

ABA 101

*a blog series dedicated
to everything & anything about
Applied Behavior Analysis*

theautismhelper.com

What is ABA?

BY - AMBER KANCHWALA

THEAUTISMHELPER.COM

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is a science dedicated to the understanding and improvement of human behavior. ABA differs from other fields in its focus, aim, and methods. **Behavior analysts focus on defining behaviors of social significance, often referred to as target behaviors.**

Behavior analysts intervene to improve target behaviors while demonstrating a reliable relationship between the intervention and improvements in behavior. Once an effective intervention is implemented, ongoing data collection occurs. Behavior analysts program for generalization and maintenance to ensure that the behavior maintains over time and across different settings and people. Behavior analysts often train staff and caregivers to implement all interventions in order to facilitate a consistent protocol.

ABA is a scientific approach for identifying environmental variables that influence behavior of social significance and for systematically developing a functionally related methodology to program for behavior change. Additionally, **ABA focuses on skill acquisition.** Skill acquisition can occur when a behavior analyst is teaching a new, functionally related alternative behavior (to replace an inappropriate problem behavior) or to teach academic, self-care, motor, social skills, etc.

So what does all this mean? Basically, behavior analysts study the environment in which the individual's target behaviors are occurring. Using functional behavior assessments, they scientifically determine what factor of the environment is maintaining the target behavior (known as the FUNCTION of the behavior). Using this information, an intervention that addresses that same FUNCTION is implemented in order to create an appropriate and positive change in behavior! By socially significant, we mean that the behaviors targeted are those that may cause harm or interfere with the individual's learning.

ABA is different from traditional psychology in that ABA focuses on **observable behaviors** rather than what an individual may be thinking (also known as an individual's cognitions). ABA techniques can be used in a wide variety of settings (schools, parent training, staff training, OBM, special education, self-management, etc), but it is important to note that the ABA theoretical approach lies heavily in manipulating the environment to create behavior change rather than changing an individual's internal events, or thoughts. ABA's theories are supported by **empirical data** that is obtained through controlled observation and measurement of behavior.

What ABA IS NOT!

- counseling therapy
- focused on changing an individual's thoughts
- bribery
- strictly used with pet training
- strictly used with individuals with autism
- striving to control the world

ABA Common Terms & Lingo

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Reinforcement

change in environment IMMEDIATELY following a behavior that INCREASES the behavior in the future

Reinforcers

something that, when presented after the behavior, results in that behavior occurring more often in the future.

Positive Reinforcement

something is ADDED immediately after the behavior resulting in the behavior occurring more often in the future

Example: Johnny completes his math homework after school and immediately his mother gives him ice cream as a reward. In the future, Johnny completes his math homework right after school.

Negative Reinforcement

something is REMOVED immediately after the behavior resulting in the behavior occurring more often in the future

Example: Johnny is given a plate of vegetables to eat with his dinner. Johnny screams and immediately his mother takes the plate of vegetables away. When Johnny is given a plate of vegetables in the future, he screams.

Noncontingent reinforcement (NCR):

a procedure in which a reinforcer is presented after a specified amount of time has passed, regardless of the behavior occurring. NCR is often used to reduce a problem behavior.

Example: Johnny typically throws a ball at another student in order to get attention from his gym teacher. In order to reduce this inappropriate behavior, Johnny's gym teacher provides him with attention in the form of social praise and a high five every 5 minutes, regardless of what behavior Johnny is engaging in.

Extinction:

discontinuing reinforcement of previously reinforced behavior. The primary effect is a decrease in the frequency of behavior until it reaches prereinforced level or ultimately ceases to occur.

Example: Johnny has received attention from his mother in the past each time he engaged in screaming behavior. His mother no longer provides attention contingent on screaming. Johnny's screaming behavior eventually stops because his behavior of screaming is no longer being reinforced.

Frequency:

the amount of times a behavior occurs within a period of time; rate

Example:

Sarah says hello to her mother 15 times within a period of 30 minutes.

Preferred Items:

items that the individual enjoys, but will not necessarily work for it. Preferred items do not necessarily INCREASE the future frequency of the behavior.

Example:

Martha loves jewelry, but this not necessarily mean Martha will come to work everyday if she is paid in jewelry. Jewelry is a preferred item but it does not function as a reinforcer because it does not INCREASE Martha's behavior of coming to work if she was paid in jewelry.

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Functions of Behavior

Attention: The individual engages in behavior in order to receive attention from those in the environment (parents, teacher, siblings, peers). Attention functions as a reinforcer because it increases the individual's behavior that has, in the past, resulted in attention.

Escape: The individual engages in behavior in order to get out of doing something he/she does not want to do. In the past, the individual has engaged in this behavior and it has resulted in the removal of the task, therefore the removal of the task functions as a negative reinforcer, and increases the likelihood that the individual will engage in this behavior to escape/avoid work.

Access to Tangible: The individual engages in the behavior in order to get a preferred item or activity. In the past, when the individual has engaged in this behavior, it resulted in receiving an item or activity. The item or activity is a reinforcer because it increases the likelihood that the individual will engage in the behavior to have access to it.

Automatic: The individual engages in the behavior in order to have some type of internal sensation. This function does not rely on other people (ie. the student will go this when alone). These behaviors are often referring to as self-stimulating or self-stimulatory.

Example: Johnny screams every instance that his mother walks away from him. When he engages in this behavior, his mother returns to him and asks, "What's wrong Johnny?" This behavior is attention-maintained because the behavior consistently results in attention. When Johnny "wants" attention, he screams.

Example: Every time Ms. Smith puts a math worksheet on Johnny's desk, he rips up the paper and throws it on the floor. As a result, Ms. Smith does not make him do his math homework. In the future, Johnny continues to engage in this behavior every time he receives a math worksheet because it results in escaping the behavior of doing the math worksheet.

Example: When Stevie cries, his mother gives him a pacifier. In the future, Stevie cries because it consistently results in access to the pacifier.

Example: Stevie engages in hand flapping in the absence of any specific antecedent or consequence stimulus. This behavior provides automatic sensory stimulation.

Punishment

something that, when presented after the behavior, results in that behavior occurring less often in the future.

Punishers

something that, when presented after the behavior, results in that behavior occurring less often in the future.

Positive Punishment

something is ADDED immediately after the behavior resulting in the behavior occurring less often in the future

Example: Johnny completes swears at his teacher. His teacher yells at him and he does not swear again in the future.

Negative Punishment

something is REMOVED immediately after the behavior resulting in the behavior occurring less often in the future.

Example: Johnny kicks his classmate on the playground. Johnny's teacher removes Johnny's recess privilege for the day as soon as she sees this behavior and Johnny no longer kicks his classmate in the future

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Baseline: initial data collection which serves as a basis for comparison.

A

antecedent

what occurs in the environment immediately before the behavior of interest

B

behavior

what the behavior of interest looks like

C

consequence

what occurs in the environment immediately after the behavior of interest

ABC Data: The observer records a descriptive account of the behaviors of interest including what happens before, during, and after.

Fluency: Fluency is a combination of speed and accuracy of responding.

Example: A flash card set of numbers 1-30 is flipped through with the student in 20 second timings. There is a specific aim, or goal, that the student is to work toward.

Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA):

practitioners that conduct behavior assessment and provides behavior analytic interpretations of the results. The BCBA designs and supervises behavior analytic interventions and develops and implements assessment and intervention methods for use in unfamiliar situations for a range of cases. The BCBA teaches others to carry out ethical and effective behavior analytic interventions based on research. (bacb.com)

alternative/replacement behavior:

teaching a behavior that serves the same purpose, or function, a problem behavior. Alternative behaviors allow the student to receive, maintain, or escape something in a socially appropriate and functional way. The socially appropriate behavior serves the same purpose as the problem behavior and replaces the problem behavior when the individual is taught to engage in the replacement behavior rather than the problem behavior under similar conditions.

Assessment of Basic Language Learning Skills (ABLLS):

The ABLLS provides a curriculum for teaching children and a roadmap for an individualized education plan. The ABLLS is broken up into the following skills: cooperation and reinforcer effectiveness, visual performance, receptive language, motor imitation, vocal imitation, requests, labeling, intraverbals, spontaneous vocalizations, syntax and grammar, play/leisure skills, social interaction skills, group instruction, classroom routines, generalized responding, academic skills, self-help skills, gross motor skills, and fine motor skills.

Discrete Trial Training (DTT): method of teaching a skill in simplified and structured steps. Instead of teaching an entire skill at once, the skill is broken down teaching discrete trials that teach one step at a time.

ABA & Teaching New Skills

BY - GRACE CASCONE

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If you decide a Behavior Analyst is right for you and your child, you can ask the BCBA to focus on things other than decreasing problem behaviors. You can emphasize that you want to work on teaching new things. If you want to teach your child the most basic skills to more complicated academic skills, BCBA's can assist you with that.

If you have a younger child, a BCBA may focus more on a wider variety of basic skills, whereas if your child is older, functional skills (e.g., dressing, cooking, working, etc.) may be the focus.

Your BCBA will consult with you about what you want to focus on and in what order you would prefer to tackle them. They may observe, ask questions, and give you surveys/questionnaires to help pinpoint specific goals.

When teaching new skills, it is important to realize they might take some time. In the dressing example, dressing could be broken up into many steps to be individually tackled. In order to ensure the long-term goal is reached, you and your BCBA want to make sure your child is fluent (or has mastered) each individual goal.

Once goals are selected your BCBA will likely set long-term and short-term goals. An example is if you want your child to be able to dress independently in a timely manner (this would be the long-term goal). Some of the short-term goals may be using a zipper, buttoning buttons, selecting appropriate clothes from their drawers/closet, etc. These short-term goals will be tackled individually to increase the likelihood of dressing independently in the long term.

What makes ABA effective for children with Autism?

BY - KIMEISHA CHAMBERS THEAUTISMHELPER.COM

What is Autism?

The term autism describes a condition which presents itself from early childhood. It is characterized by impairments in social interaction and, to some extent, impairments in language and communication skills. Individuals with autism may also display rigid, repetitive behaviors which may contribute to their challenge in adjusting to a rapidly changing world. As a 5-year-old girl puts it in an article published on Yahoo Parenting, individuals with autism “live in a world that is different than ours ... kind of like [their] brain does not work the same way.”

Autism usually presents itself as a very complex diagnosis. Challenges in social interaction are seen as early as the toddler years where the child with autism may not give parents, other caregivers, or siblings direct eye-contact, or may react negatively to physical contact (such as hugs and kisses). The child may also develop language skills much later than other children their age; or not develop language at all. For those children who do speak, their language may be distorted to some extent, or they may even speak at the level of their peers but have challenges communicating their feelings or emotions, and may have challenges following social cues. These challenges may carry over into their academic performance, where for some children with autism they may do extremely well in some subject areas, while falling significantly behind their peers in most other academic areas. No two children with autism are exactly alike. Autism is said to be a spectrum disorder, meaning, there are a range of levels of functioning within the autism community; some children may be lower functioning than others, and as such may display a different combination of skills than others.

What is ABA?

The field of Applied Behavior Analysis, commonly referred to as ABA or Behavior Analysis, is a field of psychology that applies a scientific approach to the study of behavior. It's roots are found in the early experimental research of B.F Skinner who identified some basic phenomena in our environment that affect behavior on a day to day basis. In other words, there are certain things in your environment that play an integral role in promoting certain behaviors, while other things in the environment may serve to reduce the likelihood of you engaging in other behaviors. It is through an intentional alteration of these phenomena that changes in behavior can be brought about, Skinner identified.

Behavior Analysts thus believe that behavior is not simply a result of innate genetic or biological factors, rather, the environment plays a critical role in the emergence, maintenance, or reduction of behavior. The goal of ABA is thus to use the basic principles of behavior to bring about a change in behavior to a socially relevant and meaningful degree for the client and those in their environment. Over the years, the basic principles of behavior that have been identified in laboratory research have been applied to real world situations and have been found to be very effective for a variety of cases; whether it be mental illness and disability, healthy eating and exercise, sexuality and relationships, parenting, or even business management. Over the years, practitioners in ABA have been identifying just how broad a reach the principles of ABA have in a wide variety of areas.

How is ABA used with persons with Autism?

Though the scope of ABA is revealed more and more with time, the most prominent and well known application of ABA is its use as a treatment alternative for individuals with autism. As described earlier, autism presents a very complex diagnosis that is characterized by a variety of behavioral impairments, whether it be speech, daily living skills, social interaction, academics, etc. That is, all current signs of autism are observable behaviors exhibited by the individual.

With ABA's focus on observable behavior, and behavior change to a socially acceptable and meaningful extent, it provides a unique, yet extremely effective approach to autism treatment. The environment in which the client operates on a daily basis (home, school, grandma's, the supermarket, etc.) is altered in such a way to reduce the likelihood that certain behaviors will continue to occur (e.g. severe tantrums, aggression toward self/others, and other inappropriate behaviors), while systematic training procedures are implemented to teach the individual appropriate social skills (peer interaction, appropriate classroom behavior, play skills, etc.), communication skills (developing vocal language or using alternative communication devices), academic skills (writing, reading, etc.), and much more.

What makes ABA effective?

ABA's effectiveness lies in its foundation in scientific research that have been conducted in laboratories as well as in the natural setting for decades. As such, all techniques used by behavior analysts are grounded in research that supports their effectiveness once they're implemented systematically. A component of ABA therapy is the development of individualized treatment packages; in other words, one package does not fit all. With autism being so complex, and each individual being so unique, individualized treatment packages play a key role in the effectiveness of ABA. The behavior analyst observes each individual client, assessing their current skill sets and those that need to be developed, the resources available to them, and their environmental setup, then specifically designs a treatment package that will be most effective for that client.

In addition, behavior analysts continuously collect data on their clients behaviors. This allows them to monitor client progress and make changes to treatment packages in real time. As such, treatment is continuously altered as needed as the client grows in his/her dynamic environment. Parents and other caregivers are also trained to implement treatment techniques to ensure that their effects are maintained even after sessions have ended. This is a key component in the long-term effectiveness of ABA therapy. All persons who interact with the client are incorporated in some way to help facilitate the continuation of treatment effects as well as their carryover into variety of environments or in the presence of a variety of people. This is especially beneficial for the individual with autism who may have challenges learning that certain behavior aren't inappropriate just at home, but they are inappropriate at school, at the park, and even when visiting the neighbors.

ABA effectiveness lies it's unique approach to the study of behavior, contrary to other areas in psychology. This approach is exceptionally beneficial for children with autism as the signs of autism are first seen in the behavior of the individual. As such, a science of behavior change focused on change to a socially meaningful degree is an ideal treatment approach for autism.

What Will a BCBA Work on With My Child?

BY -GRACE CASCONE

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Where to begin!?? There are so many things BCBAs can work on with you and your child. There are also so many different places BCBAs can work. More often than not, it will be in the home environment. It is not unusual for them to work out in the community (e.g., grocery stores, parks, school, etc.) wherever you and your child need support. Often times, they will talk with you to see what is most important to the family unit. Skills that are the most socially significant, meaning they have the most impact at that time. These may include addressing first behaviors that cause harm, hinder the client's ability to learn, and increasing socially appropriate behaviors. They may take sessions to consult with you, have you fill out forms/questionnaires, observe you in your normal everyday routines, etc. Sometimes they will conduct assessments to help set certain goals too. BCBAs will often prioritize behaviors based on what is most important for the child. If a child is really aggressive, that aggression will likely take priority over academic skills because it may likely hinder the client's ability to learn the best way possible. Also, aggression is more likely to have an overall negative impact on the entire family unit.

Motor Skills

This can include things from walking to holding a utensil. For example, focusing on grasping can help with handwriting in school, eating independently, or being able to stock shelves in a possible job.

Communication Skills

This can be vocal speech, devices, picture exchange communication system (PECS), sign language! There are so many things out there to find the best way for your child to communicate. Communication skills will begin by assessing manding (asking for things), tacting (describing things), and socializing with peers. Most importantly, communication skills can help develop a skill to replace negative behaviors. For example, if a child hits to get access to food and he is taught to ask for a snack, the hitting will likely go away.

Functional Skills

Potty training is a big one! There are also things like bathing, cooking, dressing, using money etc. Often, these will be done in the home setting and the parent will be trained on how to conduct the goal themselves. With something like toileting, the BCBA may just be with the parent to provide guidance if that is preferred by the family. Eventually, the BCBA will slowly fade their presence so the parent is conducting the toileting independently.

Academic Skills

Setting academic goals typically begins by focusing on the component skills necessary for the larger subject. Teaching letter identification will help your child to read later on.

Social Skills

Small talk, sharing, group play, how to respond in certain social situations, what emotions are, etc. There are tons of skills to focus on!

ABA & Behavior Reduction

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HOW IS ABA USED TO REDUCE BEHAVIOR? WHAT'S THE TRICK?

There is no trick to Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Unlike many other fields in psychology, ABA adds a scientific approach to the study of behavior; hence 'analysis'.

An ABA practitioner observes behavior in the natural environment (the classroom, home, etc.) and identifies what in that environment is maintaining the behavior (why the behavior keep happening), as well as what environmental factors are preventing other behaviors from occurring. What maintains a behavior is known as its consequence, that is, what happens immediately after the behavior on a regular basis. More specifically, a consequence that results in the behavior happening again and again is known as a reinforcer. **Therefore, for problem behaviors that are occurring very often, a behavior analyst would conduct observations to identify what exactly is acting as a reinforcer for that behavior.** This is the key to effective intervention!

A behavior analyst will observe the client on multiple occasions before recommending any type of intervention for a problem behavior. They'll observe the client during those times when the behavior is most likely to occur, and if it does, they'll simply take notes on what's happening. If they don't intervene at that moment, don't feel any way about it. They're taking very important notes! They are tracking the consequences of the behavior to identify what could be maintaining it over time. Once they've identified the potential maintaining consequence, they'll begin designing the most appropriate and likely to be effective intervention package for that behavior.

MAIN STRATEGIES

When it comes to reducing behavior, three main strategies are used. 1) We train caregivers to no longer provide the reinforcer when the behavior occurs, 2) We train caregivers to provide the specific reinforcer for more appropriate behaviors, and 3) The least often used; we train caregivers to present a less desirable consequence after each occurrence of the behavior. A combination of strategies are sometimes used, depending on the severity of the behavior and potential harm to the individual or others.

1) No longer provide the reinforcer

One strategy is simply to train caregivers to no longer provide the maintaining consequence. Say, for example, a child throws tantrums often and observations indicate that, on most occasions, whenever the child tantrums a caregiver turns the television on. As an intervention, a behavior analyst may recommend that the caregiver no longer turn the TV on when the child tantrums. It must be noted here that simply not providing the maintaining consequence anymore could result in the behavior seemingly becoming worse in that moment (e.g., the child cries louder and for a longer time or even grabs the caregiver). This may happen before a significant reduction in the behavior is seen. A behavior analyst will ensure that all caregivers are prepared for this brief increase and will also incorporate additional strategies, for example, teaching the child how to request TV time in an appropriate way.

2) Provide the specific reinforcer for a more appropriate behavior

Another strategy often used involves providing the reinforcer as a consequence for a more appropriate behavior. This can be a behavior the child can already do, or a behavior the therapist directly teaches the child. Using the same example above, the behavior analyst may directly teach a child a more appropriate behavior for which the maintaining consequence for the problem behavior would be provided. In this case, the behavior analyst may teach the child to request TV time by saying "TV please?" if the child can vocalize that statement. The behavior analyst would then train caregivers to only turn the television on when the child says "TV please" and not when the child tantrums. Using these first two strategies in combination may serve to eliminate that brief increase in the problem behavior described earlier.

3) Provide a less desirable consequence

A less often used strategy, a behavior analyst may recommend the use of an undesirable consequence when behavior is extremely severe; where the individual is harming themselves or others, and no other interventions have worked. Here, instead of providing the reinforcer, the behavior analyst may train caregivers to present a consequence the individual does not like, at all. The term behavior analysts use for this strategy is punishment. Say, for instance, in the example described above, the child's tantrum behavior usually results in him forcefully hitting his body against objects in the environment, resulting in bruises and cuts, or even concussions. In such a case, any instance of the behavior could lead to the child severely harming himself. As an intervention, the behavior analyst may recommend a punishment procedure where, if the child doesn't like being sent to the time-out corner, it is recommended that whenever he throws a tantrum he is taken to the time-out corner until he is quiet and calm for a designated period of time. A combination of all three strategies may be used in this case for effective behavior management. However, not all cases may warrant the use of all three strategies.

It must be noted that these are just a few ways in which behavior analysts bring about behavior reduction. It is not recommended that any caregiver should implement the procedures described here without consulting a behavior analyst first. Also, it is unlikely that a behavior analyst will recommend only one strategy in isolation, but that a combination of strategies are recommended as an intervention package specifically designed for the individual.

ABA: Misconceptions About Punishment

BY - AMBER KANCHWALA

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Punishment is a hot topic. Unfortunately, there is an unnecessary stigma surrounding the word punishment, whether that is the result of improper uses, negative past experiences, or simply just not understanding the concept. It is very important to understand punishment and its consequences because it is a helpful tool that can be used appropriately in a variety of settings.

Punishment: A response is immediately followed by a stimulus change (either a removal of something or addition of something) that decreases the future frequency of the response or similar responses.

So what does this mean? Just as reinforcement is used to INCREASE behaviors, punishment is used to DECREASE behaviors. In positive punishment, a stimulus or thing is ADDED immediately after a behavior and results in a decrease of that behavior. For example, if you are speeding down the expressway and you get pulled over and issued a \$200 speeding ticket (added stimulus), your behavior of speeding in the future is likely to decrease. The ticket serves as a punisher intended to decrease our behavior of illegally going over the speed limit. In negative punishment, a stimulus or thing is REMOVED immediately after a behavior in order to decrease that behavior. For example, if you are late to work every single day, your boss only puts you on the schedule to work one day next week in order to decrease your tardy behavior. Your boss removing hours (removed stimulus) from your schedule acts to decrease future behavior of coming in to work late.

It is important to distinguish the difference between a punisher and something we may think is a punisher. If 15 year-old Johnny comes home past curfew every week, and every week you take away his privileges to hang out with his friends, this is NOT a punishment. This is NOT considered punishment because Johnny's behavior of coming home past curfew every week is not actually decreasing his behavior.

Punishment is an important tool used for learning and immediate behavior change. We learn not to engage in certain behaviors or avoid certain things as a result of punishment. It is essential to understand the meaning of these concepts so we can hopefully move away from the negative association most people have. When implementing punishment, it is important to also use reinforcement so the individual can increase appropriate behaviors while decreasing inappropriate behaviors.

If punishment is implemented improperly, punishment can result in negative side effects. It is important not to deliver punishment too intensely.

Tips for Ethical Practice of Punishment:

- Consider using a reinforcement procedure FIRST.
- If using punishment, provide reinforcement for desired behaviors.
- Do not gradually increase the magnitude of the punisher.
- Start with the highest magnitude that is least restrictive and slowly decrease the magnitude.
- Deliver the punisher immediately.
- Punish every instance of the behavior.
- Consistently implement punishment in all settings (make sure all teachers and caregivers are on board and aware of the procedure).

ABA: Myths and Facts

BY - GRACE CASCONE

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Myth: ABA takes a long time to see actual results.

Fact

It all depends on the kid. Some move really quickly and others take some time. ABA can take a long time to see results! The therapy focuses on moving with your child as they change and progress. If a kiddo needs to start at basic skills, that is where therapy will start. An example is if parents want their child to learn to read. If therapy needs to be started at identifying individual letters, it may take awhile before the child can start reading chapter books. One of the awesome things about ABA is being able to look at data to see how much children are improving.

Another thing to consider is how long the client has been engaging in that behavior. The longer the behavior has been occurring, it will likely take longer to teach an appropriate replacement behavior. Again, it all depends on the child (or adult). A final consideration is the severity of the behavior. If a child injures themselves and you have to reinforce the behavior for the safety of the child, it may take longer to decrease the self injurious behavior.

Myth: ABA only focuses on a child's deficits.

Fact

Therapists may use assessments that are standardized and focus on what is "normal." Personally, I never use terms like "low-functioning" or "high-functioning." ABA is all about the INDIVIDUAL! Saying a child has less developed reading skills, just means that is something to focus on improving. I love ABA because it aims to increase skills in kids NOT emphasize what they don't have yet.

Myth: ABA will turn my child into a robot.

Fact

When first starting with therapy, sometimes kids can talk very "robotically." Social skills is one of the big ones where this can happen. Over time, as kids develop more skills and see everyday modeling, this often goes away or decreases. When therapists teach certain skills, we initially use very simple and basic responses (which can be robotic). As children see everyday modeling and contact reinforcement for these responses, the robotic-ness goes away. It is all about teaching the basics so kids have the tools to grow!!

Myth: ABA therapists will not work with other fields.

Fact

ABA therapists have a bad reputation for being cocky and "know-it-alls." However, NOT all BCBA's are like this! Each therapist and each company is different. I have seen many ABA therapists that work with SLPs and OTs (occupational therapy), while other ABA therapists may not collaborate very well with these professionals. Parents need to choose therapists that fit best with what their child needs. If it is important for you to provide a team approach for your child, take as much time as you need to find the BCBA who is open to being part of a team.. Personally, I love being able to work in a team with different viewpoints. I believe that two heads are better than one ESPECIALLY when supporting complex kids.

Myth: ABA will let my child get away with "bad" behaviors.

Fact

If kids have some undesirable, or "problem," behaviors, it may seem like therapists are letting kids get away with the bad behavior. As a field, we really value what the problem behavior is trying to "get" and then influence that consequence. An example is if a kid throws things to gain access to attention. Sometimes it may seem like we are letting them get away with throwing objects, when what we're trying to do is ignore the throwing behavior by NOT providing attention. By not providing attention when they throw things, they will be less likely to throw things in the future.

Ethics of ABA

BY - AMBER KANCHWALA

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Is ABA Ethical?

Yes! ABA is safe, ethical, and effective. The principles of ABA foster learning in areas such as daily living, communication, play and leisure, academics, and more. The ABA approach focuses on benefiting the individual and providing maximum positive reinforcement, while developing useful skills and socially appropriate behaviors. Interventions are customized to each learner's skills, needs, interests, preferences. Treatment goals are derived from detailed behavior assessments.

Just how much do The Guidelines for Responsible Conduct for Behavior Analysts influence how BCBAs practice? Well, a lot! The ethics code dictates how we get consent, how and when to begin treatment, how records should be maintained and stored, and even when to terminate services.

Ethics Code

Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) follow an ethics code, which is a guideline for responsible conduct. Behavior analysts provide services, teach, and conduct research only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, and professional experience. What exactly do we mean within the boundaries of competence? Well, if an individual is seeking services for an intervention to help with a healthy diet and fitness program and the BCBA is not certified in nutrition or physical fitness, we are not to conduct research or provide services in these areas! We can however, create a behavior self-management and program, for example, to help achieve goals of increasing daily physical activity and decreasing fast food consumed weekly. Behavior analysts have a responsibility to work in the best interest of the clients. **All treatment procedures are scientifically supported because the client has the right to effective treatment.**

BCBAs always recommend the least restrictive procedures and ALWAYS choose reinforcement rather than punishment procedures whenever possible. When punishment procedures are necessary, reinforcement procedures are always implemented for alternative behaviors. **We seek to maximize reinforcers that most likely mimic reinforcers in the natural environment and we plan for generalization and maintenance to ensure that the appropriate behaviors are long-lasting across settings, people, and time!** When punishment procedures are necessary, reinforcement procedures are always implemented for alternative behaviors.

Unfortunately, just as in any other profession, not all Board Certified Behavior Analysts may practice responsibly and ethically. Therefore, it is important that a few bad examples or past experiences do not negatively affect your perception of the field of behavior analysis and BCBA's! If you are aware of your rights as a client and aware of the Ethics Codes for BCBA's, this can strongly benefit you to distinguish between ethical practice vs. unethical practice. If you are ever unsure if an incident is unethical and should be reported, the BACB legal staff is available via email at bacblegal@bacb.com.

ABA: Beyond Autism

BY - KIMEISHA CHAMBERS

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Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a field of behavioral psychology whose primary focus is the application of the research supported principles and laws of behavior to the natural setting (e.g., home, school, workplace, etc.). The most common application of applied behavior analysis is in working with children with autism; from intensive early intervention programs, to social skills development, academics, and job training. On the contrary, this is not the only area in which ABA is used effectively. Beyond autism, ABA is applied in all areas of mental health as well as in areas such as Organizational Behavior Management (OBM), Education (both special education and mainstream), Health and Wellness (healthy eating, exercise, etc), Substance Abuse, Animal Training, Parenting, Language Acquisition, Gerontology, and even sports; to name a few.

How is that that such a field can have so wide a scope?

The key to ABA's wide scope is its foundation in research on the principles of behavior. Principles such as the effects of reinforcement, and punishment, which guide how behavior is learnt and maintained over time. We all behave! Humans and animals alike. We behave at home, we behave at school, we behave in the workplace, we behave even when we are alone. Once we are a living being, we engage in behavior and our behaviors are guided by the principles upon which ABA is based. As a result, ABA has over the years been found to be effective in a wide range of fields. Let's look at a few:

Mental Health

In the field of mental health and wellness, behavior analyst work alongside other professionals such as Clinical Psychologists and Psychiatrists with individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia, mental retardation, social and emotional disorders, and other clinical conditions. Here, the role of the behavior analyst is to design interventions that target behaviors that are associated with these diagnoses (aggression, self-injury, negative self-talk, etc.). The same basic principles of behavior apply here, and research has supported the effectiveness of ABA in clinical settings.

Education

Applied behavior analysis in education is a fast growing area of application. Currently, a large number of degree programs in education (more specifically special education) have an ABA component to their course load. More and more special education teachers are being exposed to ABA in some way, and are using the many research-based ABA teaching strategies in their classrooms. Strategies such as discrete trial training, token economy systems, and fluency-based instruction. In some cases, the tools that behavior analysts use to assess students' skill sets (such as the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills; ABLLS) are used by special education teachers to identify areas to be worked on for each of their students. Some special education teachers are also being trained in basic behavior management techniques that can be used in the classroom to manage problem behaviors and promote more appropriate behaviors. In some states, school districts have hired behavior analysts who cover a specific set of schools and are in charge of responding to the behavioral concerns that arise within that district.

In other areas of education, there are specialized schools around the US which are designed specifically for children with developmental and even learning disabilities. Many of these schools are run by behavior analysts or have behavior analysts on staff who design individualized academic programs for each student.

Animal Training

In the early years of behavior analysis, founding-father B.F Skinner conducted all of his basic research with animals. Today, the same principles that were identified in the laboratory are used to train animals such as dogs, parrots, sea lions, horses, monkeys, even elephants; to name a few.

OBM

Organizational Behavior Management is a growing subfield of ABA. Here, the role of the behavior analyst is to develop programs that serve to improve individual and group performance in the workplace, as well as promote safety and productivity. The areas of focus for the behavior analyst in the workplace include performance management strategies, behavioral systems analysis (seeing the organization as a system whose individual parts interact and impact the whole), and behavior-based safety protocols. Within these areas, the same basic principles of behavior are employed as they relate to effective feedback, effective staff training, and even the measurement of clear outcomes that are used to determine sound performance and productivity.

General Health & Wellness

A large number of research in ABA has been conducted on healthy eating habits, dieting and exercise, stress reduction, obesity management, eating disorders, smoking cessation, alcohol consumption etc. Here, researchers have looked into how the restructuring of one's environment plays an integral role in the management of healthy habits that promote a healthy lifestyle.

Gerontology

Often referred to as behavioral gerontology, the application of behavior analysis to work with older adults is also a growing field. Here, behavior analysts work with older individuals with a range of psychological challenges including behavioral problems associated with mental illness, dementia, late-life depression, and anxiety; as well as for improving exercise and healthy dieting, improving lost skills such as walking, continence, and more independent self-care practices (e.g. teeth brushing, cleaning up after oneself, and general hygiene).

Sports

The application of behavior analysis to sports is another growing sub-field, Here, research has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of behavior analytic principles in improving performance in a variety of sports, such as surfing, football, gymnastics, tennis, swimming, and soccer, to name a few.