The dose question: do more ABA hours mean better results?

You were handed a number: 30 hours, 40 hours. Here is what the research says.

What the evidence says

- **More hours did not predict better outcomes.** A meta-analysis of 19 randomized trials of parent-delivered early intervention found small, real effects, and the amount of intervention did not change them.[1]
- **The evidence for 40-hour weeks is weak.** The Cochrane review of early intensive behavioral intervention rated the evidence "weak" and "low quality," with no randomized trials showing that intensity itself drives results.[2]
- **A large government dataset found little change.** The Department of Defense's TRICARE autism report found most children showed little or no measurable change over a year. The method was disputed.[3]
- **In August 2026, Medicaid's own guidance said 40-hour weeks are "not a best practice."**[4]
- **What does move outcomes: the parent.** Parents who ran functional communication training at home cut problem behavior by more than 90% in a randomized study.[5] Parent coaching reduced autism severity and the effect held six years later.[6]

The other side, stated fairly

Early intervention helps. Some children do need many hours, especially when safety is at stake. The research does not say "no hours." It says the number should come from your child's data, not from a menu.

What to ask

> **"Show me the data that says my child needs this many hours. What would make you recommend fewer?"**
> If the answer is a policy and not your child, you've learned what you needed to know.

1. Nevill RE, Lecavalier L, Stratis EA (2018). Meta-analysis of parent-mediated interventions for young children with ASD. *Autism* 22(2):84-98. doi:10.1177/1362361316677838
2. Reichow B, et al. (2018). Early intensive behavioral intervention (EIBI) for young children with ASD. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD009260.pub3
3. U.S. Department of Defense (2020). Report to Congress: Comprehensive Autism Care Demonstration, annual report. Methodology critiqued by Military Times (2021-03-09).
4. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (Aug 2026), ABA oversight toolbox, as reported by the Boston Globe, 2026-08-04.
5. Lindgren S, Wacker D, et al. (2016). Telehealth and autism: treating challenging behavior at lower cost. *Pediatrics* 137(S2). doi:10.1542/peds.2015-2851O
6. Pickles A, et al. (2016). Parent-mediated social communication therapy (PACT): 6-year follow-up of a randomised trial. *Lancet* 388:2501-2509. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31229-6

Chase Alexander Hought, M.S., BCBA · DRAGEN LLC · chase@dragen.cloud