

NICE slightly softening towards ABA - autism best practice can accommodate ABA

When we started this campaign in 2013, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) had a blanket statement about not recommending ABA due to lack of enough of their preferred Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) evidence. This has now softened and in fact NICE says in black and white (in response to our recent lobbying) that their recommended best practice for autism - both teaching skills and managing challenging behaviour - might include or “accommodate” the use of ABA. This is good news! It stops short of what we’d prefer - that they actually name as ABA the “psychosocial interventions for autism” that sound pretty much exactly like ABA, but are left vague - no help to consumers. However “accommodate” is better than a “no”.

The other good news is that, despite the inevitable lobbying by a small group of anti ABA level 1 autistic folk, NICE states categorically that “we did not find any evidence during surveillance that indicated ABA causes harm”:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg170/resources/2021-surveillance-of-autism-nice-guidelines-cg128-cg142-and-cg170-9140525965/chapter/Overview-of-2021-surveillance-methods?tab=evidence> - see paragraph headed "Views of Stakeholders".

Here’s the actual wording. NICE said in its detailed responses to our ABAA4ALL submission in Appendix B* (below) that "We would like to highlight that the recommendations do not say ‘do not use ABA’. Recommendations 1.3.1 to consider a specific social-communication intervention and 1.4.9 which describes the attributes of effective psychosocial interventions for behaviour that challenges potentially accommodate the use of ABA-based interventions”:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg170/evidence/appendix-b-stakeholder-consultation-comments-table-cg170-pdf-9140525969>

Why does this matter?

NICE is the UK's leading health authority, governing what the NHS should and should not cover. Such a big name saying it finds no evidence at all of "harm" from ABA, and stating that ABA can be included in its recommended best practice for helping autistic children and young persons with any challenging behaviour *and* to learn key life skills is a very good step in the right direction for ABA in the UK. A small step perhaps, but still a step.