



ADAPTATION WITH INTEGRITY

The IDEA-Inspired Decision Matrix & Adaption Log





Introduction

In applied behavior analysis, fidelity is essential — but so is flexibility. When parent training strategies meet the real world, things rarely go as planned.

Schedules shift, energy fluctuates, and stressors appear without warning. For behavior change to last, the strategies we teach must fit the family's routines, values, and context.

That's where intentional adaptation becomes a critical skill.

This Decision Matrix for Adaptation is based on principles from the IDEA Decision Tree (Miller et al., 2020) and the FRAME model (Stirman et al., 2019), both grounded in Implementation Science. These tools were developed to help practitioners balance fidelity — preserving the behavioral mechanisms that make interventions effective — with flexibility, the thoughtful modifications that improve contextual fit and sustainability.

In short:

We don't abandon the science — we apply it more intelligently.

The Decision Matrix helps BCBAs make data-driven adaptation decisions by guiding you through four simple steps:

1. Identify when and why a strategy isn't working as intended.
2. Determine which elements are core (must stay the same) and which are peripheral (can be modified).
3. Evaluate whether the proposed change improves fit while maintaining effectiveness.
4. Adapt intentionally — document the decision, collect outcome data, and review results.



By applying this structured process, you can:

- Increase parent buy-in and consistency,
- Reduce implementation drift,
- Demonstrate data-based decision making, and
- Create truly sustainable, individualized interventions.

Remember: Adaptation isn't a sign of weakness or drift — it's a marker of expertise.

When done intentionally and systematically, it strengthens fidelity by ensuring the plan remains effective within the realities of each family's life.

Quick Decision Rules

- If it changes the function » stop. Don't proceed without reanalyzing the behavior.
- If it increases fit but keeps the function » adapt and test.
- If it feels easier for the parent and data hold steady » retain.
- If data drop or parent stress increases » revisit fit and simplify again.



Decision Matrix for Adapting Parent Training Strategies

Step	Guiding Question	Key Considerations	Example	Decision/Notes
I – Identify the Need for Adaptation	What's not working as intended? What barrier or mismatch has occurred?	Collect data or observations. Is the problem related to parent skill, context, values, or resources?	Parent forgets to prompt snack-time communication when multiple children are present.	Barrier = divided attention; high-stress context.
D – Determine Core vs. Peripheral	Is the change going to alter a core component of the strategy?	Core = the function or behavioral mechanism (e.g., prompting, reinforcement, stimulus control). Peripheral = delivery, materials, setting, timing, etc.	Core: prompting before communication. Peripheral: visual vs. verbal prompt.	Core preserved; can change from visual to verbal.
E – Evaluate Fit and Impact	Will this change increase contextual fit and feasibility without reducing effectiveness?	Ask: Does it improve parent consistency? Does it maintain the learning function?	Parent can now prompt consistently using verbal cue. Function is intact.	Proceed with adaptation; monitor outcome.
A – Adapt Intentionally and Monitor	How will you implement, document, and evaluate this adaptation?	Define adaptation details, data collection plan, and review timeline.	Add a “verbal prompt before snack” step to routine. Track 5 opportunities per week.	Adapted. Review in 2 weeks.
Follow-Up / Iterate	Did the adaptation maintain effectiveness and engagement?	Collect outcome data (parent report, session data). Keep, revise, or revert.	Parent used prompt 4/5 days; child initiated 3 times.	Keep adaptation. Stable engagement.



Adaptation Log: FRAME-Inspired Decision Record

Use this form whenever you modify a parent training strategy to improve contextual fit or reduce barriers. Record the what, why, and how to ensure adaptations preserve core behavioral functions and effectiveness.

What Changed

Describe the modification clearly and concisely.

What part of the strategy or context was adjusted? (e.g., timing, materials, prompt type, setting, delivery format, session structure)

Example: Changed parent prompt from picture cue to verbal cue during snack routine.

Why It Changed

Identify the reason or barrier that led to the adaptation.

Was there a contextual mismatch, parent barrier, or environmental constraint?

- ☐ Parent stress or overwhelm
- ☐ Low confidence or skill
- ☐ Schedule/time constraints
- ☐ Competing demands (siblings, work, etc.)
- ☐ Environmental limitations (space, materials, etc.)
- ☐ Other: _____

Example: Parent struggled to manage visual materials while preparing snacks for two children.



Core Component Preserved

Confirm what remained functionally intact.

Which behavioral mechanism or process stayed the same? (e.g., prompting sequence, reinforcement contingency, discriminative control, modeling, practice opportunity)

Example: Prompting still occurs before the communicative behavior and is reinforced immediately after correct response.

Who Suggested the Adaptation

Who initiated or recommended the change? (check all that apply)

- ☐ BCBA
- ☐ Parent
- ☐ RBT / Therapist
- ☐ Supervisor / Consultant
- ☐ Joint decision
- ☐ Other: _____

Example: Suggested by parent after reporting difficulty managing PECS cards.



Outcome Metrics

Define how success will be evaluated.

Identify observable data sources that will indicate whether the adaptation improved fit and/or effectiveness.

- Parent self-report / reflection
- Parent adherence (% sessions followed through)
- Child skill data
- Session observation
- Stress rating / self-monitoring
- Other: _____

Example: Track parent follow-through using session notes; measure percentage of days parent prompted at snack time.

Review Plan

Set a clear plan for follow-up and data review.

When will you evaluate this change to decide if it should be kept, revised, or reverted?

- ☒ Keep adaptation (effective, sustainable)
- ☒ Revise (partial improvement, adjust further)
- ☒ Revert (ineffective or reduced fidelity)

Example: Review after 2 weeks of data collection; parent self-rating + observation.



Notes / Observations

Record qualitative feedback, contextual observations, or reflections about the adaptation's impact on engagement, fit, or outcomes.