



## Defense Health Agency (DHA) Clinical Communities Speaker Series

### Children and Youth: Advanced Practices for the Pediatric Health Care Provider

#### Closing the Gap: Caring for Military Children with Special Healthcare Needs (M-CSHCN) and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities

##### Resource List

The [Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers \(M-CHAT\)](#) is a validated developmental screening tool for toddlers between 16 and 30 months of age. This helps to identify children that could benefit from more rigid developmental and autism evaluations. It is recommended that all children at 18 and 24 months undergo this screener that can be completed during the well child visit. Early interventions are essential to ensure that the child receives the supportive services. These services can include a physical exam, cognitive exam, hearing assessment and speech assessment. Specialized assessment can be conducted by a geneticist, clinical psychologist, developmental pediatrician, pediatric psychiatrist and/or pediatric neurologist. In a study of nearly 20,000 toddlers, over half were identified as “high risk” and warranted further evaluation. This resulted in their official diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. This further supports the importance of completing the M-CHAT when asked by the Primary Care Manager Team.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), [Autism: AAP Guidance includes Updates, Searchable Topics, Executive Summary](#), there has been a significant increase in autism prevalence and is more likely to affect males versus females. Children with average cognition and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder may be diagnosed with autism; it is noted that 40% of autistic children also have an intellectual disability. Since 2013, the diagnosis of autism has been consolidated from a category of pervasive developmental disorders (PDD), which included autistic disorder, Asperger disorder, PPD-not otherwise specified and disintegrative disorder, into a single diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder with modifiers and co-occurring conditions.

The [Exceptional Family Member Program \(EFMP\)](#) is designed to inform and equip the Active Duty Service Member with pertinent information to support the special needs of their family member(s). It helps the family navigate the medical and education system at the present or gaining duty station. Each Service has their own EFMP program, the principles are basically the same for each one. EFMP assists families to receive assignments that can support the special needs of their loved one; should a duty station not have the medical or education needs required of the family member, a different assignment is found. Additionally, should a family member receive a new diagnosis at a duty location that cannot support, an EFMP Reassignment can quickly get the family to a duty station that can.

[What is applied behavioral analysis?](#) ABA therapy is based in the science of learning and behavior. This kind of therapy applies our understanding of how behavior works to real situations, with the goal to increase helpful behaviors and decrease harmful behaviors related to learning. It increase language and communication skills, improves attention, focus, social skills and memory, possibly decreasing problem behaviors. ABA therapy is flexible and can be provided in different locations, such as the home, school and community. The main strategy employed in ABA therapy is positive reinforcement. When a behavior is rewarded, a person is more likely to repeat that kind of behavior, resulting in positive behavior change over time. Therapists will identify a goal behavior and work with the patient to achieve that goal, providing rewards that are meaningful and valued by the patient.



## Defense Health Agency (DHA) Clinical Communities Speaker Series

### References

- Autism Speaks Inc. (2020). *What is applied behavioral analysis?* <https://www.autismspeaks.org/applied-behavior-analysis-aba-0>.
- Hyman, S. L. & Levy, S. E. (2019). Autism: AAP guidance includes updates, searchable topics, executive summary. American Academy of Pediatrics.  
<https://www.aappublications.org/news/2019/12/16/autism121619>.
- Military OneSource. (2020, February 28). *The Exceptional Family Member Program: A program for families with special needs*. <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/family-relationships/special-needs/exceptional-family-member/the-exceptional-family-member-program-for-families-with-special-needs>.
- Robins, D., Fein, D. & Barton, M. (2009). *Learn about M-CHAT*. M-Chat.org. <https://m-chat.org/en-us/page/learn-about-m-chat/about-us>.