

# Turn Autism Around®

Three Steps Parents & Professionals Can Take Today!



**Dr. Mary Barbera**  
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I believe everyone should have access to comprehensive autism treatment, no matter your location, schedule, or educational background.

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If you're a parent worried about your child or a seasoned autism professional with some questions, you're in the right place.

As an autism mom myself, as well as an RN, a BCBA-D, and the author of two books (including my best-selling book, *Turn Autism Around*), I've walked the road you are walking. I've had questions and struggled to find answers all while trying to do what was best for my son. The reality is dealing with autism is not easy and the journey to finding a solution is confusing, overwhelming, and stressful. My hope is to provide you with three easy steps that you can implement today to begin the transformation journey for your child or clients.



The good news is this: when kids with autism are treated very intensively with effective therapy, they CAN improve! And the steps I'm about to share with you are proven to be effective. Not only with my own son, Lucas, who was diagnosed with autism in the late 1990's, but also with my former clients and thousands of participants in my online courses and community.



While awareness of autism is increasing, so is the autism rate. When my son was diagnosed, the autism rate was 1 in 500, but in the several decades, it has grown to 1 in 36 (CDC, 2023).

I understand how difficult it is to find an autism program that you can trust. That's why I've created this three step guide to help you! These three steps are for anyone looking to start, improve, or re-vamp their autism support and programming.

It can be overwhelming to find an effective and convenient ABA program that also produces the results you are looking for. I believe that everyone should have access to comprehensive treatment no matter your location, schedule, or educational background. Trust me, I understand what it feels like to be lost in this maze, and my hope is that once you see how easy these first steps are to implement, you'll be ready to tackle more steps and eventually transform your life, and the lives of your children or clients.

In this short guide, I'm going to share the first three steps of my child-friendly and positive ABA approach to help you turn things around for your child or clients.



The first step to helping any child with autism (or even a toddler showing some early signs of autism but not yet diagnosed) is ASSESSMENT!

You might be thinking “Hold on, I’m not a professional,” or “I’m a professional and do assessments frequently.” That’s okay. My simple, digital assessment tool was designed to help you look at the whole picture quickly no matter your training or experience-level. I’ve used this assessment form for literally hundreds of children and trained thousands of parents and professionals to use it too.

On the next page, you’ll see a copy of the assessment which will help you evaluate what is going on with any child. It can be done by a parent, caregiver, teacher, or other family member who is around the child consistently. Best of all, it only takes about **10 minutes to complete!**

Assessing the whole child quickly allows you to understand the big picture so you can identify concerning issues that were hiding under the surface. For example, a child with no ability to speak will almost always have eating issues and difficulty with play and imitation skills too. If they can’t ask for what they want, there’s also a very high chance of major problem behaviors occurring too.

And even if your child or client is talking, but not conversational and displaying more minor problem behaviors such as stimming and scripting, much more can be done.

In fact, in the autism world, dealing with tantrums and other problem behaviors are common. I did a survey a few years ago and 300 autism professionals and parents responded. They told me their #1 challenge by far, hands down, was handling problem behavior.

**So if you’re struggling with what to do with problem behaviors, you’re not alone!**

A common question I get is “How do I get my child or client to stop \_\_\_\_\_?” You can fill in the blank with anything here.

Parents and professionals want to know how to stop a child from throwing himself to the ground, hitting other kids, or how to stop picky eating...

And as tempting as it is to focus on a specific problem behavior, it will almost always backfire, without having a full understanding of the child’s abilities, language, medical problems, feeding, sleeping, toileting, and so much more.

As a Behavior Analyst, I’ve analyzed a lot of different problem behaviors ranging from severe self-injurious behavior, to one student who said “Are you happy?” 48 times in 10 minutes (yes, I counted), to another boy who became aggressive if anyone said the word “OK.” While helping that student, I realized just how much I say OK!



So the first step to turning things around for any child with autism (or signs of autism) is to complete an accurate assessment of the whole child, including a thorough description of the problem behaviors he or she is exhibiting. If you join one of my courses you'll gain access to other, more thorough assessment approaches, but [this digital assessment](#) is an excellent starting point for any parent or professional.

# Example Digital Assessment

## Barbera Early Childhood Assessment (BECA)<sup>™</sup> by Dr. Mary Barbera

### General information

Date of completion **04/02/2021**  
Person completing  
**Parent/Guardian**  
First name of person completing  
assessment **RSS**  
Child's first name or initials  
**EJS**  
Date of birth **04/02/2019**  
Age yrs **2**  
Age months **0**

### Medical Information

What best describes your situation? (Select one) **I have concerns but no evaluation or therapy yet**  
Does your child have any of these diagnoses? (check all that apply)  
**Speech Delay**  
Does your child receive any therapy or special education services currently? **NO**  
Is your child on any medication?  
**NO**  
Does your child have allergies?  
**NO**  
Is your child on a special diet?  
**NO**

### Safety Concerns

Do you have safety awareness concerns? **YES**  
If yes, check all that apply  
**Wandering/Darting Away, Unaware of Cars/Traffic, Unsafe Around Water**

### Self-Care and Daily

#### Living Tasks

Does your child have any eating or drinking problems listed below? **NO**  
If yes, what type of eating or drinking problems?  
Does your child have sleeping issues listed below? **YES**  
If yes, what type of sleeping issues? **Does not sleep through the night, Does not sleep alone, Trouble falling asleep**  
Does your child have any problems with using the potty/toilet listed below? (If the child is under 3 years old and you haven't

started potty training yet, please check no) **NO**  
If yes, check one  
Does your child have difficulty with dressing and grooming listed below? **YES**  
if yes, check all that apply  
**refuses or needs total assistance with washing hands, refuses and or needs total assistance with tooth brushing**

### Language and Learning

#### Skills

Does your child ever use any words? **YES**  
If yes, approximately how many different words does your child say on a daily basis? **0-5**  
If yes, does your child string 2 or more words together? **NO**  
If yes, how often do you hear your child use 2 or more word phrases? **rarely**  
If yes, Is your child fully conversational (back and forth exchanges with full sentences)?  
**NO**

### Requesting / Manding

Can your child ask for things he/she wants with words? **NO**  
If yes, how often? **rarely**  
If no, how does your child let you know what he/she wants.  
**Gesture, Reaching/Pointing, Pulling /handleading, Grabbing**

### Labeling / Tacting

Can your child label things in a book or on flashcards? **NO**

### Verbal Imitation /

#### Echoics

Can your child imitate words you say? **NO**  
Does your child say things he/she has memorized from movies or things he/she has heard you say in the past? **NO**

### Answering Questions /

#### Intraverbals

Can your child fill in the blanks to songs? **NO**

Will your child fill in the blanks to fun and/or functional phrases? **NO**  
Will your child answer WH questions (with no picture or visual clues)? **NO**

### Listening / Receptive Language

Does your child respond to his/her name when you call it?  
**Almost always**  
If you tell your child to get his/her shoes or pick up his/her cup, does he/she follow your direction without gestures?  
**Almost always**  
If you tell your child to clap his/her hands or stand up will he/she do it without gestures?  
**Almost always**  
Will your child touch his/her body parts, for example, if you say "Touch your nose?" **YES**

### Imitation

Will your child copy your actions with toys if you tell him/her "Do this"? **YES**  
Will your child copy motor movements if you tell him/her "Do this"? **YES**

### Visual / Matching

Will your child match identical objects to objects, pictures to pictures, and pictures to objects if you tell him/her to "match"?  
**YES**  
Will your child complete age-appropriate puzzles? **Yes**

### Social / Play Concerns

Do you have concerns about your child's ability to socialize and/or play? **NO**

### Problem Behavior

Is your child currently able to sit at a table or on the floor and do simple tasks with an adult? **YES**  
If yes, how long can they stay engaged with an adult at a table or on the floor without problem behavior? **5-15 minutes**



After you've assessed the whole child, including problem behaviors, you can now create a plan. To get started, take a look at my easy-to-use "planning form" included [here](#).

Start by writing out the child's strengths and needs, based mostly on the digital assessment you just completed. You can check out a sample planning form filled out below.

It's common to have a lot of issues you want to address and more needs than strengths when you first get started or are stuck. But, you can't tackle all of the issues at the same time. If I was teaching you how to fly a plane or how to play the guitar, it would take you months to master even the most basic concepts.

It's best at this point to work as a team and prioritize your most urgent needs that way you work on them first.

I would highly recommend you get a binder, and a 3-hole punch, and keep yourself organized as you learn from me, starting with the assessment and plan. You can update both of these every few months. This will allow you to go back to see how much progress your child or client makes and see how their strengths and needs change over time.



**Turn Autism Around Planning Form (Sample)**  
by Dr. Mary Barbera

Child's Name: Faith

Date of Birth: 1/5/XX

Date Form Completed: 4/20/XX

Age: 3 years 2 months

<p style="text-align: center; color: green;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can say 50 words</li> <li>• Can mand and tact</li> <li>• Feeds herself</li> <li>• Sleeps through the night</li> <li>• Responds to her name most of the time</li> <li>• Follows directions sometimes when accompanied by gestures</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center; color: green;">Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot echo/imitate</li> <li>• Cannot sing songs</li> <li>• Cannot match identical objects</li> <li>• Flops on the ground several times daily</li> <li>• Potty training</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center; color: green;">Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pair table and materials with reinforcement</li> <li>• Learning time at the table daily</li> <li>• Focus on echoic control and visual matching</li> <li>• Collect data on language and problem behaviors</li> </ul>	



# Turn Autism Around Planning Form

by Dr. Mary Barbera

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Form Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months

Strengths	Needs
Plan	

# 3

## TAKING DATA



**As an autism mom, Registered Nurse, and Behavior Analyst, I know how confusing autism truly is. Most of the kids I know have medical problems on top of their autism, which makes it even more tricky for you to figure out how to help your child or client reach his fullest potential.**

**There are a lot of things going on, especially when your child or client is newly diagnosed or having unusual problem behaviors that involve potential medical complications. What makes it more difficult is when children aren't conversational and can't tell you how they feel.**

**I've found over the years that the best way to keep track of things for Lucas was to use a separate calendar. In his calendar, we keep track of problem behaviors, medical issues, doctor's appointments, allergy shots, and any kind of new medical treatment being implemented.**

**I have calendars dating back years and this data has really helped us make strides to figure out if problem behaviors were related to medical conditions. I encourage all parents and professionals including all my online students to keep calendars for their kids too. I'm pleased that this simple step has helped them gain so much clarity.**

**So, the third step you can take today is to get a calendar and start recording any pertinent information. Don't just jot down notes in a journal because it'll be too hard to track overtime. It's best to use a calendar.**

**For Lucas and other clients who sometimes struggle with agitation, self injurious behavior, and/or aggression, writing those behaviors down on the calendar is key. For my son, I also record headaches, delivery of Motrin or antibiotics and if allergy shots are due and given.**

**I recommend keeping track of any new supplements or medications as well as any new medical or behavioral treatments.**

**If sleep is a concern, track their sleep patterns on the calendar too. You can note when the child was put to bed, how long it took to fall asleep, if he woke up in the middle of the night and if you tried any medication for sleeping.**

**The great thing about a physical calendar is that you can bring the calendar to any doctor's appointment and school meetings to review so adjustments to medications or interventions can be made.**

# Next Steps

Feeling stuck?  
**Contact my team**  
and we will help you!

So, these are the 3 steps that you can take today to start turning things around for your child or clients with autism:

1. Complete your quick digital assessment [here](#).
2. Create your plan and prioritize which areas to work on first.
3. Buy a physical calendar and start recording! I like using a non-electronic calendar but feel free to use whatever works for you!



Congratulations on getting this far in this mini-guide! Now, it's time to implement the first 3 steps so you can take back control. If you want to experience even more clarity, I can help you conquer the maze once and for all through my online courses. Each course, is designed to equip parents and professionals with proven-strategies so they can help their kids reach their fullest potential.

Plus, you gain exclusive access to our online community of parents and professionals so you can grow and learn together, and be encouraged by others.

Since 2015, my courses and online community have helped parents and professionals from over 100 different countries see real transformations in their children and clients every day.

To take the next step, sign up for a [free online workshop](#) so you can learn more by seeing videos of me working with kids with and without autism. I can show you how to take things to the next level so your child or clients can become happier, healthier, and as independent as possible.

Remember, you don't have to struggle anymore and you don't have to do it alone, I have a system that has worked for thousands of parents and professionals around the world, and it can work for you too.