

## Applied Behavioral Analysis, BH 37

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**All requests for authorization for the services described by this medical policy will be reviewed per Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) guidelines. These services may be authorized under individual consideration for Medicaid members under the age of 21-years if the services are judged to be medically necessary to correct or ameliorate the member's condition. Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), Supplement B - EPSDT (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment) Manual [\\*](#).**

### Description & Definitions:

Mental Health Services – App. D - Intensive Community Based Support – Youth p. 21 (7/17/2025)

“Applied Behavior Analysis” or “ABA” means the practice of behavior analysis as established by the Virginia Board of Medicine in § 54.1-2900 as the design, implementation, and evaluation of environmental modifications using behavioral stimuli and consequences, to produce socially significant improvement in human behavior, including the use of direct observation, measurement, and functional analysis of the relationship between environment and behavior.

ABA services must include the following four characteristics:

- An objective assessment and analysis of the client's condition by observing how the environment affects the client's behavior, as evidenced through appropriate data collection.
- Importance given to understanding the context of the behavior and the behavior's value to the youth, the family, and the community.
- Utilization of the principles and procedures of behavior analysis such that the client's health, independence, and quality of life are improved.
- Consistent, ongoing, objective assessment and data analysis to inform clinical decision-making.

Family training related to the implementation of ABA shall be included. ABA may be provided in the home or community settings where the targeted behaviors are likely to occur. ABA may also be provided in clinic settings. Limited services are allowed in the school setting (see service limitations section). The setting must be justified in the ISP.

The following required activities apply to ABA:

#### **Assessment**

- An initial assessment for ABA consistent with the components required in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (see Chapter IV for requirements), documenting the youth's diagnosis/es and describing how service needs match the level of care criteria must be completed at the start of services. The initial assessment must:

- be completed by the LBA, LABA or LMHP acting within the scope of practice. An assessment completed by an LABA can only be used as an assessment for ABA and cannot be used as a Comprehensive Needs Assessment for other services. Other qualified staff may assist with the completion of an assessment
- be conducted in-person with the youth and the youth's family/caregivers
- Include a functional assessment using validated tools completed by the LBA, LABA or LMHP acting within the scope of practice.
- The LBA, LABA or LMHP must, at a minimum, observe the youth monthly. Assessments must be reviewed and updated at least annually by the LBA, LABA or LMHP.

### Treatment Planning

- Individual Service Plans (ISPs see Chapter IV for requirements) shall be required during the entire duration of services and must be current. ISPs must be reviewed at a minimum of every 30 calendar days or more frequently depending on the youth's needs. Refer to Chapter IV for additional guidance and documentation requirements for the 30-day review as well as additional quarterly review requirements.
- Direct family involvement in the treatment program is required at a minimum of weekly and must be documented in the ISP. Family involvement includes, but is not limited to, assessment, family training, family observation during treatment, updating family members on the youth's progress and involving the family in updating treatment goals.
- Family training (97156, 97157) is required. Family training involving the youth's family and significant others shall:
  - be for the direct benefit of the youth and not for the treatment needs of the youth's family or significant others;
  - occur with the youth present except when it is clinically appropriate for the youth to be absent in order to advance the youth's treatment goals; and,
  - be aligned with the goals of the youth's ISP.

### Care Coordination

- Providers must communicate the results of the assessment and treatment planning to the youth's primary care provider. Care coordination with the youth's primary care provider is an essential component of the provision of ABA services and must be documented in the youth's record.
- Providers must follow all requirements for care coordination (See Care Coordination Requirements of Mental Health Providers section of Chapter IV).

## Admission Criteria:

Mental Health Services – App. D - Intensive Community Based Support – Youth p. 24 (07/01/2025) MHS - Appendix D (updated 7.17.25) Final.pdf

Applied Behavioral Analysis is considered medically necessary for **ALL** of the following:

- Treatment is for **1 or more** of the following:
  - **Admission** with **ALL** of the following:
    - The youth must be under the age of 21;
    - The youth currently meets criteria for a primary ICD diagnosis that correlates to a DSM diagnosis or has a provisional psychiatric diagnosis as developed by an LMHP when no definitive diagnosis has been made
    - The youth must meet **TWO** of the following criteria on a continuing or intermittent basis:
      - Non-verbal or limited functional communication and pragmatic language, unintelligible or echolalic speech, impairment in receptive and/or expressive language
      - Severe impairment in social interaction /social reasoning /social reciprocity/ and interpersonal relatedness
      - Frequent intense behavioral outbursts that are self-injurious or aggressive towards others
      - Disruptive obsessive, repetitive, or ritualized behaviors
      - Difficulty with sensory integration
    - There is a family/caregiver available to participate in this intensive service.
  - **Continuation of services** are considered medically necessary with **ALL** of the following:
    - Within the past thirty (30) calendar days, there is evidenced at least **1 or more** of the following:
      - The youth's symptoms/behaviors and functional impairment persist at a level of severity adequate to meet admission criteria;
      - The youth has manifested new symptoms that meet admission criteria and those have been documented in the ISP;

- Progress toward identified ISP goal(s) is evident and has been documented based upon the objectives defined for each goal, but not all of the treatment goal(s) have been achieved.
- Active treatment and care coordination must be demonstrated by **ALL** of the following:
  - An individualized ISP with evaluation and treatment objectives appropriate for this level of care and type of intervention
  - Progress toward objectives is being monitored as evidenced in the 30 calendar day ISP review documentation
  - The youth and family/caregiver are actively involved in treatment, or the provider has documented active, persistent efforts that are appropriate to improve engagement
  - The type, frequency and intensity of interventions are consistent with the ISP
  - The provider has developed an individualized discharge plan that includes specific plans for appropriate follow-up care
- If youth **does not meet criteria for continued treatment**, ABA may still be authorized for up to an additional 10 calendar days under any **1 or more** of the following circumstances:
  - There is no less intensive level of care in which the objectives can be safely accomplished
  - The youth can achieve certain treatment objectives in the current level of care and achievement of those objectives will enable the youth to be discharged directly to a less intensive community service rather than to a more restrictive setting
  - The youth is scheduled for discharge, but the youth requires services at discharge which are still being coordinated and are not currently available.

## Discharge Guidelines:

Mental Health Services – App. D - Intensive Community Based Support – Youth p. 25 (05/17/2025)

The provider must terminate ABA if the service is no longer medically necessary. The service is no longer deemed medically necessary if **1 or more** of the following criteria is met within a 30-day time period:

- No meaningful or measurable improvement has been documented in the youth's behavior(s) despite receiving services according to the ISP; there is reasonable expectation that the family and /or caregiver are adequately trained and able to manage the youth's behavior; and termination of the current level of services would not result in further deterioration or the recurrence of the signs and symptoms that necessitated treatment.
- Treatment is making the symptoms persistently worse or the youth is not medically stable for ABA to be effective
- The youth has achieved adequate stabilization of the challenging behavior and less intensive modes of therapy are appropriate
- The youth demonstrates an inability to maintain long-term gains from the proposed ISP
- The family and/or caregiver refuses or is unable to participate meaningfully in the behavior treatment plan.

If there is a lapse in service for more than 31 consecutive calendar days, the provider must discharge the youth from services and notify the FFS Contractor or MCO. If services resume after a break of more than 31 consecutive calendar days, a new service authorization request including a new assessment and ISP must be submitted to the FFS Contractor or MCO.

## Exclusions and Service Limitations:

Mental Health Services – App. D - Intensive Community Based Support – Youth p. 26 (07/01/2025)

In addition to the "Non-Reimbursable Activities for all Mental Health Services" section in Chapter IV of the DMAS manual, the following service limitations apply:

- ABA CPT codes are limited to 97151, 97154 (with modifier HN, HO and TF only), 97155, 97156 and 97157 in Residential Treatment Services settings including Therapeutic Group Homes (TGHs) and Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs). See Chapter V of the Residential Treatment Services Manual for additional information.
- Services rendered primarily by a relative or guardian who is legally responsible for the youth's care shall not be covered.

- ABA may only be provided in the school setting when the purpose is for observation and collaboration by the QHP related to behavior and skill acquisition (not direct therapy) and services have been authorized by the school, parent and provider and included in the ISP. Additional coverage for ABA in the school setting may be available under school health services. See the Local Education Agency Manual for information.

## Document History:

### Revised Dates:

- 2025: July – Implementation date of October 1, 2025. Verbiage updated to align with changes to Provider manual revision 7/17/2025.
- 2024: June – Updated Authorization Requirements, Description of Service, Exceptions & Limitations, and Clinical Indications for Procedures to reflect updated language from DMAS manual revision dated 5/15/2024.
- 2023: July
- 2022: June

### Reviewed Dates:

- 2025: June – DMAS manual has not updated since 5.15.2024. No change to criteria. Updated to new format
- 2022: September

Origination Date: December 2021

## Coding Information:

Medically **necessary** with criteria:

Coding	Description
97151	Behavior identification assessment, administered by a physician or other qualified health care professional, each 15 minutes of the physician's or other qualified health care professional's time face-to-face with patient and/or guardian(s)/caregiver(s) administering assessments and discussing findings and recommendations, and non-face-to-face analyzing past data, scoring/interpreting the assessment, and preparing the report/treatment plan
97152	Behavior identification-supporting assessment, administered by one technician under the direction of a physician or other qualified health care professional, face-to-face with the patient, each 15 minutes
97153	Adaptive behavior treatment by protocol, administered by technician under the direction of a physician or other qualified health care professional, face-to-face with one patient, each 15 minutes
97154	Group adaptive behavior treatment by protocol, administered by technician under the direction of a physician or other qualified health care professional, face-to-face with two or more patients, each 15 minutes
97155	Adaptive behavior treatment with protocol modification, administered by physician or other qualified health care professional, which may include simultaneous direction of technician, face-to-face with one patient, each 15 minutes
97156	Family adaptive behavior treatment guidance, administered by physician or other qualified health care professional (with or without the patient present), face-to-face with guardian(s)/caregiver(s), each 15 minutes
97157	Multiple-family group adaptive behavior treatment guidance, administered by physician or other qualified health care professional (without the patient present), face-to-face with multiple sets of guardians/caregivers, each 15 minutes
97158	Group adaptive behavior treatment with protocol modification, administered by physician or other qualified health care professional, face-to-face with multiple patients, each 15 minutes
0362T	Behavior identification supporting assessment, each 15 minutes of technicians' time face-to-face with a patient, requiring the following components: administration by the physician or other qualified health care professional who is on site; with the assistance of two or more technicians; for a patient who exhibits destructive behavior; completion in an environment that is customized to the patient's behavior.

0373T	Adaptive behavior treatment with protocol modification, each 15 minutes of technicians' time face-to-face with a patient, requiring the following components: administration by the physician or other qualified health care professional who is on site; with the assistance of two or more technicians; for a patient who exhibits destructive behavior; completion in an environment that is customized to the patient's behavior.
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Considered Not Medically Necessary:

Coding	Description
	None

*The preceding codes are included above for informational purposes only and may not be all inclusive. Additionally, inclusion or exclusion of a treatment, procedure, or device code(s) does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement.*

### Policy Approach and Special Notes: \*

- Coverage: See the appropriate benefit document for specific coverage determination. Member specific benefits take precedence over medical policy.
- Application to Products: This guideline is applicable to all Sentara Health Plan Virginia Medicaid products except Sentara Health Plan Virginia Medicaid FAMIS members.
- Authorization Requirements:
  - Initial registration is required by the Plan.
  - Pre-certification by the Plan is required for continued stay.
  - Assessment CPT codes do not require service authorization.
  - Mental Health Services Revision Date: 7.17.2024. Appendix D: Intensive Community Based Support – Youth, p 27 [MHS - Appendix D \(updated 7.17.25\) Final.pdf](#)
    - All treatment service hours require service authorization. Providers shall submit service authorization requests by the requested start date of services. If submitted after the required time-frame, the begin date of authorization will be based on the date of receipt.
    - For all service authorization requests, providers must request a predetermined number of units for each separate treatment procedure code based on the assessed treatment needs of the youth.
    - The ABA provider must submit the following information to the FFS service authorization contractor or MCO for the initial service authorization:
      - Initial Service Authorization Request Form
      - The provider assessment completed by the LBA, LABA or LMHP;
      - The preliminary ISP; ~~and~~, including documentation of telemedicine as described in Chapter IV; and
      - A description of the preliminary discharge plan to include referrals as service goals are met.
    - Services are authorized based on medical necessity. For all requests exceeding 20 hours (80 units) or more per week, the schedule of activities used to structure the service sessions and describe how the activity will facilitate the implementation of the ABA treatment. Each session must clearly be related to the successful attainment of the treatment goals. The therapeutic function of all scheduled sessions must be clearly defined regarding the number of hours requested. Schedules must be individualized. A general schedule of clinic-based activities is not sufficient to meet this requirement. Clinic-based schedules must also distinguish between time the individual spends in therapeutic interventions and time spent in recreational and non-therapeutic activities.
    - Continuation of service requests must include:
      - Continued Stay Service Authorization Form
      - Original Comprehensive Needs Assessment and an addendum to this assessment (can be in a progress note) that briefly describes any new information impacting care, progress and interventions to date, and a description of the rationale for continued service delivery.

- An updated ISP that reflects the current goals and interventions including the use of telemedicine as described in Chapter IV.
- A summary of the youth's treatment progress that contains the following information:
  - Graphical presentation of progress on each goal and objective in the ISP;
  - Overview of family involvement during service period with regards to the youth's ISP to include: who has been involved; progress made and continuing needs of family goals/training to include reasons the youth and parent/caregiver need continued ABA.
  - A summary of progress towards generalization of adaptive functioning in multiple settings to include assessing for maintenance of the skills acquired and updating the ISP as needed to test for generalization of skills in multiple environments;
  - Progress toward the anticipated date of discharge from services including any plan to gradually reduce services and consultative actions as planned to include identifying lower levels of care, natural supports care coordination needs;
  - A summary of the care coordination activities.
  - Providers must clearly and substantially document care coordination with existing MHS or ARTS service providers and the need for multiple services in the service authorization request and medical record.
- Additional information on service authorization is located in Appendix C of the manual. Service authorization forms and information on Medicaid MCOs processes is located at [www.dmas.virginia.gov/for-providers/behavioral-health/training-and-resources/](http://www.dmas.virginia.gov/for-providers/behavioral-health/training-and-resources/).
- Special Notes:
  - This medical policy express Sentara Health Plan's determination of medically necessity of services, and they are based upon a review of currently available clinical information. These policies are used when no specific guidelines for coverage are provided by the Department of Medical Assistance Services of Virginia (DMAS). Medical Policies may be superseded by state Medicaid Plan guidelines. Medical policies are not a substitute for clinical judgment or for any prior authorization requirements of the health plan. These policies are not an explanation of benefits.
  - Medical policies can be highly technical and complex and are provided here for informational purposes. These medical policies are intended for use by health care professionals. The medical policies do not constitute medical advice or medical care. Treating health care professionals are solely responsible for diagnosis, treatment and medical advice. Sentara Health Plan members should discuss the information in the medical policies with their treating health care professionals. Medical technology is constantly evolving and these medical policies are subject to change without notice, although Sentara Health Plan will notify providers as required in advance of changes that could have a negative impact on benefits.
  - The Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) covers services, products, or procedures for children, if those items are determined to be medically necessary to "correct or ameliorate" (make better) a defect, physical or mental illness, or condition (health problem) identified through routine medical screening or examination, regardless of whether coverage for the same service or support is an optional or limited service under the state plan. Children enrolled in the FAMIS Program are not eligible for all EPSDT treatment services. All requests for authorization for the services described by this medical policy will be reviewed per EPSDT guidelines. These services may be authorized under individual consideration for Medicaid members under the age of 21-years if the services are judged to be medically necessary to correct or ameliorate the member's condition. Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), Supplement B - EPSDT (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment) Manual.
  - Service authorization requests must be accompanied by sufficient clinical records to support the request. Clinical records must be signed and dated by the requesting provider withing 60 days of the date of service requested.

## References:

Including but not limited to: Specialty Association Guidelines; Government Regulations; Winifred S. Hayes, Inc; UpToDate; Literature Review; Specialty Advisors; National Coverage Determination (NCD); Local Coverage Determination (LCD).

Behavioral health professionals are involved in the decision-making process for behavioral healthcare services.

Provider Manual Title: Mental Health Services. Revision Date: 7/17/2024 Appendix D: Intensive Community Based Support - Youth. Retrieved 7.17.2024 [https://vamedicaid.dmas.virginia.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/MHS%20-%20Appendix%20D%20%28updated%207.17.25%29\\_Final.pdf](https://vamedicaid.dmas.virginia.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/MHS%20-%20Appendix%20D%20%28updated%207.17.25%29_Final.pdf)

### Keywords:

Applied Behavioral Analysis, ABA, Behavioral Health 37, BH, Autism, Intensive Community Based Support, youth, spectrum disorder, Mental Health Services, Autistic Children