asked.

☐ **Treats a family's practices as obstacles.**

Describes a household's language, food, routines or parenting as something to work around, correct or push past. Assumes their own norms are the default.

☐ **No real warmth about children.**

Flat affect on the questions about kids, with energy appearing only for pay, schedule or hours.

Four ways to bring out a good candidate

Step 1: Reach out before the interview

Send a short email or a friendly text saying you are excited to meet them and talk about the role. A personal note may be the difference between a candidate showing up to the interview and staying home.

Step 2: Ask the unexpected question

Once they are relaxed, ask plainly whether they are comfortable changing a diaper or toilet training an older child. Watch the half second before they reply, because the pause tells you more than the answer does.

Step 3: Ask about the future

Ask where they want to be in three years. If they are pursuing BCBA certification, say out loud that you can support their supervision hours, because it is the strongest retention lever you have.

Step 4: Be transparent about feedback

Tell them plainly that this role is feedback-driven and that following the BCBA's plan of care is a regulatory requirement, so it is never a matter of preference. Then ask how they handle criticism.

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When you are ready

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Know an RBT who is looking for work?

Share this link with them. It lists open RBT roles with BCBA-owned practices that work with Alpaca Health, and people who are not certified yet can apply too.

www.alpacahealth.io/rbt-careers



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For the reasoning behind each flag and how to run the interview, read the full guide to hiring RBTs. <https://www.alpacahealth.io/provider-resources/how-to-hire-rbts>