

# WHAT IS ABA THERAPY?

## ABA Basics

### APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

#### *Evidenced-Based Treatment for Autism*

ABA stands for Applied Behavior Analysis. ABA therapy is based on the science of learning and behavior. Children with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities learn and process information differently than their neurotypical peers. Clinicians who practice ABA therapy make observations and record data about each client to understand how their behavior works, how their behavior is affected by the environment, and how learning takes place for that specific client. A major benefit to ABA therapy is that it applies our understanding of how behavior works to real life situations. It can be used to help individuals with developmental disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder.

The overall goals of this therapy are to decrease behaviors that are harmful to the client, increase behaviors that are helpful or beneficial to the client, and to work on goals that will help the client increase independence and success, not only in the short term, but the long term as well. ABA therapy cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, each program created is tailored to the individual client based on their particular needs, behaviors, and goals. In addition, ABA therapy can help increase language and communication skills and improve attention, focus, memory, academics, and social skills.

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## A-B-C's

### *What drives behavior?*

*This chain of events helps clinicians understand why behavior happens and how different consequences may encourage repetition of positive behavior or elimination of a behavior that is not desirable.*

The **antecedent** is what occurs just before the target behavior. It could be verbal, like an instruction or a question. It could be physical like a toy, light, sound, or something else in the environment. Antecedents can come from another person, the environment, or even from within the client (internally, like feelings or thoughts).

The **behavior** is the response or lack of response to the antecedent. The behavior may be verbal, an action, or something else.

The **consequence** is what comes directly after the behavior. It could be positive reinforcement for a desired behavior, or no reaction for incorrect or inappropriate responses.

# SOME ABA TECHNIQUES



## *Discreet Trial Training (DTT)*

Discreet Trial Training is a structured ABA technique that breaks concepts down into smaller parts and teaches them one by one. For instance, if a therapist is teaching shapes to a client, they could begin with shape identification. The therapist may start by showing the client a circle and saying, "Point to the circle." Then they might show the client a square and say, "Point to the square." Finally, they may show both shapes and ask the client to point to one or the other to correctly identify a circle or a square. Once that is mastered, the therapist would add other shapes in the mix, one by one.

Once the client can identify all the shapes by

pointing to the correct one when directed, the therapist may then work on having the client learn to identify the shapes by saying their names. The process would start over again, starting with a small number of shapes and leading up to all the shapes.

The A-B-Cs would be employed in Discreet Trial Training. For instance, when the therapist says, "Point to the circle" (antecedent), and the child points to the circle (behavior), the therapist may give the child a small candy, toy, or reward token (consequence).

## *Natural Environment Teaching (NET)*

Natural Environment Teaching refers to skills being taught or generalized to the client's natural environment. NET assures that ABA therapy isn't simply a set of drills to master, but rather building a skillset that can be utilized across a variety of situations. For instance, assume a client is taught to recognize and label farm animals based on pictures.

Once that skill is mastered, the client can be expected to ask for the animals she wants by name while playing with a toy farm set, or even recognize and label animals if she visited a real farm. Assuring skills transfer to real life and play is an important aspect of ABA therapy.

## For more information...

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