Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

What Is It?

Defining Behavior:
Behavior refers to responses to one’s environment that can be specifically described, observed, and measured. Behavior may be categorized as voluntary or involuntary, social or asocial, adaptive or maladaptive, and functional or nonfunctional. The basic goal of scientists who study behavior is to systematically observe, describe, understand, explain, and predict behavior.

Defining Behavioral Therapy:
Behavioral therapy is a broad term referring to the general application and use of behavioral principles and interventions. The term can be used to describe a number of behavioral philosophies, methods and treatments used to address concerns relating to behavioral excesses and deficits. The use or application of behavioral therapy does not specifically involve an analysis of factors influencing behaviors, systematic implementation of strategies, or ongoing analyses of outcomes informed through data-driven decision making. Instead, strategies used as part of behavioral therapy may be selected and implemented on the basis of the clinical judgment of the therapist guiding the intervention.

Defining Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA):
ABA is a philosophy that refers to the scientific and systematic application of methods based upon behavioral principles. That is, interventions and programming are derived by making a hypothesis and testing this hypothesis through systematic data collection and analyses of the data. Data is collected from a number of informants, settings, and situations as well as in a number of formats. This data is then utilized to determine the most appropriate methods for intervention. ABA interventions are individualized but effective programming is typically composed of three primary components: setting up the environment, reducing behavioral symptoms, and increasing functional replacement skills. Ongoing data is collected and analyzed to monitor outcomes, areas of needed modifications and successes. This philosophy has been shown to be effective with a wide variety of behavioral disorders (inclusive of Autism Spectrum Disorder) and symptoms for many years and forms the basis of the HANDS in Autism® training model.

ABC Behavior Chart

Student’s Name: _______________________
Rater’s Name: __________________________
Age: ___________________
Date: ____________________

Operational definitions of target behavior:
______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

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The HANDS (Helping Answer Needs by Developing Specialists) in Autism® Interdisciplinary Training & Resource Center is located within the Department of Psychiatry at the Indiana University School of Medicine. Support for the foundational development of the HANDS in Autism® Center has been provided through a combination of federal and state funding as well as private philanthropies. To learn more, please contact Naomi Swiezy, Ph.D. HSPP, Director, at nswiezy@iupui.edu or find us at HANDSinAutism.iupui.edu

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Request a training to learn how to effectively support individuals with ASD & related developmental disabilities by contacting us at hands@iupui.edu or visiting HANDSinAutism.iupui.edu

Help us bring supports for individuals with ASD to your community! We greatly appreciate any and all donations that allow us to provide information, training, and resources to individuals, families, and caregivers in your community. All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law and you will be provided with the necessary documentation of 501(c) tax exemption status (www.HANDSinAutism.org/donatehands.html ) For further information, contact us at hands@iupui.edu.
What ABA is:

- ABA is representative of a clear and systematic way to describe, observe, & measure behavior.
- ABA is a science that uses very specific information about behavior in choosing interventions to improve socially significant behavior.
- ABA is a research-based (or evidence-based) philosophy.
- ABA is used to address applied and functional goals.
- ABA is guided by data-driven assessment and intervention.
- ABA is supportive of teaching both simple and complex skills.
- ABA is based upon an individualized approach to addressing strengths and weakness of individuals.
- ABA is focused on the acquisition, maintenance, and generalization of skills.
- ABA is focused on increasing the independence of individuals in applied and functional domains.
- ABA is a philosophy that reinforces teaching across all settings, activities, and opportunities.
- ABA is a set of strategies and tools that are selected and used collectively on the basis of individual needs.

What ABA is not:

- ABA is NOT a specific method for treating Autism Spectrum Disorder or other developmental disorders.
- ABA is NOT equivalent to any single, specific strategy that uses ABA principles (e.g., Discrete Trial Training (DTT), Verbal Behavior Analysis (VBA)).
- ABA is NOT an approach that is designed to increase dependence of the individual on others.
- ABA is NOT an invalid philosophy despite its use of single case studies or focus on changes in outcomes for one individual at a time.
- ABA is NOT only used in clinical settings.
- ABA is NOT necessarily applied to all behaviors, just those behaviors targeted for intervention.
- ABA is NOT only used for behavior reduction.
- ABA is NOT based on punishment strategies.
- ABA is NOT focused upon the manipulation or control of individuals.
- ABA is NOT effective if used inconsistently.
- ABA is NOT exclusive to the treatment of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Programs & Philosophies Based on or Related to ABA:

- Structured Teaching (TEACCH)
- Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS)
- Pivotal Response Training (PRT)
- Discrete Trial Training (DTT)
- Incidental Teaching
- Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)
- Verbal Behavior Analysis (VBA)
- Functional Communication Training (FCT)

*This list is not exhaustive.

Sample Interventions Utilized with ABA:

Proactive Strategies

- Physical Structure
- Visual Structure
- Choreography

Skills Teaching Strategies

- Structured Prompting
- Task Analyses and Chaining
- Tasks, Adaptations, and Modifications

Consequence-based strategies:

- Differential Reinforcement
- Planned Ignoring
- Reward/Response Cost Systems
- Time Out
- Overcorrection

For More Information:

- www.abainternational.org
- www.nationalautismcenter.org
- www.autismspeaks.org

References

- www.abainternational.org/aba/behavior-analysis.aspx
- www.centerforautism.com/aba-therapy.aspx

Would you like to learn more about visual supports & proactive strategies?
HANDSinAutism.iupui.edu