



Child-Centered ABA for Toleration, Communication, and Reinforcement

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Goal	What to Do (Procedure)	Example	Tips/Tricks (Main Focus)	Why It Works (Evidence)
Build Motivation	Use child's interests—even "obsessions"—to start teaching.	Child loves cars → teach "my turn/your turn" with cars.	Treat perseverations as teaching tools. Join in and use them to connect.	Special interests boost engagement (Koegel et al., 2012).
Teach Functional Communication (mands: words/signs/PECS)	Prompt the child to request items/activities before access. Reinforce immediately.	Before snack, prompt child to sign "cookie" or say "cookie." Deliver snack right away.	Honor all attempts (sign, word, picture). Begin with success, shape later.	FCT reduces problem behavior by replacing it with communication (Carr & Durand, 1985).
Reinforcers: Preference Assessments	Offer frequent choices of reinforcers; rotate options.	Hold up bubbles and ball. Child reaches for bubbles → immediately say "bubbles!" and blow them.	Label items, not "point." Praise naturally ("Nice picking bubbles!").	Preference assessments identify effective reinforcers (Fisher et al., 1992; Mangum et al., 2012).



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Look for Precursors (Early Signs)	Watch for early signs of frustration and intervene quickly.	Child tenses body and looks away → prompt “all done” card before escalation.	Early prevention beats crisis. Act on the first signal.	Precursor analysis is validated as safer and effective (Smith & Churchill, 2002; Hoffmann et al., 2018).
Prevent Challenging Behavior	Reinforce desired behaviors often, not just when things go wrong.	Child waits quietly → deliver praise and token before whining begins.	“Catch them being good.” Reinforce small steps forward.	Differential reinforcement strengthens desired behaviors (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2020).
Work on Toleration of Nonpreferred Tasks	Start with very short, achievable demands. Gradually expand.	“Touch puzzle piece” → immediate return to preferred toy.	Keep demands short and successful; expand slowly.	Demand fading and graduated exposure builds tolerance (Hagopian et al., 2001).
Use Transitions Effectively	Provide warnings and visuals before transitions.	“2 more minutes, then clean up.” Show timer; then	Use consistent language + visuals. Predictability =	Transition warnings reduce problem behavior



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		transition to snack.	smoother transitions.	(Flannery & Horner, 1994).
Practice Waiting (Tolerance Training)	Begin with short waits; gradually increase. Make waiting functional.	Therapist says "my turn" for 2 sec → returns toy. Later, child plays with alternate toy during wait.	Make waiting fun—sing, count, or cheer when wait ends.	Shaping tolerance with reinforcement is effective (Hanley et al., 2014).
Responding to Challenging Behavior	Block if needed. Prompt communication instead of punishing.	Child throws puzzle → block, prompt "help please" → reinforce with help.	Assume behavior = communication. Re-teach instead of scolding.	Escape extinction + FCT reduces problem behavior (Iwata et al., 1994).
Reinforcement Strategy	Use meaningful reinforcers; fade prompts gradually.	Give sticker + praise for sitting; fade to praise only over time.	Reinforcement must be motivating <i>in the moment</i> . Keep it fresh.	Positive reinforcement is more effective than punishment long-term (Cooper et al., 2020).



- Use child's interests to build engagement.
- Prompt & reinforce communication (word/sign/picture).
- Offer choices of reinforcers frequently (preference assessments).
- Watch for precursors; intervene early.
- Reinforce calm body, waiting, asking, transitioning.
- Keep demands short → expand slowly.
- Give transition warnings (visuals/timers).
- Use "my turn/your turn" → gradually expand wait time.
- Redirect problem behavior into communication.
- Reinforce desired behaviors more often than reacting to problem ones.
- Meet the child where they are—success first.