



ISSUE DATE

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SUBJECT:

**Medical Necessity Guidelines for Intensive
Behavioral Health Services**

BY:

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Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services**

SCOPE:

This bulletin applies to enrolled providers who render intensive behavioral health services (IBHS) to beneficiaries under 21 years of age in the Medical Assistance (MA) Fee-for-Service and managed care delivery systems.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this bulletin is to issue the guidelines to be used when evaluating the medical necessity of individual services, applied behavior analysis (ABA) services or group services for children, youth and young adults under 21 years of age.

BACKGROUND:

On October 19, 2019 the Department of Human Services promulgated regulations that codified the minimum licensing standards and program requirements for participation in the MA Program and MA payment conditions for agencies that deliver IBHS to children, youth and young adults under 21 years of age with mental, emotional and behavioral health needs. IBHS includes individual services, ABA services, group services, and evidence-based therapy (EBT) delivered through individual services, ABA services or group services. The regulations replace the requirements for behavioral health rehabilitation services previously set forth in bulletins issued by the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

DISCUSSION:

Individual services are intensive therapeutic interventions and supports that are used to reduce and manage identified therapeutic needs, increase coping strategies and support skills development to promote positive behaviors with the goal of stabilizing, maintaining or maximizing functioning of a child, youth or young adult in the home, school or community setting. Individual services are delivered through Behavior Consultation, Mobile Therapy or Behavioral Health Technician services.

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS BULLETIN SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO:
Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Bureau of Children's Behavioral Health
Services P.O. Box 2675, Harrisburg, PA 17105. General Office Number: 717-705-8289.

ABA is the design, implementation and evaluation of environmental modifications, using behavioral stimuli and consequences, to produce socially significant improvement in human behavior or to prevent loss of attained skill or function, including the use of direct observation, measurement and functional analysis of the relations between environment and behavior. ABA services are used to develop needed skills (behavioral, social, communicative, and adaptive functioning) through the use of reinforcement, prompting, task analysis, or other appropriate interventions in order for a child, youth or young adult to master each step necessary to achieve a targeted behavior. ABA services are delivered through Behavior Analytic, Behavior Consultation–ABA, Assistant Behavior Consultation–ABA or Behavioral Health Technician -ABA services.

Group services are therapeutic interventions provided primarily in a group format through psychotherapy; structured activities, including ABA services; and community integration activities that address a child's, youth's or young adult's identified treatment needs. Group services may be provided in a school, community setting or community like setting. A community like setting is a setting that simulates a natural or normal setting for a child, youth or young adult. Group services are delivered by graduate-level professionals and individuals who meet the qualifications to provide BHT services or BHT-ABA services.

EBT is behavioral health therapy that uses scientifically established behavioral health interventions and meets one of the following:

1. Categorized as effective by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the Evidence-Based Practice Resource Center.
2. Categorized as a Model or Model Plus in the Blueprints for Health Youth Development registry.
3. Categorized as well-established by the American Psychological Association's Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology.
4. Rated as having positive effects by the Institute of Education Sciences' What Works Clearinghouse.

PROCEDURE:

Requests for prior authorization of individual services, ABA services and group services for children, youth and young adults under 21 years of age are to be reviewed using the guidelines attached as Attachments 1 through 3.

Requests for prior authorization of an EBT should be reviewed using the admission guidelines for the requested EBT.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1 – Individual Services
- Attachment 2 – Applied Behavior Analysis
- Attachment 3 – Group Services