



RethinkBH

BCBA State of the Profession Survey:

Navigating Urgent Challenges and Shaping the Future

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Executive Summary

Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) stand at the intersection of science and compassion – committed to improving outcomes for individuals with autism and developmental disabilities. However, as the landscape of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy evolves, so do the challenges these clinicians face.

Across the country, demand for ABA services continues to grow due to earlier autism diagnoses, rising prevalence, and broader awareness of evidence-based interventions. Yet services availability and family supports remain constrained, with staffing shortages, high clinician turnover, and escalating operational complexity presenting real barriers to delivering high-quality, scalable care.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The BCBA State of the Profession Survey, conducted by RethinkBH, reveals the urgent needs and systemic challenges facing the profession and the clinicians at the center of it. The findings point to four critical focus areas:



Stress Is Taking a Personal and Professional Toll

89% of BCBAAs experience work-related stress, with more than one in four saying they are "very" or "unmanageably" stressed. Clinicians are struggling to care for themselves while caring for others – 46% say they prioritize their clients' well-being over their own mental health.



Operational Overload Is Undermining Care

61% of BCBAAs say administrative burdens are interfering with their ability to provide direct care. In fact, one in five spend more time managing personnel than they do serving clients – putting both outcomes and job satisfaction at risk.



Collaboration Is Essential – But Often Missing

26% of BCBAAs cite lack of caregiver participation as the greatest obstacle to client outcomes. About one in five point to poor collaboration across providers, reinforcing the need for stronger, more integrated care models.



Dosage Decisions Hinge on Experience More than Data

80% of BCBAAs did not receive formal training in determining ABA dosage. Most rely on their clinical experience and judgment, with only 9% using data-based tools – highlighting opportunities to strengthen data-informed decision-making.

Left unaddressed, these challenges threaten not just clinician well-being but the quality and continuity of care for millions of children and their families. In addition to survey-backed insights, this report offers actionable strategies to tackle these challenges head-on from RethinkBH. With over a decade of leadership in behavioral health, RethinkBH is uniquely positioned to partner ABA professionals as they rise to meet these challenges and build a stronger, more sustainable future for the field.

Survey Methodology

This report is based on a national, independent survey of 390 practicing BCBAs from practices of all sizes across the United States. Conducted between October 21, 2024 and November 14, 2024, the survey explored stress levels, workflow inefficiencies, clinical decision-making, and collaboration across ABA therapy teams.

To see complete survey data, you can submit a request through our website: <https://www.rethinkbehavioralhealth.com/contact>



Key Findings: A Profession at the Crossroads

The data in this year's survey tells a compelling story: BCBAs are as committed as ever – but they are being stretched too thin. They are continually pulled away from client care by administrative overload and left to navigate clinical complexity without the tools or training they need.

Survey insights underscore a pivotal moment for BCBAs. **ABA practices that prioritize automation, collaboration, and clinician well-being are poised to lead the next decade of growth and improve quality of care.**



KEY FINDING 01

Stress Is Taking a Personal and Professional Toll

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Stress Is Taking a Personal and Professional Toll

The passion BCBA's bring to their work is undeniable – but so is the toll it's taking on their well-being. Burnout is no longer a background concern – it's a central threat to the sustainability of the ABA workforce. As emotional and physical demands grow, so does the risk of attrition. The State of the Profession survey data confirms that the strain on BCBA's is both intense and persistent, with more than half considering leaving the field due to stress.



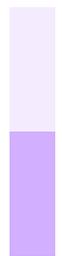
of BCBA's experience work-related stress

26% describe it as "very stressful" or "unmanageable"

33% have been operating under extreme stress for two years or more

58% say their stress level has led them to consider changing professions

Top stressors for BCBA's include:



46%

prioritize client well-being over their own mental health

45% use self-help content or meditation to cope

25% use coping mechanisms they know are unhealthy

16% can't find time to cope at all

THE PATH TO A BETTER TOMORROW:

Care for the Caregivers

Offering evidence-based wellness content, mindfulness programs and self-care modules tailored to BCBA's provides mental health resources, stress management tools, and behavioral health strategies that can help them cope with the demands of their jobs.



KEY FINDING 02

Operational Overload Is Undermining Care

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Operational Overload Is Undermining Care

Behind every ABA therapy session is a BCBA working to balance clinical quality with the demands of running a care team. But the State of the Profession survey reveals that too many BCBA's are being pulled away from their clients by operational burdens.

In fact, BCBA employee turnover, hiring, and administrative tasks were identified as leading causes of burnout and reduced care quality in the profession.



1 in 5 BCBA's spend more time managing personnel than working with clients

53%
Supervise
six or more
team members

37%
manage
10+ team
members

9%
manage
16+ team
members

This administrative load has a direct impact on outcomes. In fact, **61%** of BCBA's say administrative burdens are interfering with their ability to provide direct care. BCBA's report spending **38%** of their week on billable services that aren't therapy, while only **25%** of their time is spent on direct client care.



The top tasks taking the most time away from working with clients included:

Session notes (24%)

Report writing and administrative tasks required for reauthorization (18%)

Scheduling (15%)

Contributing to the time spent on these tasks is the fact that nearly half (45%) of BCBA's say they still use some manual processes to track, measure, and report client progress, with 12% relying solely on manual methods like note taking and Excel spreadsheets.



45%

use manual processes to track, measure, and report client progress

12%

rely on manual methods like note taking and spreadsheets

When asked about the potential of artificial intelligence (AI), respondents indicated that if the technology could do just one part of their jobs, their top choices, by far, would be session notes (30%) and report writing/administrative tasks required for reauthorization (19%).

Session notes (30%)



Report writing and administrative tasks required for reauthorization (19%)



It's clear from these responses that BCBA's need an operational and administrative structure – and technology – that prioritizes client care, allowing them to focus more fully on the people they serve.



THE PATH TO A BETTER TOMORROW:

Empowering with Automation that Puts Care First

ABA leaders who invest in automation – from smart templates to supervision logs – enable their teams to focus more on care, less on clerical tasks.



KEY FINDING 03

Collaboration
Is Essential –
But Often Missing

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Collaboration Is Essential – But Often Missing

The BCBA State of the Profession Survey underscores a fundamental truth in ABA therapy: BCBAs can't do it alone. While they bring clinical expertise and individualized strategies to the table, the success of those efforts hinges heavily on what happens outside of therapy sessions, particularly in the home and across interdisciplinary care teams.



26% of BCBAs surveyed said lack of parent or caregiver support poses the single greatest risk to achieving meaningful client outcomes.

This finding reinforces the vital role families play in the therapeutic process. Parent and caregiver participation is more than just helpful – it's essential. Effectiveness of ABA services hinges on:

- Consistent carryover of strategies in the home
- Responsiveness to behavior intervention plans
- Alignment on treatment goals

When families are engaged, informed, and empowered, the likelihood of lasting behavioral change grows.

Conversely, when that partnership is missing or strained, even the most carefully designed treatment plans may fall short of their potential.



Nearly 20% of BCBAs cited lack of collaboration among all service providers – such as school personnel, speech therapists, and occupational therapists – as a major threat to client outcomes.

The need for support doesn't end with the family. Fragmented care can lead to mixed messages, inconsistent expectations, and conflicting priorities, all of which can be confusing for clients and stressful for families. Effective, integrated collaboration across disciplines ensures that everyone is working from the same playbook, reinforcing skill development and maximizing each provider's contribution.

These findings point to a broader shift in how BCBAs are viewing their roles – not only as clinicians, but also as collaborators, educators, and facilitators of coordinated care. The future of ABA depends not only on what happens within a therapy session, but also on how well that work connects to the broader ecosystem of support surrounding each client.

THE PATH TO A BETTER TOMORROW:

Actionable Steps Toward Greater Collaboration

Practicewide alignment starts with communication. Parent portals and HIPAA-compliant provider messaging are tools clinicians can use to ensure that patients' entire care team – and their families – stay on the same page.



KEY FINDING 04

Dosage Decisions Hinge on Experience More than Data

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Dosage Decisions Hinge on Experience More than Data

There is a notable gap between the training BCBA's receive and the responsibility they carry in making one of the most critical decisions in client care – determining appropriate ABA therapy hours.



of surveyed BCBA's reported receiving no formal training during their education on how to determine service hours

At the same time, 57% say they feel equipped to make these important clinical determinations, drawing on their experience and professional judgement.

This finding underscores the field's reliance on experience and adaptability, highlighting the professionalism of BCBA's while also pointing to opportunities for greater standardization, enhanced training and stronger data support.

In practice, the determination of ABA therapy hours remains more of an art than a science. BCBA's primarily rely on such factors as:

88% Analysis of a child's prioritized goals based on their deficits and family objectives

86% Assessment results

42% Family availability

These elements are undeniably important because individualization is a cornerstone of quality ABA. But the absence of consistent, data-driven frameworks or tools introduces variability and potential inconsistency in care.

Only 9% of respondents reported using data-based software or technology to guide their dosage decisions.

As clinical demand continues to grow and scrutiny around medical necessity and treatment integrity increases, the field may benefit from more robust tools and training that blend professional judgment with empirical data. While BCBA's have demonstrated

confidence and competence despite training gaps, more structured, data-informed approaches could help remove guesswork, support defensible treatment plans, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for clients.

The data also reflects a profession striving to balance clinical autonomy with practical constraints. Family availability and resource limitations often impact the final treatment recommendations, even when clinical needs suggest more intensive support. This reality adds another layer of complexity to dosage determination, further reinforcing the need for comprehensive training and decision-support tools that are flexible yet grounded in best practices.



THE PATH TO A BETTER TOMORROW:

Smarter Care, Backed by Data

Robust analytics and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered tools can support defensible, individualized care plans that improve outcomes while meeting documentation standards.

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

A Call to Action for the ABA Industry

The BCBA profession is at an inflection point. The BCBA State of the Profession Survey paints a clear picture: stress levels are unsustainable, operational demands are pulling clinicians away from care, and the current systems for collaboration and dosage planning aren't keeping pace with the needs of the field.

Yet amid these challenges, BCBAs continue to show resilience, dedication, and an unwavering commitment to their clients. Now it's time for the industry to match their commitment – with better tools, smarter systems, and stronger support. The data tells us that change is needed. The opportunity now lies in how we respond.

ABA practices that embrace automation, center clinician well-being, and foster collaboration across the care ecosystem will not only improve outcomes – they will lead the future of behavioral health.

Let's rethink how we support the professionals who make this work possible. When BCBAs thrive, so do the clients and families they serve.



SPOTLIGHT

RethinkBH's Commitment to Supporting BCBAs

At RethinkBH, we believe effective behavioral health care starts with supporting the professionals who deliver it. Our solutions are purpose-built to reduce administrative burden, elevate clinical decision-making, and protect the well-being of behavioral health teams.

- End-to-end automation and cutting-edge ethical AI reduces time spent on paperwork, scheduling, and reporting
- Smart data tools offer defensible insights into dosage, progress tracking, and goal attainment
- Comprehensive onboarding, self-paced Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) training, and ongoing Continuing Education Unit (CEU) training opportunities empower clinicians and ensure staff readiness

As the trusted partner for over 96,000 behavioral health professionals, RethinkBH is committed to helping BCBAs do what they do best – deliver transformative care to clients, while thriving personally and professionally. To see how RethinkBH can help your practice reduce burnout, improve efficiency, and elevate outcomes, contact us to schedule a tailored demo.



CEO

Ben Semmes

A Message from Our CEO

At RethinkBH, we believe that supporting the behavioral health workforce isn't just a business goal – it's a moral imperative.

Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) combine data-driven science with deep compassion, working tirelessly to improve lives for individuals with autism and developmental disabilities. But as this report shows, they are being pushed to the edge – overwhelmed by administrative demands, under-supported in clinical decision-making, and forced to choose between their own well-being and their clients' needs.

The BCBA State of the Profession Survey is both a reality check and a roadmap forward. It reveals the urgent need for a new model of support – one where innovation lightens the load, collaboration replaces fragmentation, and clinician wellness is treated as a strategic priority.

At RethinkBH, we're committed to being that model. From workflow streamlining and AI-powered dosage tools to professional development that informs and empowers, our platform is designed to support the whole BCBA – clinically, operationally, and emotionally.

The future of ABA depends on how we respond now. Let's build a profession where the people delivering care feel just as supported as the people receiving it.



EXPERT REVIEW

Angela Nelson, Ed.D., BCBA

Dr. Angela Nelson is the Vice President of Operations and Executive Director of Clinical Services at RethinkCare. Dr. Nelson oversees RethinkCare's consultation services and content generation for Parenting and Professional solutions. She joined Rethink in 2011 and specializes in working with parents raising children and teens with learning, social, and behavioral challenges, as well as organizations motivated to expand their neurodiversity efforts. Dr. Nelson holds a Doctorate in Education from the University of Southern California (USC), Master's degree in Counseling from California State University, Northridge, a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from UCLA, and is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).



Being a BCBA is a blend of rewarding and exhausting. Embracing modern technologies in our work is essential nowadays, not only to enhance quality of care for clients but for the caregivers (us!) too.

—Angela Nelson, Ed.D., BCBA



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