



SIGNS OF ASSENT

Assent = “I’m okay with this” (for this learner, today). Look for patterns, not one moment.

- Approaches materials or stays close
- Orients to you, initiates interaction, bids for attention
- Relaxed body, steady breathing, engaged face/eyes (for them)
- Participates without rising tension or avoidance
- Accepts help/choices and returns to task

RBT ASSENT RESPONSE CARD

Assent Withdrawal in ABA: What to Do in the Moment

Safety Check (Always): If there’s immediate danger (running toward unsafe area, severe aggression, unsafe objects), follow the safety plan first. Once safe, reduce demands and return to the steps below.

The 20-Second Immediate Protocol

1. **Pause** → Name → Offer → Honor → Adjust

Pause the pressure. Don’t repeat the demand or “talk through” distress.

2. **Name what you saw (neutral).**

“I see you pushing it away.”
“I hear ‘no.’”

3. **Offer a regulated exit (give 2 options).**

“Do you want a break or help?”

4. **Honor the communication quickly.**

If they choose break, give it. If they choose help, help. If they choose different, adjust.



SIGNS OF ASSENT WITHDRAWAL

Withdrawal = “Not like this” (sometimes subtle). We respond to the earliest version.

- Turns away, pushes materials, pauses, “goes limp,” delays
- Avoids eye contact (if that’s new), leaves area, hides, drops to floor
- Facial tension, whining/crying, agitation, increased stereotypy
- “No,” “stop,” “all done,” “break,” or AAC equivalent
- Rapid shift from engaged to flat, shut down, or irritate

ADJUST ONE THING

If we represent the same demand the same way, we're teaching the learner withdrawal doesn't matter.

Pick one adjustment and try again later (seconds, minutes, or next session depending on regulation):

- Reduce response effort (one item instead of five, errorless start)
- Increase choice (materials, order, location, partner, pacing)
- Increase reinforcement (better reinforcer, quicker access, higher density)
- Change the format (table → floor → movement → natural routine)
- Change the prompt strategy (model first, reduce verbal pressure)
- Shorten the work burst (tiny demand + immediate success)
- Add regulation first (movement, sensory support, calm space)

Remember: Our goal is not “getting through the program.” Our goal is effective teaching with dignity. Withdrawal is information. Use it.

WHAT NOT TO DO (THESE BREAK TRUST FAST)

- Don't repeat the demand louder or faster
- Don't block escape unless safety requires it
- Don't “wait them out” while they escalate
- Don't label it as “noncompliance” in the moment
- Don't use break as a punishment (“Fine, then no iPad later”)
- Don't pretend you didn't see the withdrawal

TAKE QUICK DATA

After the moment passes, capture the basics so we can make real clinical decisions:

- What was asked?
- What did withdrawal look like?
- What did you do (break/choice/help)?
- What did you change?
- Did engagement return?

WHEN TO CALL YOUR BCBA

Reach out if you notice any of these patterns:

- Withdrawal is happening across many tasks or most of the session
- You're unsure what counts as withdrawal vs regulation needs for this learner
- You tried adjustments and withdrawal stayed the same or worsened
- You see new behavior, higher intensity, or safety concerns
- You suspect demands/targets are mismatched (too hard, too easy, irrelevant)



The form is titled "Assent Data Sheet" and features a logo for "MAXIM" in the top right corner. It includes fields for "Learner:" and "Date:". Below these is a section for "Recorder:" followed by a large table. The table has a header row with "Task" and two main categories: "Approach Behaviors" and "Withdrawal Behaviors". Under "Approach Behaviors" are sub-headers: "Task", "Time", "Duration", "Frequency", "Intensity", "Location", "Partner", "Pacing", and "Density". Under "Withdrawal Behaviors" are sub-headers: "Task", "Time", "Duration", "Frequency", "Intensity", "Location", "Partner", "Pacing", and "Density". The table body consists of 10 rows and 10 columns, providing a grid for recording data.