

# Teaching Communication Using ABA:

## A Beginner's Guide for Parents

Simple ABA strategies for clearer communication



# Introduction

## Communication Can Feel Hard

For many children, sharing their wants, needs, or feelings is not easy. When they cannot express themselves clearly, frustration often shows up quickly. Small moments like wanting a snack or needing help can turn into crying, pulling, or other behaviors.

The encouraging news is that communication grows through simple, supported steps. ABA therapy teaches children how to communicate in clear and meaningful ways using words, gestures, pictures, or devices. With gentle practice at home, these skills become stronger.

This guide offers practical, ABA informed strategies to help your child communicate more confidently in everyday moments.



# Why Communication Feels Difficult

Children naturally communicate through behavior. When they do not yet have an effective communication method, they may express their needs through crying, reaching, or pulling your hand. From an ABA perspective, these behaviors are attempts to access something important such as attention, a preferred item, or a change in activity.

## **Communication can feel difficult when your child:**

- cannot find the right word or gesture
- becomes overwhelmed by choices
- struggles with transitions
- has difficulty waiting
- relies on behavior because it has worked before

ABA supports communication by teaching replacement skills that serve the same purpose as the behavior but in a clearer and more appropriate way.



# The Communication Toolkit

These tools are drawn from ABA strategies such as modeling, prompting, reinforcement, and creating communication opportunities. You can begin with one tool and add more over time.

| Tool                    | How You Can Use It                                                            | Why It Helps                                                            |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Modeling                | Say the simple word or gesture your child needs such as "More" or "Help".     | Gives a <b>clear example</b> for your child to imitate.                 |
| Choice making           | Offer controlled options such as "Banana or cracker".                         | Reduces <b>frustration</b> and increases <b>participation</b> .         |
| Visual supports         | Use picture cards, objects, or AAC buttons your child can hand to you.        | Provides a <b>reliable communication</b> method even if speech is hard. |
| Prompting               | Gesture, show, or lightly guide to support a request. Fade prompts over time. | Helps your child <b>succeed</b> while <b>building independence</b> .    |
| Immediate reinforcement | Give the item right after your child attempts to communicate. Add praise.     | <b>Strengthens communication</b> by making it rewarding to try.         |



# Everyday Moments for Communication Practice

Daily routines offer natural chances to support communication. ABA therapy often uses these same moments to build functional communication skills.

## Mealtimes

### Why meals help

Food naturally motivates children. This makes it a strong opportunity for practicing requesting, also known as manding in ABA.

### Practical steps

#### Step 1

Offer small portions so your child asks again.

#### Step 2

Hold the item and model a word, sound, gesture, or picture.

#### Step 3

Provide the item immediately after any attempt to communicate.

### Encouragement

Pointing, vocalizing, reaching, or handing a picture card are all meaningful steps. Reinforce each attempt warmly.



## Playtime

### Why play is powerful

Your child is relaxed and engaged. ABA often uses play to shape early communication because motivation is already high.

### Practical steps

#### Step 1

Pause the activity briefly such as bubbles or swinging.

#### Step 2

Wait for a small sign your child wants to continue.

#### Step 3

Model the word or gesture and reinforce the attempt by resuming play.

### Encouragement

Even one successful communication attempt during play is progress worth noticing.

## Getting Ready

### Why routines support communication

Predictable steps make it easier for your child to learn new words and gestures.

### Practical steps

#### Step 1

Offer simple choices such as "Brush teeth or wash face first"

#### Step 2

Use visuals to show each step.

#### Step 3

Model helpful words like "Help", "Finished", or "Wait"

### Encouragement

Consistency helps your child feel more confident. Celebrate small wins during routines.

# Understanding What Your Child Is Telling You

From an ABA perspective, behavior always serves a purpose. When a child does not have an effective communication skill, behavior becomes the quickest way to get a need met.

| Behavior                 | What Your Child May Be Saying | ABA Supported Replacement                              |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Crying for food          | "I want that snack."          | Teach a <b>word, picture, sign, or AAC button.</b>     |
| Throwing toys            | "I need help."                | Teach <b>"Help me"</b> or a <b>help picture.</b>       |
| Pulling your hand        | "Come with me."               | Teach <b>pointing</b> or <b>"Come"</b> .               |
| Screaming at transitions | "I did not expect this."      | Use <b>visuals</b> and a <b>"First, then" support.</b> |

Teaching a replacement communication skill and reinforcing it consistently helps reduce challenging behaviors over time.



# Sensory Supports That Encourage Communication

Calm and regulated children communicate more easily. Light sensory supports can help prepare your child for communication moments.

## You can try:

- soft background music
- gentle stretches or movement
- fidgets or a soft blanket
- natural light during the day and dimmer lighting in the evening

Small sensory adjustments can make communication smoother





# Tracking Tiny Wins

Communication progress is built through tiny, consistent steps. **ABA therapy** focuses on reinforcing these small moments, which lead to larger gains over time.

Examples of tiny wins include:

- **pointing** instead of crying
- handing a **picture card**
- making a **new sound**
- using a **gesture to ask for help**

Here is a simple weekly tracker with sample marks:

| DAY  | Tried to Communicate                | Used a Word or Picture              | Parent Gave Praise                  |
|------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Mon  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Tue  | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Wed  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Thur | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Fri  | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Every checkmark or X helps you notice patterns and celebrate steady progress.

# Printable Workbook

## Communication Workbook

### 1. My Child's Favorite Motivators

Write a few items your child loves. These help encourage communication.

- **Food:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Toys or activities:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Sensory items:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **People or places:** \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Simple Request Practice

Try one word, gesture, or picture at a time.

**Word or picture we are practicing this week:**

Moments we will practice:

- ☐ Mealtime ☐ Getting ready
- ☐ Playtime ☐ Bath time

### 3. Daily Mini Tracker

| DAY  | Tried to Request | Parent Modeled Word | Parent Gave Praise |
|------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Mon  |                  |                     |                    |
| Tue  |                  |                     |                    |
| Wed  |                  |                     |                    |
| Thur |                  |                     |                    |
| Fri  |                  |                     |                    |

### 4. Parent Encouragement

One thing that went well today:

\_\_\_\_\_

Something to try tomorrow:

\_\_\_\_\_

# Why Choose StarRise ABA?

Choosing the right ABA therapy provider for your child is an important decision. At **StarRise ABA**, we are committed to delivering high-quality, personalized care that meets the unique needs of each child and family.



## Personalized Approach

Our therapy programs are designed around your child's goals and strengths, ensuring compassionate and effective care.



## Comprehensive Care

We combine one-on-one therapy, social skills training, parent support, and school consultation to create lasting growth.



## Convenience and Comfort

We bring professional, in-home ABA therapy to help your child practice skills in familiar environments.



Our team of experienced therapists believes in gentle guidance, practical tools, and partnership with parents.

# Together, we help children thrive

in their own way and at their own pace.



Monday – Friday, 7 AM – 5 PM



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