



# ABA TERMS GLOSSARY

"We should select words for their effects on the listener NOT for their effects on the speaker."  
-B.F. Skinner

### **ABA = APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS**

This acronym simply means using the science of behavior- applying it to socially significant behaviors! ABA is an umbrella term that can cover many specific and unique strategies that are all backed up by this science of behavior. ABA is both data-driven and evidence-based.

### **ABC DATA = ANTECEDENT-BEHAVIOR-CONSEQUENCE TO FIND THE WHY BEHIND A BEHAVIOR**

All 3 of these (antecedent, behavior, consequence) have their own entries in this glossary. These are often collected as ABC data collection to help figure out the function of a behavior, or the WHY behind it.

### **ANTECEDENT = WHAT COMES RIGHT BEFORE**

This means before a behavior. What happens before a behavior or using an intervention to prevent a problem behavior is called an antecedent intervention. Why? Because it comes BEFORE.

### **AUTOMATIC REINFORCEMENT = DOESN'T REQUIRE SOMEONE ELSE TO DELIVER IT TO YOU/ IT FEELS GOOD**

Some things just feel good or are reinforcing without anyone else having to give an external reinforcer. Your own behavior produces reinforcement.

### **BEHAVIOR = ANYTHING WE SAY OR DO**

Technically most BCBAs will say this has to be observable or measurable. But you can also have private behavior which includes your thoughts and feelings.

The Dead Man's Test says that if a dead man can do it then it's not a behavior. Not talking? A dead man can do it. Not hitting? A dead man can do that, too

Behavior typically involves an interaction with the environment. If you say or do something- it puts a new statement or motion into the environment around you.

### **BEHAVIOR CONTRACT = A WRITTEN CONTRACT ABOUT BEHAVIOR**

It's a physical document also called a contingency contract. You clearly list each party's expectations or target behaviors. Then list out what rewards or reinforcers are available for doing the target behaviors. Each party can sign (the one doing the behaving and the one giving in the reinforcers) and use it as a visual cue or reminder of the contingency happening right now.

### **BEHAVIOR SKILLS TRAINING (OR BST) = A WHOLE PACKAGE DEAL OF 4 STEPS TO TEACH A SKILL.**

It puts together several research-based practices to pack the best punch. BST is a research-based strategy to teach new skills. It has been defined as "a procedure consisting of instruction, modeling, behavioral rehearsal, and feedback that is used to teach new behaviors or skills" (Miltenberger, 2004).

There are 4 steps to BST. When using this strategy, you can't leave out any of these steps. Do all of them. And do them in order, please.

1. Instructions: tell them.
2. Modeling: show them.
3. Rehearsal: have them show you.
4. Feedback: praise or prompting.

### **CHAINING = TEACH ONE STEP IN A SEQUENCE AT A TIME**

When teaching larger or more complex skills, teach one step at a time in order. You can start forward or backward- they are both types of chaining. See the entry for task analysis for more.

### **CONSEQUENCE = WHAT COMES RIGHT AFTER**

I know you want to say a consequence is a negative reaction or punishment but in ABA terms, it's just what comes after. It doesn't mean a negative or positive thing. Just AFTER.

## DEFINE

### **CONTINGENCY = IF THIS HAPPENS, THEN THAT CAN HAPPEN**

A contingency in ABA land usually is a relationship between 2 things. If this happens, then that will happen. If this behavior occurs, then this consequence occurs. It's a pattern of what can happen in the future. See ABC data.

### **DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT = REINFORCING THIS BEHAVIOR INSTEAD OF THAT ONE**

Typically you reinforce a desired target behavior while not reinforcing the undesired behavior. You want your child to do THIS (a more effective way to communicate or behave) instead of THAT (problem behavior), so you reinforce THIS and not THAT. There are several specific schedules or procedures within differential reinforcement because it's such a useful teaching tool!

### **ECHOIC = EXACT COPY VERBAL BEHAVIOR/ REPEAT**

This is a verbal behavior term usually used when teaching verbal behavior. Echoic means echoing. Just repeating back the sounds or words heard.

### **ESCAPE = STOP OR GET AWAY FROM SOMETHING YOU DON'T LIKE**

Getting away from something aversive or making that unpleasant stimulus stop. If you don't like something, you get out of it or get away from it. That is escape behavior.

Also goes along with avoidance or negative reinforcement.

### **EXTINCTION = STOP THE REINFORCEMENT**

To stop a behavior from happening, make sure it's not being reinforced. Stopping a reinforcer to stop a behavior should be accompanied by strong levels of reinforcement for a replacement behavior.

Extinction procedures can have side effects and are not always the most compassionate choice so make sure they are balanced and supported with lots of data.

### **FADING = SLOWLY BACKING OFF SUPPORTS**

A behavior analyst's goal is always for the learner to do new skills independently. It may take a lot of supports like prompts and visuals and chaining and all kinds of behavior tools you can find in this glossary. Fading is the systematic or purposeful removal of these supports- slowly, gradually, at a pace that works for the learner to keep being successful and do things independently.

### **FBA = FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT= FIGURING OUT THE WHY BEHIND A BEHAVIOR**

A behavior analyst will take ABC data (antecedent- behavior-consequence) or do an assessment called a functional analysis to figure out WHY a behavior is occurring. This is called the function.

If a child is engaging in a problem behavior, we want to replace that with a more appropriate behavior or way of communicating. But the only way this works for a child is if it serves the same purpose, meets the same need, has the same function.

### **FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING = TEACHING HOW TO COMMUNICATE TO PREVENT OR REPLACE PROBLEM BEHAVIOR**

An appropriate way to communicate wants and needs is taught and reinforced to replace or prevent problem behavior.

Being able to ask for what you need (in whatever method/ mode) is taught and built up to prevent screaming or hitting or something unhelpful to get what you need.

### **GENERALIZATION = FLEXIBLE APPLICATION OF A SKILL**

Once a new skill is learned, can it happen in other environments or with other people?

Generalization means the skill generalizes to these other setting or situations.

### **INTRAPERSONAL = FILL IN THE BLANK OR ANSWER QUESTIONS**

A verbal operant with a tricky name. Basically, intraverbals are building blocks to conversation skills as its the ability to discuss, describe, or answer a question about something that isn't physically present. What is your favorite food? Tell me about what you did last weekend.

These are often trained with answering WH questions like who, what, when, where, why or fill in the blanks.

### **LATENCY = HOW LONG IT TAKES TO START**

The amount of time between a stimulus and a response. For example, when you give an instruction how long does it take for your child to start doing that instruction?

### **MAINTENANCE = AFTER A SKILL IS MASTERED, MAKE SURE THEY DON'T LOSE IT; MAINTAIN IT**

After a skill is mastered we usually move on to the next skill or next baby step of raised expectations. Maintenance means maintaining previously mastered skills and making sure the learner doesn't just forget them because we stopped practicing them altogether.

Check in every so often to check that skills are maintaining- not forgotten or lost because you moved on.

### **MAND = DEMAND OR REQUEST**

This means requesting something wanted or needed.

You hear this word with verbal behavior training, it is a verbal operant. Still just means request. Can be spoken or any other form of communication (gestures, sign, picture cues, AAC, etc)

### **NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT = INCREASING A BEHAVIOR BY STOPPING SOMETHING UNPLEASANT**

This term gets confused by ABA people and parents alike! It does NOT mean a negative consequence.

Reinforcement means the behavior increases. Negative means subtract or take away.

The easiest way to explain: when your car makes a beeping sound until you put your seat belt on. The beeping sound negatively reinforced you wearing a seatbelt. Negative because you stopped or subtracted the beeping sound. Reinforcement because your behavior of seat belt wearing increased.

It's unnecessarily confusing terminology. I'm sorry.

### **NET = NATURAL ENVIRONMENT TRAINING = USING REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS**

Take advantage of teachable moments in real life instead of creating school-type learning moments. This can look more like playing together and less like sitting across a table with flash cards.

We can say things like "clap your hands" or "touch your head" for instruction following or things like "put on your shoes" and then go play outside in the natural environment.

### **NON-CONTINGENT REINFORCEMENT= FREE REINFORCEMENT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE EARNED**

Typically with non-contingent reinforcement, it is delivered on a schedule. So the learner gets access to their reinforcers every so often regardless of their behavior. You don't have to earn it- it's just available at these times.

This is an antecedent intervention because it's usually used BEFORE to try to prevent problem behavior.

If I'm getting the attention I'm wanting every so often then I'm less likely to engage in problem behavior to get that attention.

### **PAIRING = PAIR SOMETHING UNFUN WITH SOMETHING FUN.**

This means to take something reinforcing (the fun) and do it along with the unfun thing (the behavior that isn't happening as often as it could). We do this to help make unfun skills that our kids avoid but are necessary (like brushing teeth) more reinforcing- or more fun!

Pair something reinforcing to your child with something that they aren't a fan of to make the unfun thing more fun.

We are trying to transfer the reinforcing properties of the fun thing to whatever is less desirable to your kiddos. You can pair an activity with reinforcement to make it less stressful.

### **PREMACK PRINCIPLE = "FIRST DO THE UNFUN THING, THEN GET A REINFORCER."**

"First \_\_\_\_\_, then \_\_\_\_\_."

The "first" is an un-fun thing. What is the behavior you need them to do, but they aren't super into it? Next comes the "then". That's the good stuff that you will give them after they complete the unfun task. The 'then' is the reinforcer.

"First \_\_\_\_\_, then \_\_\_\_\_."

Say it out loud. Directly tell them the contingency in place. What are they going to get?

### **PROMPT = HELPING OR CUEING TO MAKE A BEHAVIOR HAPPEN**

Typically after a behavior has been taught or mastered, then we can give little hints, cues, or help along the way to make it happen in real life.

There are several types of prompts: physical prompt, gestural prompt, position prompt, model prompt, verbal prompt, symbolic prompt, visual prompt, and many more.

This is a type of antecedent intervention- something to do BEFORE to help make a behavior happen.

### **POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT= SOMETHING IS ADDED AFTER A BEHAVIOR & THEN THAT BEHAVIOR HAPPENS MORE OFTEN IN THE FUTURE.**

By definition, positive reinforcement occurs when something is presented immediately following a behavior and as a result, that behavior occurs more often in the future.

Behavior-->Something is added-->behavior occurs more often in the future

Are rewards positive reinforcement? Only if they work to increase the behaviors you want to see more of.

Examples:

Your child tries all the food on their plate at dinner. You give lots of praise and attention. The next night, they try all their food again!

### **PREFERENCE ASSESSMENT = WAY TO FIND REINFORCERS**

An assessment or test to try to figure out what a learner likes the best that can be used as potential reinforcers to increase a behavior or skill. There are several types of preference assessments. It does what it sounds like- see what is preferred. Can also be a reinforcer assessment.

### **PROBE = QUICK TEST A SKILL**

Usually just one trial or a first response to see if a skill is mastered already or generalized. It's a quick way to test or assess a specific skill.

### **PUNISHMENT = COMES AFTER AND THEN DECREASES A BEHAVIOR**

Punishment procedures mean something is either added or taken away from the environment which causes the behavior to DECREASE. That decrease in frequency is what behavior analysts look at the most for punishment.

Punishment should be accompanied by strong reinforcement for a replacement behavior- lots of reinforcement for doing the appropriate behavior instead.

### **REINFORCER = THE THING THAT YOU WANT/ INCREASES THE BEHAVIOR**

This is the 'something that is added' following a behavior that causes that behavior to increase (see the positive reinforcement definition). A true reinforcer will cause your child to engage in the desired behaviors again in the future.

Does it increase the behavior? If not- it's not a reinforcer.

Reinforcers are consequences because they come after a behavior.

### **SATIATION = HAVING SO MUCH OF SOMETHING THAT IT'S NOT REINFORCING ANY MORE**

The common definition of satiation refers to eating. It means being full, not wanting or needing any more food. The same goes for reinforcers. If a learner has had so much of one reinforcer, they don't want or need it anymore. They are satiated with that reinforcer and it will not be an effective way to teach or shape behavior.

### **SELF-MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES = IN CHARGE OF YOUR OWN BEHAVIOR CHANGE**

There are multiple behavior tools that fall under the self-management umbrella that all have the person in charge of their own behavior change program. Track your own progress, set your own goals, and decide when and how to give yourself access to reinforcement.

### **SHAPING = USING POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TO BUILD UP BABY STEPS TOWARD THE GOAL.**

As one baby step is mastered, you raise the bar to the next step. You stop reinforcing the mastered baby step and move on to the next one to gradually teach a new behavior or skill.

This is used to teach a new skill that is too far out of reach to begin with.

Help them get there gradually by raising the expectation when they are ready.

In jargon terms, this is called reinforcing successive approximations to the target behavior. Successive approximations are the baby steps (in order) to the big picture behavior goal.

### **TACT= LABEL**

This means being able to label or describe something.

You hear this word with verbal behavior training, it is a verbal operant. Still just means label or identify an object, a smell, a feeling- you name it! Can be spoken or any other form of communication (gestures, sign, picture cues, AAC, etc)

### **TASK ANALYSIS = BREAK DOWN ANY ROUTINE OR SKILL TO THE MOST SIMPLE STEPS.**

Breaking things down into baby steps and then teaching those baby steps in order can help learn new skills or complete a routine.

Break down any routine or activity to the most simple steps you can think of. Put those in order, list them out, and then either use pictures or words.

We teach each step and can use the list of steps as a visual cue or prompt.

A task analysis is a step-by-step list of actions necessary to complete a specific behavior.

### **TOKEN ECONOMY = A STRUCTURED REINFORCEMENT SYSTEM.**

A token economy is like a reward system like a sticker chart or marble jar you've seen before. The difference? We are going to be more intentional with it and set it up so that it really works for you.

A behavior change system consisting of three major components: (a) a specified list of target behaviors; (b) tokens or points that participants receive for emitting the target behaviors; and (c) a menu of backup reinforcer items.'

Think of the real economy. You go to work (do a behavior), you get a paycheck (a token). You can then exchange your money (token) to get something you want.