

## What is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)?

**The Report of the MADSEC Autism Task Force (2000) provides a succinct description, put together by an independent body of experts:**

*Over the past 30 years, several thousand published research studies have documented the effectiveness of ABA across a wide range of:*

- populations (individuals with mental illness, developmental disabilities and learning disorders)
- interventionists (parents, teachers and staff)
- settings (schools, homes, institutions, group homes, hospitals and business offices), and
- behaviors (language, social, academic, leisure, life skills; aggression, self injury, etc)

*Behavior Analysis is the scientific study of behavior and from this study principles of learning and motivation have been derived. Applied behavior analysis application of procedures and technology based upon those principles to improve socially significant behaviors to a meaningful degree... ABA is an objective discipline which focuses on the reliable measurement and objective evaluation of observable behavior.*

*ABA methods are used to support persons with autism by:*

1. increasing behaviors (e.g., on-task behavior or social interactions)
2. teaching new skills (e.g., life skills, communication skills, or social skills)
3. maintaining behaviors (e.g., teaching self control and self-monitoring skills)
4. generalizing behavior (e.g., from one situation, person or response to another)
5. restricting conditions in which problem behaviors occur (e.g., modify the environment)
6. reducing or eliminating problem behaviors (e.g., self injury, aggression or stereotypy).

ABA-based treatment approaches are considered to be at the top intervention for children with autism. The large amount of scientific evidence supporting ABA treatments for children with autism have led a number of other independent bodies to endorse the effectiveness of ABA, including the U.S. Surgeon General, the New York State Department of Health, the National Academy of Sciences, and the American Academy of Pediatrics (reference list available).

ABA programs rely heavily upon positive reinforcement with specific, individualized teaching procedures. For beginning learners or for introducing new skills, discrete trial training (DTT) is used. In DTT, a specific instruction or cue is given, the desired response is prompted, and the individual receives reinforcement for proper responses. Although the DTT is an integral part of ABA-based programs, other ABA teaching strategies such as Natural Environment Training (NET) may be used to address more complex skills. With NET, skills are taught in the natural environment in a more playful manner, and the reinforcers used are directly related to the task. Other teaching strategies used in a comprehensive ABA-based program include errorless teaching procedures, task analysis, shaping, Picture Exchange Communication System, fluency-based instruction and so forth. At the Shorkey Center utilizes all ABA-based teaching approaches which are appropriate for an individual.

## References

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