

Applied Behavior Analysis

Applied Behavior Analysis, or ABA, has become a widely accepted treatment approach that focuses on improving specific behaviors, such as social skills, communication, and adaptive learning skills like hygiene, and domestic capabilities. It is a flexible treatment that can be adapted to meet the needs of each unique person, can be provided in many locations, and can involve one-to-one teaching and/or group instruction.

The goal of ABA is to increase behavior that is helpful and decrease behavior that is harmful or that is affecting learning. ABA can also help transfer skills and behavior from one situation to another, assist with controlling situations where negative behaviors occur and minimize negative behavior. Progress is tracked and measured by collecting data on behaviors and skills each session.

The Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) or other licensed professional will develop a treatment plan based on the strengths, weaknesses, interests, and abilities of your child to narrow the gap between their current functioning and those of similar-aged peers. For every problem behavior, an alternative replacement behavior is identified and taught to ensure your child has the skills to meet their needs. The BCBA then works with a technician to execute the program created specific to your child.

Usually delivered in the home, a technician will work with your child to develop their skills and reduce behaviors that may be harmful to themselves or others, disruptive to others or make them stand out more. These technicians will follow the treatment plan developed by the BCBA or other licensed professional, to change the environment in certain ways to help achieve your child's goals. Regular supervision will occur as the BCBA/licensed professional attends sessions with the technician to monitor the progress of your specific program.

The technician will work directly with you and your child to practice skills and work on the individual goals developed by the BCBA or other licensed professional. There are different types of ABA, some examples are:

- **Discrete Trial Training (DTT)** – Teaches using a series of trials to teach each step of a desired behavior or response. Correct answers and behaviors are rewarded, incorrect ones are ignored.



- **Natural Environment Teaching (NET)** – Teaches skills in the natural environment.
- **Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention (EIBI)** – Used with very young children (under age 5).
- **Pivotal Response Training (PRT)** – Works to increase motivation to learn, monitor own behavior, and initiate communication.
- **Verbal Behavior Intervention (VBI)** – Focus is on teaching verbal skills.

The length of time spent in ABA depends on the severity of the problem and the individual child's rate of improvement. These programs can be as short as 2 hours per week or be as long as 30-40 hours per week, depending on the needs of your child.

Parent training is also an essential component of all ABA programs. This helps parents or caregivers learn how to set up the child's environment for success and how to respond to increase positive behaviors and reduce challenging behaviors. Another important therapy is the use of social skills groups in which children can learn to interact more appropriately with others of similar ages.

Resources

Centers for Disease and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism

Autism Speaks

www.autismspeaks.org/applied-behavior-analysis-aba-0