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What is ABA?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a therapy based on the science of learning and behavior.

Behavior analysis helps us to understand:

- How behavior works
- How behavior is affected by the environment
- How learning takes place

ABA therapy applies our understanding of how behavior works to real situations. The goal is to increase behaviors that are helpful and decrease behaviors that are harmful or affect learning.

ABA therapy programs can help:

- Increase language and communication skills
- Improve attention, focus, social skills, memory, and academics
- Decrease problem behaviors

The methods of behavior analysis have been used and studied for decades. They have helped many kinds of learners gain different skills – from healthier lifestyles to learning a new language. Therapists have used ABA to help children with autism and related developmental disorders since the 1960s.

Video: [What is ABA?](#)

How do kids get started with ABA therapy?

When a new client comes to Easterseals, an evaluation by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) is completed to determine the treatment plan and the treatment setting using a family-centered approach. Our team builds an individualized plan for each child, outlining goals and addressing challenging behavior. Easterseals' ABA therapy can be provided in various settings, including 1:1, small group, classroom-like environment, in the home when appropriate, or a combination of all these settings.

BCBAs will consult with families about what they want to focus on and in what order they would prefer to tackle them. They may observe, ask questions, and give families surveys/questionnaires to help pinpoint specific goals. Often times, they will focus on skills that are the most socially significant, meaning they have the most impact at that time.

Once goals are selected the BCBA will likely set long-term and short-term goals for the child. An example is if the family wants the child to be able to dress independently in a timely manner (this would be the



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long-term goal). Some of the short-term goals may be using a zipper, buttoning buttons, selecting appropriate clothes from their drawers/closet, etc. These short-term goals will be tackled individually to increase the likelihood of dressing independently in the long term.

Goals can include:

- Motor Skills
 - This can include things from walking to holding a utensil. For example, focusing on grasping can help with handwriting in school or eating independently.
- Functional Skills
 - Potty training is a big one! There are also things like bathing, dressing, etc.
- Communication Skills
 - This can be vocal speech, devices, picture exchange communication system (PECS), sign language! Communication skills will begin by assessing manding (asking for things), tacting (describing things), and socializing with peers. Most importantly, communication skills can help develop a skill to replace negative behaviors. For example, if a child hits to get access to food and he is taught to ask for a snack, the hitting will likely go away.
- Academic Skills
 - Setting academic goals typically begins by focusing on the component skills necessary for the larger subject. For example, teaching letter identification will help a child to read later on.
- Social Skills
 - Small talk, sharing, group play, how to respond in social situations, what emotions are, etc.

What happens in an ABA session?

Applied Behavior Analysis involves many techniques for understanding and changing behavior. ABA is a flexible treatment:

- Can be adapted to meet the needs of each unique person
- Provided in many different locations – at home, at school, and in the community
- Teaches skills that are useful in everyday life
- Can involve one-to-one teaching or group instruction

Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is one of the main strategies used in ABA. When a behavior is followed by something a reward, a person is more likely to repeat that behavior. Over time, this encourages positive behavior change. First, the therapist identifies a goal behavior. Each time the person uses the behavior or skill successfully, they get a reward. The reward is meaningful to the individual – examples include praise, a toy or book, watching a video, access to playground or other location, and more. Positive rewards encourage the person to continue using the skill. Over time this leads to meaningful behavior change.



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Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence

Understanding antecedents (what happens before a behavior occurs) and consequences (what happens after the behavior) is another important part of any ABA program.

The following three steps – the “A-B-Cs” – help us teach and understand behavior:

1. An antecedent: this is what occurs right before the target behavior. It can be verbal, such as a command or request. It can also be physical, such as a toy or object, or a light, sound, or something else in the environment. An antecedent may come from the environment, from another person, or be internal (such as a thought or feeling).
2. A resulting behavior: this is the person’s response or lack of response to the antecedent. It can be an action, a verbal response, or something else.
3. A consequence: this is what comes directly after the behavior. It can include positive reinforcement of the desired behavior, or no reaction for incorrect/inappropriate responses.

Looking at A-B-Cs helps us understand:

1. Why a behavior may be happening
2. How different consequences could affect whether the behavior is likely to happen again

With continued practice, the student will be able to replace the inappropriate behavior with one that is more helpful. The goal of any ABA program is to help each person work on skills that will help them become more independent and successful in the short term as well as in the future.

Video: [What happens in an ABA session?](#)

What does a RBT do?

The Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) provides direct supervision and training to children with autism in the clinic, in their home or in another natural environment as assigned by the Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). The RBT uses the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis within a family-centered approach to carry out programs and activities designed to improve the lives of children and their families.

A Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) works in clinical settings under the supervision of Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) to provide treatment plans for patients like autistic children. As a behavior technician, you’ll work under a BCBA to create the most impactful changes for an individual patient. You may also work in schools or home settings to assist patients in reducing problematic behaviors or learning daily living skills.



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During the course of your day, you'll usually see treatment components that include:

- Emotional development
- Self-management
- Safety skills
- Play and leisure skills
- Coping and tolerance skills

These are just a few of the treatment program elements you might see or assist with implementing while working with behavior analysts.

Additionally, as a behavior technician you may:

- Assist clients in one-on-one or group settings
- Share client progress with parents, caregivers, and clients
- Prep client materials
- Observe and record client behavior data
- Follow all behavior reduction and behavior skills protocols

Why should you become a RBT?

Watching the growth of patients is one of the most rewarding parts of working as a Registered Behavior Technician. Due to the nature of consistent consultations and meetings with patients, you'll watch inspiring development unfold. This career takes a lot of energy, creativity, and dedication, but the reward of seeing a patient blossom under proper training is motivational.

Watching a family's relief and hope skyrocket as they see their family member progress can offer reassurance that a Registered Behavior Technician position at Easterseals is the right choice for you.

[Working at Easterseals](#)

[Taking on Autism with Brenly](#)

[Taking on Autism with Noah](#)

[Taking on Autism with Chloe](#)