aba

BT'S

ESSENTIALS

Data Collection Tips for Busy Sessions

How can I ensure that my data is accurate across all goals and I remain present and focused on my client at the same time?

Data collection is an essential part of every ABA session, but sessions can be fast-paced and unpredictable. The goal is not to collect perfect data in the moment, but to collect consistent and meaningful data while staying engaged with your client. With a few simple strategies, data collection can feel more manageable, even on busy days.

One helpful approach is to use a small index card and pencil during the session instead of entering data directly into the app or website. Jotting down quick tallies, plus or minus signs, or brief notes keeps data collection low-key and reduces distractions for the client. This allows you to stay present and focused on the interaction rather than a screen. After the session ends, you can then transfer your data into the app or website carefully and accurately. This method helps keep data consistent while protecting the flow of the session.

That said, every client is different, and sometimes creativity is needed. I once worked with a client who was extremely distracted by screens. Anytime a phone or tablet came out, she would immediately stand right next to you, often in your personal space, trying to see exactly

what you were doing. Instead of fighting this, we turned it into a learning opportunity. Data entry became part of a program, where the BT practiced entering data while the client worked on maintaining appropriate personal space. What started as a data collection challenge became a meaningful teaching moment. With creativity and personalization, data hurdles can often be turned into opportunities for growth.

It's also important to remember that data does not need to be recorded immediately after every response. Many BTs find it helpful to mentally tally responses during activities and write them down during natural breaks, such as transitions, snack time, or moments when the client is independently engaged. This keeps the session moving smoothly while still capturing accurate information.

During busy sessions, focusing on priority goals can make data collection more manageable. Identifying three or four key programs or behaviors to track closely helps reduce overwhelm and improves accuracy. Other goals should still be recorded, but your main attention should be on the data that is most critical for that session. Accurate data, even in smaller amounts, is always more valuable than rushed or unreliable data.

Data collection can also be naturally embedded into play and daily routines. Many learning opportunities happen during games, playtime, and everyday activities like clean-up or transitions. When data is collected during these moments, it feels less intrusive and more natural for both you and the client.

If you are ever unsure about how to score a response, what counts as correct, or which data type to use, reach out to your BCBA. Asking questions early helps prevent mistakes and ensures everyone is on the same page. Remember, data collection is a team effort.

Common data mistakes include waiting too long to record information, guessing when unsure, writing too much during session, or becoming more focused on the device than the client. Using brief notes during the session and transferring data afterward can help avoid these issues.

Above all, give yourself grace. No session is perfect, and data is a tool to support treatment, not a measure of your worth as a BT. Staying present, consistent, and flexible is what makes your data meaningful.

Quick Reference Checklist for BTs:

Before Session

- ☐ **Review goals and data targets**
- ☐ **Identify priority programs**
- ☐ **Have an index card and pencil ready**

During Session

- ☐ **Stay engaged with the client**
- ☐ **Use tallies or shorthand on index card**
- ☐ **Record during natural breaks**
- ☐ **Limit device use when possible**

After Session

- ☐ **Transfer data to the app/website**
- ☐ **Double-check for accuracy**
- ☐ **Complete session notes while fresh**

aba
ESSENTIALS
BT'S

— **triumph**
Behavior Support