Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is based on the science of behavior and how the environment affects our behavior. Many people think of ABA as being only a treatment for young children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). ABA is used as a medical treatment for autism and other disabilities. Principles of ABA are also used in education, police forensics, marketing and advertising, weight management and exercise programs, smoking cessation, traumatic brain injury (TBI) rehabilitation, organizational behavior management, animal training, and more. ABA can help people with and without disabilities live a improved quality of life.

Purpose of ABA

Teaching New Skills

Many think Discrete Trial Teaching (DTT) is ABA. However, DTT is just one procedure used within a larger ABA program. DTT involves teaching one-on-one in structured steps. Skills are broken down into steps. After a student learns one step, the student begins working on the next. There are actually many ways to teach skills using ABA principles in one-on-one or group settings. Some of these procedures include prompting, reinforcement, shaping, fading, modeling, rehearsal, and generalization.

Changing Behaviors

Sometimes behaviors cause problems with a person's daily life or learning. ABA principles can help the person learn more useful strategies. Examples include using meaningful communication (instead of blurting out when something is wanted or needed), staying on task, and interacting with peers. A functional behavior assessment (FBA) may be needed to learn the cause of the behavior. When the cause of the behavior is better understood, a plan can be put in place to change the behavior to something more appropriate.

ABA in Practice

Professionals and educators often use behavior principles as part of their teaching and interventions. Individuals who have focused training and education in ABA can become certified as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and be a licensed behavior analyst in the State of Michigan.

Family Matters fact sheets are intended to enhance public understanding of Michigan's special education system and are not a substitute for official laws and regulations.

ABA

Teach New Skills — Task Analysis; Chaining; Priming; Prompting; Shaping; Fading; Reinforcement; Self Management; Discrete Trial Teaching; Others

Change Behaviors — Functional Behavior Assessment; Functional Analysis; Behavior Plans
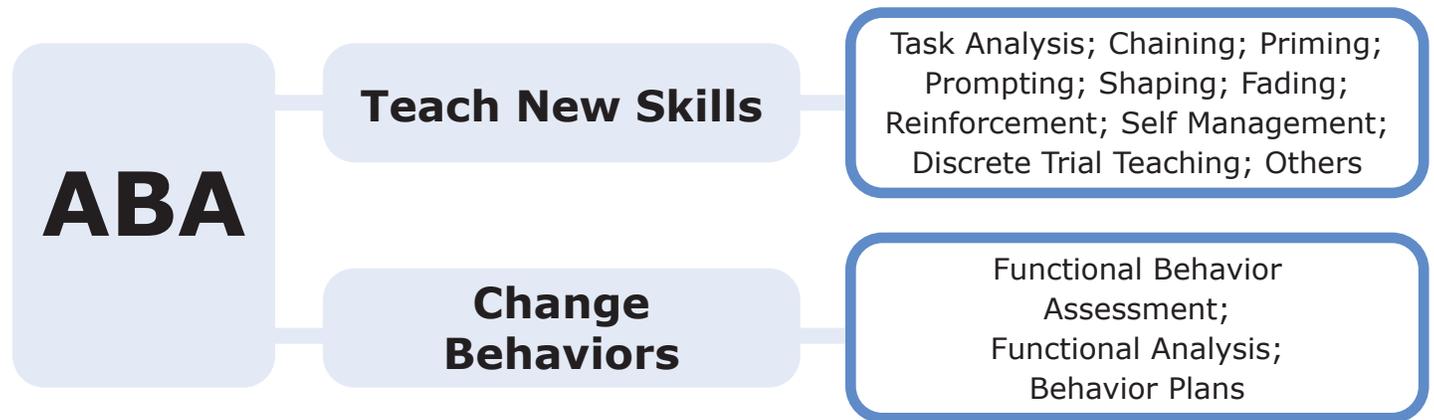
ABA and Schools

Many schools use positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) which is based on principles and practices from the science of behavior. ABA principles used in schools are considered evidence-based practice. Practices include setting behavior expectations, visual supports, self-management systems, task analysis, functional behavior assessments (FBAs), behavior intervention plans (BIPs), reinforcement, token systems, peer support programs, and data-based decision making.

ABA can be effective for changing behaviors and developing skills in both children and adults. Some families may want their children to be in an ABA program during the school day. Research demonstrates placing students with disabilities in schools alongside their peers promotes more successful transitions to community living. Additionally, if a student has an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP), being in an ABA program during the school day may violate their right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) according to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA).

Resources

Michigan Alliance for Families: Applied Behavior Analysis Overview

- Behavior Analysis Certification Board (BACB)
- Boston Medical Center: Parent Training—Everyday ABA
- Center for Parent Information and Resources: What is Applied Behavior Analysis
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)