



# Applied Behavior Analysis is Individualized to Children and Adults

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Applied Behavior Analysis or ABA is a type of therapy based on the science of behavior and learning. Individuals who study ABA seek to understand how behavior works and what role the environment plays in the behavior of an individual.

ABA therapy is individualized to the child or adult that a clinician is working with, and training can be done in a variety of locations including in the clinic, at school, in the community, or even at home.

## How does ABA work?

It begins and ends with the behavior of individuals. To understand the specific behaviors of someone they are working with, a clinician will focus on the A-B-C's of behavior.

- A is for Antecedent. This is everything leading up to the behavior. This can be anything in the environment, another person, or something inside such as being ill.
- B is for the Behavior itself or what did the person say or do.
- Finally, the C is for Consequence. This is what happened right after the behavior, such as positive reinforcement.

For example, let's say that Tara comes into the clinic for her session, and runs right up to her clinician and makes a silly face causing the staff to laugh. The antecedent here would be seeing her favorite staff, the behavior would be the silly face, and the consequence would be that the staff laughed. It is possible, that because the staff laughed at the silly face, Tara will make the face again in the future.

Primarily ABA therapy focuses on the use of positive reinforcement to change a person's behavior. When positive reinforcement follows a behavior, such as praise, a high-five, or a favorite item or activity, that behavior is more likely to happen again in the future.

When trying to decrease a behavior, positive reinforcement is still provided, but for a different behavior than the one being decreased.

Another important focus of ABA therapy is data. A clinician will use the information collected during each session to measure their client's progress and use this information to guide someone towards their goals. This data could be the number of times they do a behavior or how intense the behavior was when it happened.

## **How does ABA relate to Autism?**

As of 2018, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that approximately 1 in 54 children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (1 in 37 for boys and 1 in 151 in girls). Early interventions, such as ABA therapy, increase the chance for healthy development and can provide greater benefits across a child's life. ABA therapy can be used to teach someone a variety of skills ranging from daily living, such as toileting or personal hygiene, to language and communication.

ABA therapy can also be used to lower the rate of behaviors that may harm or be counterproductive for individuals trying to communicate their wants or needs. Communication training can be a great tool when trying to teach someone how to ask for something they need rather than simply taking it, or how to request to be left alone when overwhelmed in order to avoid self-injury on the part of the individual.

ABA therapy can provide children who cannot speak a chance to develop spoken language or teach them to use technology to communicate, providing them an alternative to behaviors such as self-injury as a form of communication. Parent training can give parents the tools they need to better understand why their child may be behaving the way they do, and how to respond.

## **What are some other areas Applied Behavior Analysis can be used?**

While one of the most prevalent areas ABA is utilized is with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, there are many other areas where it is being utilized. ABA can be found in a variety of other areas including animal training, marketing, parenting, gerontology, gambling, sports and physical health, and even optimizing business practice and procedures through organizational behavior management.

## **Who can provide ABA therapy?**

ABA therapy is provided by clinicians with a master's degree or PhD in psychology or behavior analysis who have passed a national certification exam, or may involve therapists or behavior technicians who are supervised by the above clinician.

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