Why Choose ABA?

Applied Behavior Analysis is an evidence-based intervention supported by decades of research demonstrating its effectiveness for learners with and without special needs. ABA is considered the **gold standard** for working with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Hundreds of autism-specific studies have proven the effectiveness of ABA for both teaching skills and reducing challenging behavior. Research also indicates that many learners in ABA programs achieve more progress than those in programs involving several different methods.

What Does ABA Involve?

The goal of ABA intervention is two-fold:

- To **increase** useful and desired behaviors that can improve the individual's quality of life (communication, social, academic, self-help, and leisure skills)
- To **decrease** behaviors that interfere with learning, relationships, or may be harmful

Each objective or "target behavior" in an ABA program must have meaningful **social significance** for the person. This means that goals are individualized and prioritized to promote their independence and quality of life.

ABA looks for patterns of behavior by examining the possible influence of environmental factors:

- **Antecedent:** what comes before a specific behavior
- **Behavior:** the behavior itself
- **Consequence:** what happens immediately after a specific behavior

ABA encompasses many different principles and strategies. Some key features are:

Motivation: A high priority in ABA is using what motivates the learner as part of the instructional or behavior plan. Behavior analysts include the learner's interests and what (s)he finds fun. When an individual is motivated by an aspect of the lesson or plan, it is more likely to be effective.

Reinforcement: A positive reinforcer is a consequence which increases the likelihood that a behavior will happen again. It clarifies expectations by highlighting what to do instead of what not to do: essentially, "When I do this, that enjoyable thing happens, so I'll keep doing it." Strong reinforcers are necessary when working with individuals with ASD because many have a limited range of interests.

Prompting: Prompts are additional information to help individuals learn new skills or know what to do in a particular situation. ABA offers specific procedures for using cues such as gestures or visual supports to hint at the correct response. As the skill is learned, prompts are systematically faded until the target behavior can be done independently.

Task Analysis: Task analysis breaks complex skills into small steps. For example, the single direction, "Brush your teeth," can involve 20 components. Individuals with autism often need each step to be identified, taught, perhaps prompted, and reinforced. As progress is made, additional steps are included and prompts are faded until the entire task can be done independently.

Systematic and Thorough Instruction: For example, Discrete Trial Instruction is a structured approach that rehearses specific teaching targets and responses with strong reinforcement. Natural Environment Training promotes the transfer of these skills to everyday situations, often using natural reinforcers that are logical outcomes of the activity. When used in conjunction, learners may better generalize skills beyond the teaching environment.

Functional Behavior Assessment: An ABA approach to improving challenging behavior involves understanding why the behavior is happening. Systematic analysis can determine what the behavior is accomplishing for the individual. The function may be to gain access to attention, an item/activity, or sensory stimulation, or it may enable the person to avoid or escape something unpleasant. This information is then used to develop the treatment plan so safer and more appropriate replacement behaviors can be taught to meet the same need.

Who Should Provide ABA Services?

The Behavior Analyst Certification Board credentials are the standard for the profession and highly recommended. Generally speaking, the credential to look for is **Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)**. Obtaining this certification requires graduate coursework, extensive supervised experience, a national exam, and ongoing continuing education. There are various levels of registration/certification from technician to masters and doctoral-level behavior analysts. All certificants must adhere to the BACB's standards as outlined in the *Professional & Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts* (see www.bacb.com).

What are the Hallmarks of High-quality ABA Programs?

- **Intensive:** Low instructor/student ratio, high number of instructional hours and learning opportunities
- **Individualized:** Tailored to the learner's particular strengths and deficits, interests, and support needs
- **Comprehensive:** Incorporates several ABA instructional methods to ensure that a wide range of priority skills are taught across environments
- **Supervision:** Program designed and monitored by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)
- **Training:** All participants trained in the intervention techniques (including family members)
- **Data Analysis:** Data recorded and analyzed regularly to develop and adjust the treatment plan

Where Can Parents Find ABA Providers?

- The BACB's Certificant Registry (www.bacb.com)
- Autism New Jersey's ABA Provider Referral List (www.autismnj.org/referral)
- There are various funding sources for ABA services. Call **800.4.AUTISM** for individualized assistance.

Have Questions?

Autism New Jersey's **800.4.AUTISM Helpline** offers specific and important information about autism treatment, Applied Behavior Analysis and services available in New Jersey. Contact the Helpline to request a copy of our book, *Applied Behavior Analysis and Autism: An Introduction*.

Call 800.4.AUTISM to speak to an information specialist.
Email information@autismnj.org to connect with an information specialist.
Visit www.autismnj.org 24/7/365 for comprehensive, up-to-date information and news about autism.

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