



Applied Behavior Analysis

What is Applied Behavior Analysis, or ABA?

The technical definition is: a science in which tactics derived from principles of behavior are applied to improve socially significant behavior and experimentation is used to identify the variables responsible for the improvement in behavior. (Cooper, Heron, and Heward, 2007).

It is a systematic approach to the assessment and evaluation of behavior and the application of interventions that change behavior.

ABA uses behavioral methods to measure behavior, teach functional skills, and evaluate progress.

In Simpler Words...

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is a science that focuses on the observable relationship of a behavior to the environment.

Why is ABA Used?

ABA-based interventions are best known for treating people with developmental disabilities, most notably autism spectrum disorders. However, applied behavior analysis is used in a full range of areas including: AIDS prevention, conservation of natural resources, education, gerontology, health and exercise, industrial safety, language acquisition, littering, medical procedures, parenting, seatbelt use, severe mental disorders, sports, and zoo management and care of animals.

Typically developing children learn often without our intervention- the world around them provides the right conditions to learn language, play, and social skills. Children with autism learn much, much less easily from the environment. They have the potential to learn, but it takes a very structured environment, one where conditions are optimized for learning the same skills that typical children learn "naturally."

ABA is all about how to set up the environment to enable kids with Autism Spectrum Disorders to learn.

How is ABA Used with Children with Autism?

There are many teaching methods that rely on the science of Applied Behavior Analysis. Some of these are:

- Discrete Trial Teaching
- Pivotal Response Training
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Floortime

These are teaching *methods* that uses the *science* of ABA. These methods should not be called “ABA”.

Think of it this way:

The State of California, based on the science of what skills kids need to be successful adults, determines what information needs to be taught in our public schools.

The individual classroom teacher determines, based on his or her professional experience and training, the best way to *teach* that information to his or her students.

ABA is the science that helps us determine what needs to be taught (the State of California). The teacher determines how to teach that information (the method, such as Discrete Trial Teaching or PECS).

Homework

1. Fill in the blanks:

Applied Behavior Analysis is the _____ that focuses on the observable relationship between the _____ to the _____.

2. Why do we use ABA to teach children with autism spectrum disorders? (explain as best you can)

3. Some teaching methods that use the science of ABA are: (please name a few – it is not limited to what was mentioned during the lesson above)
