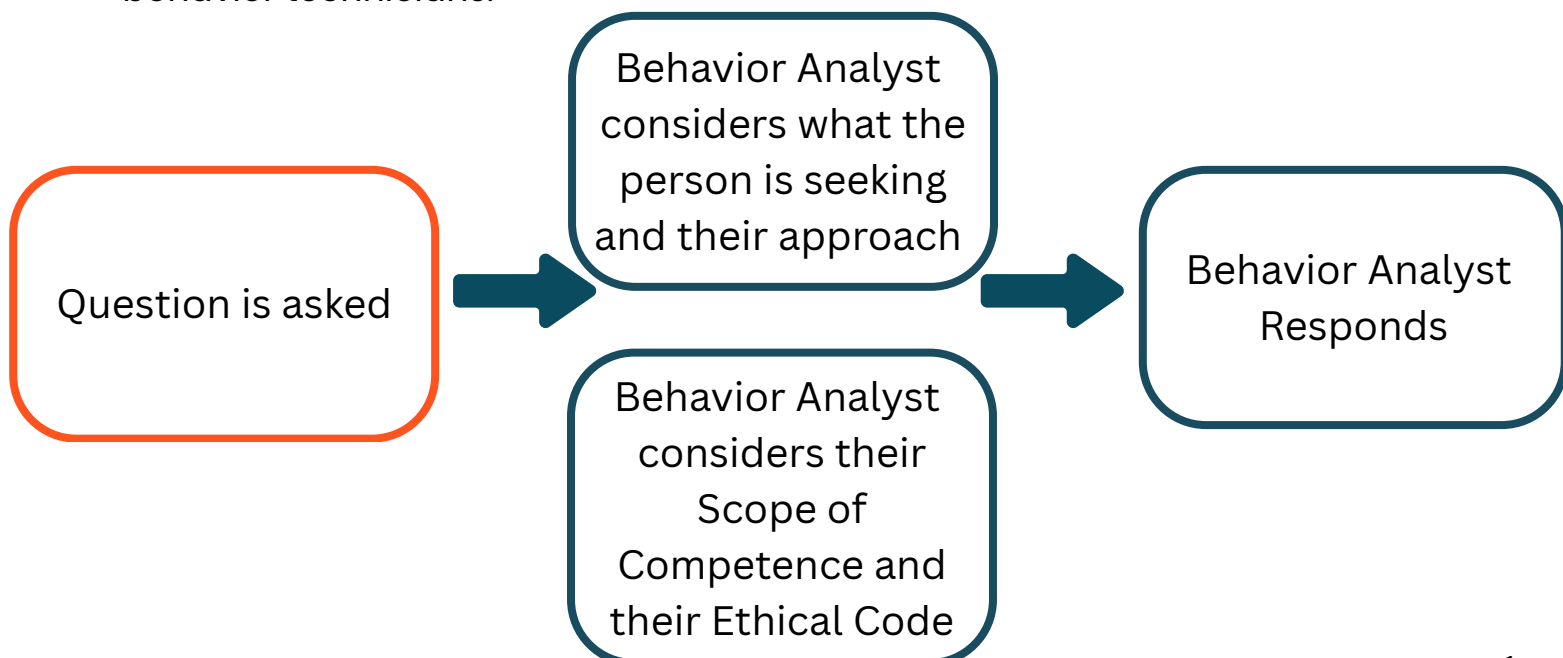


Talking with Parents and Staff

As behavior analysts, it is our ethical responsibility to carefully evaluate research claims. The BACB® Ethics Code (5.03, see also 1.01 and 1.02) requires us to ensure that what we share publicly is accurate and not overstated. By grounding our professional statements with reliable evidence, we help prevent the spread of misinformation and maintain the integrity of our field. The following are some thoughts for consideration when evaluating the credibility of research:

- Did the study use a rigorous methodological design?
- Were there strong controls to reduce bias?
- Was the research peer reviewed by other experts in the field?
- Has the research been replicated independently by other scientists under similar conditions?
- Have related organizations come to a professional consensus on the available evidence?
- Have regulatory agencies scrutinized the data before approving new treatments?

Behavior Analysts work alongside families to teach skills that increase independence and improve quality of life. Below are some considerations to guide behavior analysts through conversations with caregivers and behavior technicians.



Caregiver Question

"I heard X (e.g., vaccines, Acetaminophen) causes Autism.
Is this true?"

Behavior Analyst considers what the caregiver is seeking
and their approach

The caregiver might be feeling fear and confusion.

They might be seeking clarity from a trusted professional.

Behavior Analyst considers their scope of competence
and their Ethical Code

1.05 Practicing within Scope of Competence

2.01 Providing Effective Treatment

Tip: Redirect the conversation back to what you are doing to address the mutually determined goals of ABA treatment.

Behavior Analyst Could Say:

"It feels confusing to hear competing information and I'm sure many families are seeking clarification from their providers. The American Academy of Pediatrics affirms that ASD is the result of a complex mix of genetic and environmental factors and that vaccines are safe and effective.

I want you to know that what guides our work together is your child's current strengths and needs. Fortunately, I don't need to know the cause of their diagnosis to provide treatment. Unless their current needs rapidly change, our treatment plan will remain the same. My focus is on helping your child exactly as they are, learn skills that matter for their daily life."

Caregiver Question

What do you think about the current claims about the cause/treatment for ASD?

Behavior Analyst considers what the caregiver is seeking and their approach

The caregiver might be feeling overwhelmed by new information. They might be concerned if ABA is the best treatment for their child. The caregiver might be curious about the Behavior Analyst's personal beliefs of the information.

Behavior Analyst considers their scope of competence and their Ethical Code

1.04 Practicing Within a Defined Role

1.10 Awareness of Personal Biases and Challenges

2.01 Providing Effective Treatment

Tip: Avoid personal discourse to maintain focus on the child's ABA treatment. We have an ethical responsibility to ensure our professional work is not compromised.

Behavior Analyst Might Respond

"Research indicates that it is unlikely that a single cause of ASD will be identified because we know there are many genes and environmental factors that have been linked to autism. There has been some very promising research, and more is needed. Since being in this field I have experienced several suspected causes and treatments for autism, but my scope of practice has always remained the same- to assess a child's current strengths and challenges, identify skills that will improve their quality of life, and teach those skills using strategies based in published research in behavior analysis."

Caregiver Question

Did I cause my child's Autism?

Behavior Analyst considers what the caregiver is seeking and their approach

The caregiver might be feeling guilty. They may benefit from examples of how they are helping their child.

Behavior Analyst considers their scope of competence and their Ethical Code

1.05 Practicing within Scope of Competence

1.10 Awareness of Personal Biases and Challenges

2.08 Communicating About Services

Tip: Avoid personal discourse to maintain focus on the child's ABA treatment. Redirecting the discussion to ABA treatment priorities ensures the family understands the scope and purpose of ABA services.

Behavior Analyst Might Respond

"I can imagine how hard it is to even think that, and I wish we had an answer for what causes autism. Here is what I do know- you are doing everything you can to help your child as he is right now." Then provide examples from current goals.

Behavior Tech Question

How do I respond if my client's family asks what causes Autism?

Behavior Analyst considers what the Behavior Tech is seeking and their approach

Guidance, help with a script, fear of saying the wrong thing, anxiety about a potential emotional conversation.

Behavior Analyst considers the tech's scope of competence and their Ethical Code

1.09 RBTs® are aware that their personal biases may impact their ability to effectively carry out their behavior-technician services.

2.03 RBTs conduct themselves professionally during all work activities.

2.06 RBTs direct questions from caregivers to their supervisor

Tip: Remind your RBTs that they can and should redirect questions from caregivers to you. This will allow you to better understand where the parents are coming from so that you are in a better position to lead the treatment team.

Behavior Analyst Might Respond

"I appreciate that you are approaching your work and your relationships with our families in a considerate and thoughtful manner. The RBT ethics code can help us here, especially 1.09 and 2.03. These codes require RBTs to be aware that their personal biases may impact their ability to effectively carry out services and conduct themselves in a professional manner. Therefore, your goal with parents is to keep the focus on their child's treatment and to reduce conversations that push you outside your scope or comfort level. Remember- you can always defer the family's questions to me! But in the moment, you can reference The American Academy of Pediatrics statement that there is not a single cause of Autism and offer to send them the reference."

Related resources:

<https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/fact-checked/fact-checked-vaccines-safe-and-effect-no-link-to-autism/>

<https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2025/statement-by-aap-president-susan-j.-kressly-md-faap-on-changes-to-cdcs-website-on-autism>

<https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/apa-statement-on-white-house-announcement-on-autis>

<https://www.acog.org/news/news-releases/2025/09/acog-affirms-safety-benefits-acetaminophen-pregnancy>

<https://ysph.yale.edu/news-article/what-the-research-says-about-autism-and-tylenol-use-during-pregnancy/>

<https://www.psychiatry.org/News-room/News-Releases/APA-Statement-on-White-House-Announcement-on-Autis>

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