



# Arizona Autism Network of the West Valley

Here are a few tips regarding the interview process for a therapist:



Decide before you meet with any potential therapist the job expectations, schedule, minimum and maximum pay rate, and create a short summary of daily job responsibilities. You may be hiring someone with little ABA therapy experience. This person may assume that if their last client paid \$20 per hour by you directly rather than DDD approved agency. On the other hand, you may find yourself interviewing a therapist that has many years of experience. Just because someone has worked with many families doesn't mean they are competent. Make all of the information about the position clear -put it in writing- and discuss it with the potential therapist. Explain what you expect regarding job performance (such as stating you will video record sessions). Don't let the ABA therapist be surprised when they begin working for you. If you expect them to stay 30 minutes after each session to go over notes and data with you, tell them that upfront.



Parents often have the misconception that an ABA therapist is an all-in-one job title.....it's not. Most ABA therapists are only qualified to implement programs and run a session with your child. They may not be qualified to write programs, do assessments, or train teachers. I talk to so many parents who hire an ABA therapist and quickly realize the person has a limited skill set. The person who manages or supervises an ABA program is the Consultant. The person that implements programs is the ABA therapist.



Schedule the interview for a time when your child will be home. Observe interaction between the potential therapist and your child. If you can't observe actual interaction, let the therapist view video clips of your child. Even experienced therapists may not be comfortable with ALL behaviors. Maybe your child has a saliva play stim, and the potential therapist seems disgusted by that. That would be something you want to find out before hiring that person. It is important that any potential therapist be comfortable working with your child on their best and worst days. Be honest during the interview. If your child becomes aggressive at times, say that upfront. It's better to scare someone off during an interview than to have a therapist abruptly quit on you after a bad session.



I believe the most important characteristics when hiring anyone are: Attitude, Willingness to learn, and Energy. Any therapist you hire will need some training, even if it's just learning about your child's personality. If the potential therapist doesn't respond well to feedback and doesn't seem passionate about their work then that shows a minimal willingness to learn. Regarding attitude, as anyone who works with special needs children knows there are great days and horrible days. If a potential therapist is cranky, argumentative, or rude during the interview process, imagine how that person will act after a bad session with your child. A positive and upbeat attitude is essential for anyone who wants to teach children with Autism. Moving on to energy, I'm not saying that the person should arrive at your home and be bouncing off the walls. What you are looking for is a lack of energy. Does the person seem tired, overly quiet, or very soft spoken? Anyone working with young children should be able to "turn on" an upbeat, animated persona and leave their troubles at the door. If you are interviewing someone and can't picture them smiling, clapping, making goofy faces, or shouting "Hooray", then that is not an ideal ABA therapist.



Kerrie Mallory-Thompson  
[kerrie@azanow.org](mailto:kerrie@azanow.org)  
602-565-0140



Yvonne Marquez  
[yvonne@azanow.org](mailto:yvonne@azanow.org)  
602-882-3208



[WWW.AZANOW.org](http://WWW.AZANOW.org) / [WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ARIZONAAutismNetwork](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ARIZONAAutismNetwork)



Ask questions! So many times I have observed interviews and the parents just summarized the position and listed the goals (if already set up). At no point did those families find out any information about the person they were interviewing, that wasn't clearly listed on a resume. Beyond the basic information you need to get to know your potential staff. Here are a few questions to ask:

- What is your motivation for doing this kind of work?
- What do you know about Autism? What do you know about ABA?
- Do you believe a child with Autism can recover fully? Why or why not?
- What would you do if our child bites or hits you?
- Describe your strengths.
- Why should we hire you?
- What is your personal philosophy about special education?
- What was the last book you read about Autism?
- How do you feel about being videotaped?
- Have you changed a diaper? Have you changed a diaper on a child over the age of 5?
- How do you feel about bodily fluids getting on you, such as spit, vomit, urine, blood, etc?
- Willing to train or work with new therapists in the future?
- Are you willing to attend training sessions, conferences etc.?
- What do you think the primary responsibilities of a therapist are?
- What type of activities would you do with a child of \_\_ age?
- What do you do when a child totally frustrates you?
- How do you handle temper tantrums? How do you handle meltdowns?
- Do you know what the difference is between a tantrum and a meltdown?
- What are your favorite children's books?
- What kind of relationship do you want with our family?
- What kind of boss do you work best with?
- What important traits do you think a therapist should have?
- How would you describe your temperament?
- Do you plan to pursue Board Certification one day? Why or why not?



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