

research, the field of behavior analysis has developed many techniques for increasing useful behaviors and reducing those that may cause harm or interfere with learning.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is the use of these techniques and principles to bring about meaningful and positive change in behavior.

Since the early 1960s, ABA has been used by thousands of therapists to teach communication, play, social, academic, self-care, work and community living skills and to reduce problem behaviors in learners with autism. There is a great deal of research that has demonstrated that ABA is effective for improving children's outcomes, especially their cognitive and language abilities. Over the past several decades, different models using ABA have emerged, all of which use behavioral teaching. They all use strategies that are based on Skinner's work.

ABA is often difficult to understand until you see it in action. It may be helpful to start by describing what all of the different methods of ABA have in common. ABA methods use the following three step process to teach:

An **antecedent**, which is a verbal or physical stimulus such as a command or request. This may come from the environment or from another person or be internal to the subject;

A resulting **behavior**, which is the subject's (or in this case, the child's) response or lack of response to the antecedent;

A **consequence**, which depends on the behavior, can include positive reinforcement of the desired behavior or no reaction for incorrect responses.

ABA targets the learning of skills and the reduction of challenging behaviors. Most ABA programs are highly structured. Targeted skills and behaviors are based on an established curriculum. Each skill is broken down into small steps and taught using prompts that are gradually eliminated as the steps are mastered. The child is given repeated opportunities to learn and practice each step in a variety of settings. Each time the child achieves the desired result, he or she receives positive reinforcement, such as verbal praise or something else that the child finds to be highly motivating, like a small piece of candy. ABA programs often include support for the child in a school setting with a one-on-one aide to target the systemic transfer of skills to a typical school environment. Skills are broken down into manageable pieces and built upon so that a child learns how to learn in a natural environment. Facilitated play with peers is often part of the intervention. Success is measured by direct observation and data collection and analysis – all critical components of ABA. If the child isn't making satisfactory progress, adjustments are made.

One type of ABA intervention is **Discrete Trial Teaching** (also referred to as DTT, "traditional ABA" or the Lovaas Model, for its pioneer, Dr. Ivar Lovaas). DTT involves teaching individual skills one at a time using several repeated teaching trials and reinforcers that may or may not be intrinsically related to the skill that is being taught.

