



PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #30



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APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS (ABA)

“Applied behavior analysis is a discipline devoted to the understanding and improvement of human behavior...” ABA “focuses on objectively defined observable behavior of social significance; it seeks to improve the behavior under study while demonstrating a reliable relationship between the procedures employed and the behavioral improvement; and it uses the methods of science—description, quantification, and analysis.” (Cooper, Heron, Heward 1987)

While Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a science and is not “owned” or limited to any one group, there is a vehicle for certification in the practice of this field. Certification is provided through the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB). This organization was established in 1998 to meet professional credentialing needs identified by behavior analysts, governments, and consumers of behavior analysis services. The program of study is rigorous, requiring specific college coursework emphasis, supervision of practice, and successful performance on the Board Certified Behavior Analyst Examination. Most third party payers require certification for their providers. However, many professionals utilize the principles of ABA within the scope of their practices. Psychologists, speech-language pathologists, special education teachers, researchers and others often implement treatment strategies falling under the wide umbrella of ABA. More information may be found at: www.bacb.com.

Project ACCESS lists ABA providers on the website. Some of the providers have completed certification, while others have not. It is the responsibility of the consumer to review the credentials of providers and determine appropriateness for needs.

The National Autism Center’s National Standards Report lists Behavioral Package, Antecedent Package, Comprehensive Behavioral Treatment for Young children, and Pivotal Response Treatment as Established Treatments. These treatments clearly fall within the scope of ABA field. The report may be accessed at: www.nationalautismcenter.org.

The application of ABA principles to individuals along the autism spectrum has evolved over time. Initially, discrete trial teaching in one-on-one settings was widely implemented. Criticism of use of this method to exclusion of other learning opportunities included concerns that the strategy was contrived and did not promote generalization of learned skills to natural environments. Most practitioners, while continuing to focus on teaching skills, also treat in natural environment settings. Use of Verbal Behavior techniques targeting B.F. Skinner’s behavioral classification of language is often the basis for treatment programs (Skinner, 1957) (Sunberg and Partington, 1998).

Resources:

Alberto, P. and Troutman, A. (2009). Applied Behavior Analysis for Teachers, Eighth Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill of Pearson Publishers. www.pearsonhighered.com.

Cooper, J., Heron, W., & Hewett, W. (1989). Applied Behavior Analysis. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Skinner, B.F. (1957). Verbal Behavior. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Sunburg, M., Partington, J. (1998). Teaching Language to Children with Autism or Other Developmental Disabilities. Pleasant Hill, CA: Behavior Analysts, Inc.

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