

# Is it Autism, ADHD, or Just *Typical* Toddler Tantrums?

3 Steps  
You Can Take Today  
Instead of Worrying

By: Dr. Mary Barbera  
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# Did you know that up to half of all kids with a diagnosis of autism can recover if they receive early and intensive behavioral intervention?

I bet this may be brand new information to you, as it was to me almost 2 decades ago right before my son, Lucas, was diagnosed. The fact that children can recover from autism with Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy was actually first proven 3 decades ago with a classic study done by Dr. Ivar Lovaas at UCLA. And many professionals (including me) now believe that ADHD may be on the edge of the autism spectrum. In fact, the early signs and symptoms of both autism and ADHD as well as developmental delays overlap a lot.

Typically developing kids have lots of tantrums too and many toddlers and pre-schoolers who have language or other delays early on catch up on their own or with just a little early intervention. Even really bright kids with high IQs without delays often have sensory and social differences. With all this factored in, you are certainly not alone in your worry.

If your child is in a child care situation, maybe your child's teacher is indicating that something isn't quite right. He may be falling behind peers, not fitting in, playing alone too much or worse yet, being aggressive towards others.

Maybe your child has even been "held back" in daycare because of immaturity, failure to potty train easily, or concerning separation anxiety or maybe he's completely aloof like my son was and doesn't even notice when you leave him. Or maybe your child is at home with you all day but when you take him out or talk to friends with kids around his age, you are noticing something that is concerning.

You might even be on a long wait list for an evaluation by a Developmental Pediatrician but now the wait is producing such stress that you find yourself lying awake most nights worrying.

I'm Dr. Mary Barbera, mom to two adult sons, Lucas and Spencer. I fell into the autism world in 1999 and then became a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and a best-selling author of *The Verbal Behavior Approach: How to Teach Children with Autism and Related Disorders* which was published more than a decade ago and is available in several languages.

When Lucas started showing signs of autism around 18 months of age, I was clueless, overwhelmed, and in denial that Lucas' development was off track.



I was not an autism expert at all and it was my husband (who is a physician) who first mentioned the possibility that Lucas might have autism when he was only 21 months old.

I remember the moment he brought it up and I was totally shocked and told my husband that Lucas didn't have autism and that I never ever wanted to hear the word autism again. Lucas didn't look like he had autism to me and your child may not either. Your child may end up being completely fine, but if you downloaded this short e-book you're probably concerned about something.

A few months before Lucas was diagnosed with autism, (when I was still hoping it was just a speech delay), I met a woman with a son with autism who told me about the Lovaas study and said, "If they can treat and recover kids with severe autism using ABA, you need to learn how to use ABA to treat your son even if it's only a speech delay." This was what finally got me out of denial!



## The Lovaas Study

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On the way home from this woman's house, I went to the bookstore and started reading about autism and ABA. She gave me direction or at least permission to go into the autism world and find out how kids could recover with ABA.

Probably like you, before meeting this woman, I thought if I started looking into the possibility that Lucas had autism, the curtain would fall and my life would be over as I knew it.

By reading one book that this woman recommended in the day or two following my visit with her in 1999, I learned then what I should have learned over a year earlier which was this:

The earlier you treat autism with ABA therapy, the better and that up to half of kids who were treated very aggressively starting before the age 3 could recover, especially those with mild symptoms.

When we eventually got in to see the Developmental Pediatrician (waiting 3 months for an appointment but after more than a year after my husband suggested that he might have autism), Lucas was diagnosed with moderate to severe autism.

When I asked the doctor about Lovaas' classic study and the book which gave me such hope that Lucas could get all better, the doctor was not optimistic, gently explaining that the only times he had seen recovery in his long career was in kids with mild autism who started aggressive treatment very early. Although he didn't directly say that my 15 months of denial sealed Lucas' fate, that's how I felt.

Many outdated parenting books that I had read before Lucas was diagnosed listed only the most severe symptoms of autism

(which Lucas didn't have) so I was falsely reassured.

# 3 Steps You Can Take Today

## Instead of Worrying

Even if your child does not have any of the severe symptoms, if you or anyone is concerned, you need to trust your gut, stop worrying and start taking action today by following these 3 pieces of advice.

Dr. Mary Barbera, Autism Mom, Behavior Analyst, and Best-Selling Author

My goal is to prevent or reverse the early signs of autism and to teach both parents and professionals how to better treat it so that we can turn things around for 2 million kids by 2020 enabling each child to reach his or her fullest potential!

**1. Compare typical milestones to your child's abilities and keep track of these, even between well-child visits.** The CDC website (<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>) has lists of typical milestones at different ages so you can learn what your child should be doing no matter if he is 9 months or 4 years of age for instance, when should a child should be stringing 2 words together or starting to pretend play with peers? Learning what is typical will help you know if your child is behind and if so, what skills are most delayed.

**2. Don't freak out or stick your head in the sand.** If your toddler is delayed, talk to your pediatrician or daycare/preschool teacher about getting a free early intervention evaluation. If you're really concerned after assessing your child and determining if they are delayed in some areas, I would recommend you call your pediatrician to schedule a sick visit to discuss your child's development and/or get on the waiting list (or several) for an evaluation by a Development Pediatrician (which could take months or sadly even years in some places). Don't worry if you get things on track and your child is no longer delayed by the time you get the call to schedule your appointment, you can always cancel it but since waiting lists could be long, it would be wise to get in the queue just in case.

**3. Start investigating autism and ABA** (that's short for Applied Behavior Analysis), which is the most proven treatment for autism. Up to half of all children with a diagnosis of autism can recover, especially if they start treatment early and aggressively enough. I know you don't want to go there but you must. Since it was shown more than 3 decades ago that ABA can recover children with autism, it doesn't matter if your child eventually gets a diagnosis of autism, ADHD, or if what you're seeing right now is just normal toddler tantrums, ABA will help!

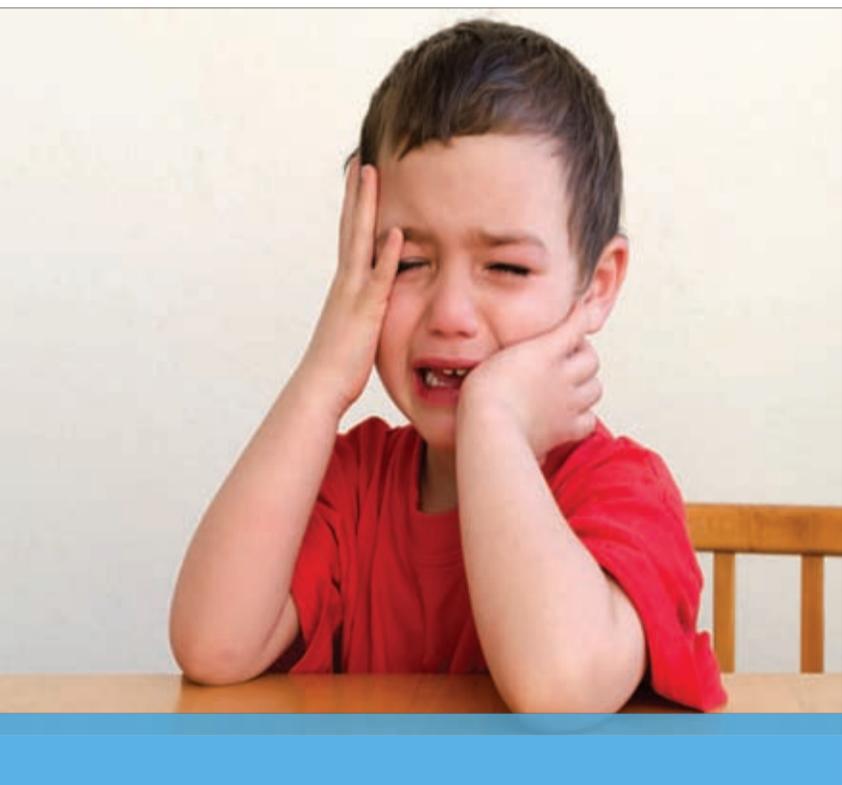


# You've Got This!

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# And I am Here to Help!

I already have two successful online courses for professionals and “gung-ho” parents to help toddlers through teens with autism. But, because prevention and treatment of the earliest signs of autism is so important, I’m developing a third online course just for parents like you who want to learn proven ABA strategies to put in place immediately to not only stop your child from flopping to the floor, crying, hitting and other bad behavior he might be displaying but also to help you learn proven interventions to get your child talking or talking more, eating and sleeping better and making going to pre-school and out to restaurants and stores a lot more pleasant too.



Taking action might not stop you from worrying but worrying alone is not helping you or your child at all.

These 3 things would be the same 3 things I would tell my best friend, sister or relative to start with if their child or grandchild was showing any signs of autism, delays, or excessive tantrums.

Regardless of whether your child is eventually diagnosed with autism, ADHD or whether he is just going through a difficult patch in his development, these 5 steps will get you started and help you figure out what to do next.

You are not alone and this might be the most important actions you ever take to help your child reach his or her fullest potential.



I’m Dr. Mary Barbera and I “fell” into the autism world in 1999 when my first-born son, Lucas, was diagnosed with autism one day before his third birthday.

In the past 2 decades, I became a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), wrote a best-selling book, *The Verbal Behavior Approach*, which is now available in several languages, earned a PhD, and created online programs for professionals and parents.

My new mission is to prevent and reverse the earliest warning signs of autism and turn things around for 2 million children with autism by 2020 through online training and advocacy.

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Dr. Mary Barbera, Autism Mom, Behavior Analyst, and Best-Selling Author