



APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS (ABA)

What is ABA?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is an intervention often used for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It:

- Teaches an individual how to do something (for example, prepare for school, behave better, play with others, or do things for himself or herself);
- Is very tailored to an individual's needs;
- Breaks a new skill down into very small steps;
- Rewards an individual for each step he or she does, even if he or she needs help;
- Is patient-friendly, and rewards the individual receiving ABA with things or activities he or she likes;
- Can be adjusted to any level of ability;
- Collects data and measures the individual's skills regularly in order to adjust the teaching level.

ABA programs can be very structured for "work time," but also include play time and group activities. ABA programs work best when they are used every day for enough time to show progress and when they include family members to help choose goals and to continue teaching at home.

Examples of some ABA teaching programs are:

- Discrete Trial Training (Lovaas)
- Pivotal Response Training
- Verbal Behavior Approach
- Competent Learner Model
- Functional Communication Training
- Precision Teaching
- STAR Curriculum

- Incidental Teaching

What Ages of Individuals Can Benefit from ABA?

ABA works with people of all ages, but it is best to start as early as possible. Most research on ABA has focused on children, and studies have shown that ABA helps children with autism learn.

Most children are between 2 and 6 years old when they begin ABA treatment. If a child starts at age 2, ABA can help him or her to develop better communication and other skills to get ready for preschool. At older ages, ABA is often used as part of an individual's education, to teach social skills, daily living skills, or to help change problem behaviors.

What does ABA look like?

ABA can look different depending on what you are trying to teach and the individual receiving therapy. Discrete Trial Training (DTT) (often used to teach school skills) is one way of doing ABA that looks like this:

1. Plan: A qualified professional, such as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst or "BCBA," meets with the family and teacher and designs a program to meet the needs of a child.
2. Goals: A large goal (Ex: Johnny will learn shapes) is broken down into smaller steps (Ex: Johnny will match circles).
3. Prompts: The teacher tells the child something like, "It's time to work," then gives a simple direction, such as "Match" or "Match shape."
4. Help when needed: If necessary, the teacher gently moves the child's hand to teach him what to do. As the child learns, the teacher "fades out," moving the child's hand less and less. Teachers keep track of what the child does so they know if he is learning or not.
5. Reinforcement: The teacher rewards the child for doing the task. The teacher might give a small piece of favorite food, high fives, fist bumps, hugs, or access to favorite toy, and say "You matched it!" or "Good Matching!"
6. Repetition and Mastery: Directions are repeated for practice, with frequent rewards. When a child can do a task all by himself almost every time, he is ready to work on something a little more difficult.
7. Generalization: The child is rewarded for showing the skill under different

conditions.

8. Data Collection: Throughout the instruction, a teacher or classroom aide takes notes and keeps track of behavior, the need for prompts, and responses.

ABA can also work in natural situations, like at home:

1. Simple Directions: "Johnny, go get your shoes from the stairs" (said while pointing).
2. Reinforcement: "Johnny, you got your shoes the first time! High five, buddy!"
3. Progression of skill: (Mom pauses to see if Johnny will do the next step on his own). "Yay! You opened the straps!" Mom pauses again, and if Johnny doesn't do the next step.... "What's next?" "Good job, Johnny, you put your foot in the shoe." (Mom lets him take the time to do it himself, as long as he keeps at it). "Good job, Johnny! One more step." If Johnny doesn't know, then Mom says, "We close the straps. Like this.... We did it! (Gives a big hug.) You put your shoes on; now we can go play!"

Related Articles:

- [The Importance of Data Collection in Measuring Progress](#)
- [Discrete Trial Training](#)
- [Pivotal Response Treatment \(PRT\)](#)
- [Verbal Behavior](#)
- [STAR Curriculum](#)
- [Who Are All These Professionals?](#)
- [Functional Behavioral Assessment: What Is It?](#)
- [Behavior Intervention Plan](#)

Recommended Link:

- [CAR Resource Directory \(Select Mental/Behavioral Health - Behavior Therapy\)](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Applied Behavior Analysis, from Autism Speaks®](#)
- [FAQs, from The Institute for Applied Behavior Analysis](#)
- [Introduction to Applied Behavior Analysis \(video\)](#)

- [Using ABA to Educate Students with Autism in Inclusive Environments](#)
- [ABA in PA Provider Directory](#)

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