

Common ABA Red Flags

South Florida has, unfortunately, become one of the leading regions in the United States for fraud related to Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services. This reality makes it especially important for parents and caregivers to stay informed and proactive when selecting and evaluating ABA providers. Understanding the basic standards of practice, what ethical service delivery looks like, and how billing should be conducted is essential to ensuring your child receives the care they deserve.

Families should feel empowered to ask questions about the services being delivered, the billing codes being used, and the qualifications of those working with their child. A reputable ABA provider will always be transparent, collaborative, and open to communication. If a company, BCBA, BCaBA, or RBT seems hesitant to share information, avoids questions, or exhibits questionable practices, it may be time to reconsider the provider. Below is a list of common red flags that caregivers should be aware of when receiving ABA services in South Florida, particularly through insurance-funded programs.

- **Falsifying Documentation**

This includes billing for services that were never provided, altering session dates or times, or misrepresenting what actually occurred during therapy sessions. Ethical providers ensure that documentation accurately reflects each session's activities and outcomes.

- **Upcoding**

This occurs when a provider bills for more time than was actually spent with the client. For example, logging a two-hour session when only one hour of service was delivered. This not only misleads insurance companies but also compromises care quality.

- **Credential Misrepresentation**

It is unethical and fraudulent to submit claims under a BCBA's credentials when the services were delivered by someone not qualified to do so. Parents should always know who is working with their child and whether that person holds the proper credentials.

- **Billing for Non-Therapeutic Activities**

ABA services should be focused on therapeutic goals. Billing for activities such as naps, meals, or unrelated conversations that are not tied to the client's treatment plan is inappropriate and may constitute fraud.

- **Incomplete or Conflicting Documentation**

Treatment notes should be consistent, clear, and complete. If documentation is missing, vague, or shows discrepancies between providers, it may indicate poor oversight or unethical practices.

- **Kickbacks or Financial Incentives for Referrals**

Referring clients in exchange for money, gifts, or other benefits is considered a serious ethical violation. Referrals should always be made in the best interest of the client—not for financial gain.

By understanding these warning signs and being informed about what quality ABA should look like, caregivers can better advocate for their children and help raise the standard of care across the field. Transparency, ethical billing, and proper credentialing are not just administrative details—they are fundamental to protecting client well-being and ensuring that services truly make a meaningful difference.