



How You Can Use Music & ABA Together, Without Being a Music Therapist



Why This is Still Evidence-Based ABA Therapy

1. ABA is Defined by Its Principles, Not Its Medium

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a scientific approach to understanding and improving behavior. The evidence-based nature of ABA therapy comes from:

- Clearly defined behavioral goals
- Data collection and analysis
- Use of reinforcement, prompting, and fading strategies
- Use of individualized, functional interventions

You are using music as a context, not a replacement for ABA. Just like using puzzles, games, or crafts to teach social skills, music becomes the medium through which behaviorally-based strategies are delivered.



Rationale: The context (e.g., a music activity) does not define whether a therapy is ABA-based. The methodology — data-driven intervention rooted in behavioral principles — does.

2. You Remain Within Your Scope of Competence as a BCBA

As a BCBA, I am not claiming to provide music therapy (which requires a credentialed music therapist). Instead, I am:

- Using music as an instructional tool
- Embedding ABA principles like Natural Environment Teaching (NET), reinforcement, shaping, and generalization into a naturally motivating activity
- Maintaining clear boundaries and not delivering services under the guise of “music therapy”



According to the BACB Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts (2022), practitioners must operate within their scope of competence, but can incorporate materials and interests that support learning — especially when those materials increase client motivation and functional outcomes.

3. Music Increases Motivation – a Core ABA Principle

In ABA, motivation is central to behavior change. Music is a highly preferred activity for many children and thus:

- Functions as an establishing operation (EO) for social interaction, communication, and group participation
- Enhances engagement and generalization of skills
- Creates a context for natural reinforcement (e.g., turn-taking to access a favorite instrument)



According to Koegel et al. (2010), embedding client-preferred interests into ABA-based interventions significantly improves social communication outcomes for children with autism.

4. Music Supports Generalization in Natural Environments

You're delivering therapy in a naturalistic setting, aligning with Natural Environment Teaching (NET) — a highly respected evidence-based ABA methodology.

- Music groups simulate real-world peer interactions
- Goals like manding, initiating, and responding to peers are practiced in a socially valid way
- Music provides structure while still allowing flexibility, promoting independence