

# Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

## TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES



### What is Applied Behavior Analysis?

ABA is a science that studies the way people interact with their environments, including observable events, sensory experiences, and internal states, and how those interactions impact individuals and their future interactions. It is not a single intervention or approach. ABA has many applications and usages, including teaching new skills. A number of intervention strategies and programs are based on the principles of ABA (e.g., Naturalistic teaching, Pivotal Response Training, etc.)

Interventions are based on the idea that behaviors are learned and maintained by the response they receive from others and the individual's internal response to the behavior.

- Antecedents: Events that occur immediately *before* a behavior.
- Behavior: A response to the persons or things around us at any given time.
- Consequences: Events that occur immediately *after* the behavior.

### What are examples of ABA in action?

School example:

- Antecedent: The teacher gives students an assignment.
- Behavior: Student raises hand and asks for help with #3.
- Consequence: The teacher provides additional instruction and breaks #3 into several smaller tasks so that the student can successfully complete the task.

In this example, the student is likely to ask for help again when needed since this skill worked to access the support needed.

Home Example:

- Antecedent: A toddler sees a new toy car on a high shelf
- Behavior: The child reaches for the car
- Consequence: The parent sees the child reach for the car and reaches to get it while modeling the word “car” for the child.

In this example, the child is likely to repeat this reach in the future since it was reinforced with access to the car. In addition, the child may add the word “car” to the reach since the two actions were paired by the caregiver.

### What behaviors can be addressed through ABA?

A number of skills can be taught using interventions based in the principles of ABA, including social skills, communication, learning readiness, self-care, self-regulation, and other skills that can take the place of challenging behaviors. Learners, and their families for young children, should take the lead in establishing the goals for ABA. Skills to be taught should be meaningful and improve quality of life for the learner. ABA should not be used to teach skills that only serve to reduce characteristics of autism or to make others more comfortable (e.g., reducing self-stimulatory behavior, reducing repetitive talk).

### Who benefits from ABA strategies?

ABA strategies are often recommended for autistic students or students with other developmental disabilities. However, the effectiveness is not limited to individuals with disabilities and ABA-based interventions can be used in a variety of skill building situations.

### Who can teach ABA strategies?

Interventions and strategies can be effectively used and implemented by different people. Individuals can be certified to deliver ABA services. These individuals are called Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA). You do not have to be a BCBA to effectively learn and use ABA teaching strategies. In fact, a competent behavioral service provider will teach others (e.g., caregivers, teachers) how to implement strategies and interventions.

*Please see reverse for resources.*



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## RESOURCES

### Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, educators and service providers, researchers, students, and policy makers. Faculty and staff engage in interdisciplinary research, training, service, and information dissemination and work in collaboration with local, state and national networks and partners. (615) 322-8240, toll-free (866) 936-8852, [vkc.vumc.org](http://vkc.vumc.org)

### Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD)

TRIAD is a VKC program dedicated to improving assessment and treatment services for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families while advancing knowledge and training. See [TRIAD.vumc.org](http://TRIAD.vumc.org).

### Take Part in Research

StudyFinder is a searchable database that lists current VKC studies. Studies seek people of all ages with and without developmental disabilities. See [vkc.vumc.org/study\\_index](http://vkc.vumc.org/study_index). Research Match is a secure place for volunteers and researchers to connect. See [researchmatch.org](http://researchmatch.org)

### Tennessee Disability Path Index

Provides free information, referral sources, and help with navigating services via phone, email, and website. Assistance is available to individuals of all ages, all types of disabilities, and all languages spoken. Its website database has more than 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county and service. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC and is partially funded by Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and other state agencies. (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636, [TNPathfinder.org](http://TNPathfinder.org)

### Local and National Resources

#### Behavior Analyst Certification Board

[www.BACB.com](http://www.BACB.com)

A nonprofit corporation established to meet professional credentialing needs identified by behavior analysts, governments, and consumers of behavior analysis services. Their website includes a registry of current Board Certified Behavior Analysts.

#### Autism Speaks

[www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

#### ABA International

[www.abainternational.org](http://www.abainternational.org)

### Print Resources

Selecting a Behavioral Services Provider Tips and Resources for Parents is a fact sheet that provides information on how to select a qualified and effective behavioral services provider. See [vkc.vumc.org/assets/files/tipsheets/behaviorservicesprovidertips.pdf](http://vkc.vumc.org/assets/files/tipsheets/behaviorservicesprovidertips.pdf).

Cooper, J.O., Heron, T.E., & Heward, W.L. (2007). *Applied Behavior Analysis* (2nd Edition). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

### Contact the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

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