

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Erin Harris

Department of Curriculum & Instruction: Angelo State University

EDG: 6327 Dysfunctional Behavior

Dr. Lane

04/20/2025

Autism Spectrum Disorder

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), neurodevelopmental disorders are a group of conditions with onset in the developmental period, typically before a child enters grade school, and are characterized by developmental deficits that produce impairments in personal, social, academic, or occupational functioning (APA, 2013). These disorders vary in severity and may include intellectual disabilities, communication disorders, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), specific learning disorders, and motor disorders. The APA emphasizes that these conditions often co-occur and may share genetic, environmental, or biological risk factors. Early identification and intervention are critical for improving outcomes and helping individuals reach their full potential.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent challenges in social communication and interaction, as well as restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. These symptoms appear early in development, typically before the age of three, and can significantly impair daily functioning across settings such as school, work, or home (APA, 2013).

ASD is highly heterogeneous in its presentation. Some individuals may have intellectual disabilities and minimal verbal skills, while others may have average or above-average intelligence and effective spoken language, but still struggle with social nuances and behavioral flexibility. Importantly, the term “spectrum” reflects this wide variation in challenges and strengths (CDC, 2024).

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), Autism Spectrum Disorder falls under the category of Neurodevelopmental Disorders, which are conditions that begin in early development and lead to significant impairments in social, academic, or occupational functioning. To meet the DSM-5 criteria for ASD, individuals must demonstrate persistent deficits in social communication and interaction, along with restricted and repetitive behaviors, with symptoms present from early childhood and not better explained by intellectual disability (APA, 2013).

Assessment of ASD

Diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorder involves a combination of developmental screenings, caregiver interviews, and direct behavioral observations. Initial screenings, such as the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT) and Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ), are often conducted during pediatric well-child visits at 18 and 24 months (CDC, 2024). If concerns arise, children may be referred to specialists, such as developmental pediatricians or child psychologists, for further evaluation using standardized diagnostic tools.

Gold-standard assessments include the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, Second Edition (ADOS-2) and the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R). These tools assess social communication, interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviors (Morris-Rosendahl & Crocq, 2020). Diagnosis is guided by the DSM-5 criteria, which require evidence of symptoms in early development that cause clinically significant impairment in daily functioning and are not better explained by intellectual disability (APA, 2013). A comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach ensures accurate diagnosis and timely access to support services.

The Role of a LPC in Assessment

Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) are permitted to administer and interpret assessments related to an individual's mental, emotional, and behavioral functioning when appropriately trained, as outlined in the Texas Administrative Code §681.91. This must be done ethically, with informed consent, and in a culturally sensitive manner. According to the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014), counselors must use developmentally appropriate tools within the boundaries of their competence.

LPCs may conduct screenings, clinical interviews, and use validated tools to identify client needs. While formal diagnosis like autism fall outside the LPC scope, counselors play a key role in recognizing concerns, supporting referrals, and guiding intervention planning through collaborative and ethically informed assessment practices.

Strategies for ASD

One effective, research-based strategy for supporting individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). ABA is a structured, evidence-based intervention that focuses on improving specific behaviors such as communication, social skills, academics, and daily living skills, while also reducing problematic behaviors (Leaf et al., 2016). It operates on the principles of behaviorism, using reinforcement techniques to encourage desirable behaviors and discourage negative ones.

In school settings, ABA might look like a teacher or trained behavior specialist working one-on-one with a student to reinforce positive behaviors, for example, using praise or a small reward when a student appropriately asks for help instead of acting out. Over time, these behaviors are shaped and generalized across environments. ABA sessions are highly individualized, often guided by a behavior intervention plan (BIP), and based on regular data collection and analysis.

A 2016 meta-analysis by Reichow et al. found that early intensive behavioral intervention (a form of ABA) led to significant improvements in IQ, language, and adaptive behavior among children with ASD compared to control groups. These results highlight the importance of early, consistent, and individualized ABA strategies for promoting developmental gains and functional skills in both home and educational settings.

LPC Role in Treatment

In outpatient or private practice settings, Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) can support clients with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by integrating evidence-based strategies, such as elements of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), through collaboration, caregiver training, and structured behavior planning. While LPCs typically do not implement full ABA programs unless additionally credentialed, they can use ABA-informed principles to guide intervention planning, goal setting, and family support, particularly in identifying target behaviors, understanding antecedents and consequences, and establishing consistent reinforcement systems to promote adaptive skills (Gitimoghaddam et al., 2022).

The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014) supports this approach, stating that counselors must use interventions “grounded in theory and/or have an empirical or scientific foundation” (Section C.2.b). Research further supports this application; for example, ABA-based parent training programs have been shown to improve child behavior and caregiver confidence (Bearss et al., 2015). Within scope, LPCs can offer psychoeducation, emotional support, and progress monitoring that reinforces therapeutic gains across home and community settings, promoting improvements in emotional regulation, social engagement, and behavior management.

LPC Role in Supporting Across Environments

Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) can effectively support individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by extending evidence-based strategies—such as behavioral reinforcement, parent training, and social skills support—across environments through collaboration and integration into daily routines (Bearss et al., 2015). The success of these interventions often relies on consistency and generalization, which makes empowering caregivers, educators, and other stakeholders essential.

In the home setting, LPCs can offer parent coaching to help families recognize behavioral cues, reinforce communication, and implement consistent reward systems. Research shows that parent-mediated interventions improve outcomes for children with ASD, including reduced disruptive behavior and increased social engagement (Bearss et al., 2015). Counselors may use modeling, role-play, and structured handouts, and encourage families to track behaviors and celebrate progress to support at-home implementation.

In school or work environments, LPCs, when given informed consent, can collaborate with teachers, job coaches, or service providers to adapt therapeutic strategies, such as visual schedules or calming routines, for broader use. This approach aligns with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), which supports interdisciplinary collaboration in the client's best interest (Section B.3.b).

Ethically, LPCs must ensure informed consent, maintain confidentiality, and stay within their scope of practice. By facilitating coordinated care without assuming the roles of other professionals, LPCs can help create a holistic, practical support plan that enhances functioning and quality of life across settings.

References

- American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA Code of Ethics*.
<https://www.counseling.org/Resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>
- Bearss, K., Johnson, C., Smith, T., Lecavalier, L., Swiezy, N., Aman, M., ... & Scahill, L. (2015). Effect of parent training vs parent education on behavioral problems in children with autism spectrum disorder: A randomized clinical trial. *JAMA*, 313(15), 1524–1533.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2015.3150>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). Clinical testing and diagnosis for autism spectrum disorder. *U.S. Department of Health & Human Services*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/screening.html>
- Gitimoghaddam, M., Chichkine, N., McArthur, L., Sangha, S. S., & Symington, V. (2022). Applied behavior analysis in children and youth with autism spectrum disorders: A scoping review. *Perspectives on Behavior Science*, 45(3), 521–557.
- Leaf, J. B., McEachin, J., Taubman, M., & Leaf, R. (2016). A work in progress: Behavior management strategies and a curriculum for intensive behavioral treatment of autism. *Different Roads to Learning*.
- Morris-Rosendahl, D. J., & Crocq, M. A. (2020). Neurodevelopmental disorders, the history and future of a diagnostic concept. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 22(1), 65–72.
<https://doi.org/10.31887/DCNS.2020.22.1/macrocq>
- Reichow, B., Barton, E. E., Boyd, B. A., & Hume, K. (2016). Early intensive behavioral intervention (EIBI) for young children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, (5), CD009260.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD009260.pub3>
- Texas Administrative Code. (2023). §681.91 *Assessment*.