



Behavior 101:

An SLP's Guide to Ethical, Interdisciplinary Behavior Management

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1

Introduction & disclosures

- **Reed Senter** (*he/him*)
 - Assist Professor at DeSales University, receives a salary and travel reimbursement
 - Neurodivergent, father to an autistic child
 - Pediatric SLP, mostly middle- and high-school
- **Maggie Collins** (*they/them*)
 - Graduate student at DeSales University
 - Previously employed as a behavioral technician
- **Erin Stehle Wallace** (*she/her*)
 - Assistant Professor at Longwood University
 - Currently on maternity leave ☺

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2

Learning objectives

Participants will:

1. Identify the underlying tenets of behaviorism, differentiating between supportive and harmful applications
2. Implement appropriate behavior management techniques in their clinical practice
3. Collaborate with other educators and service providers to implement a consistent behavior management system

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3

What's the deal with Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)?

4

What is ABA?

- Not a specific intervention or strategy, but the **broad discipline** of using behavioral principles to provide treatment
- Involves the study and modification of **observable actions** (i.e., behaviors) and **environmental contingencies**



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5

What is ABA?

- Used mostly with children with "challenging behaviors," most often **autistic children**¹
- **Setting:** Often home-based, sometimes in schools or clinics
- **Common titles:** BCBA, RBT, BHT, BC



¹While preferences for "identity-first language" vs. "person-first language" vary from person to person, numerous surveys of the autistic community demonstrate a preference for identity-first language, e.g., "autistic children" (See Tabors, Dore, & Zimmerman, 2022: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1362361322113085>)

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6

ABA controversy

1. ABA is generally viewed extremely unfavorably by autistic people (e.g., Anderson, 2022: <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221118216>)

- Autistic adults report trauma from ABA
- Do not believe they should be made to behave like their peers
- Negative long-term consequences may outweigh benefits
- Perceived as unethical

Lauren C. [redacted] · Apr 5
ABA is Abuse. #ActuallyAutistic

Liv Grey [redacted] · Apr 3
Please please please don't subject your #ActuallyAutistic children to ABA
IT IS ABUSE.

Just Craig. [redacted] · Mar 30
If you support ABA, you can GTFO.
That is all.
#ActuallyAutistic #AutismAcceptanceWeek

[redacted] · Apr 5
Unfriendly reminder that ABA is abusive and coerces #ActuallyAutistic children into participating in "learning" trials that will "increase their socially appropriate behaviors"
I am 100% willing to not on this fall.

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7

ABA controversy

2. There are frequent clashes between SLP and ABA, on a broad scale but also an individual level (e.g., Volkers, 2020: <https://leader.pubs.asha.org/doi/10.1044/leader.FTR2.25102020.52>)

- Different understanding of child development, especially language: Skinnerian vs. cognitive/psycholinguistic approaches
- Concerns about scope of practice, encroachment, reimbursement
- Concerns about children's agency and ethics
- Conflicting treatment goals, interventions, and strategies

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Primary objections

1. The methods of ABA

- Electroshock and other aversive stimuli
- Withholding, withdrawal, and deprivation
- Violations of bodily autonomy

2. The objectives of ABA


- Neuroconformity
- Prioritizing neurotypical comfort
- Forced compliance and masking

Image: <https://www.change.org/p/massachusetts-department-of-developmental-services-shut-down-the-judge-rotenberg-educational-center-immediately>



9

[illegible]

Principle 1: 
“F-B-A...
It’s easy as A-B-C”

Antecedent
↓
Behavior
↓
Consequence


[illegible][illegible]

Image: <https://www.sampleforms.com/functional-behavior-assessment-form.html>

Example #1 (general)

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Generally doesn't understand course material	Child is disruptive in classroom setting. Frequently makes loud jokes mocking the lesson, the teacher, or classmates.	Teacher sends student to the assistant principal's office
Teacher asked students to turn in homework, but student had not completed homework		Assistant principal checks in on the student, they talk, student is sent back to class with a lollipop

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13

Example #1

- Frequency, duration, intensity?
- Function of behavior?
- Effect of reinforcement?
- Possible interventions?

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14

Example #2 (incident)

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Stacking blocks with father	Requested cookie	Told "no"
Told "no"	Knocked over tower of blocks	Empathetic verbal response, offered a fruit as alternative
Offered fruit	Tried to hit father	Father restrained arms
Restraint	Screamed, tried to bite father	Father set child in time-out in a safe, quiet space
Time-out	Reduced aggressive behaviors	Father ended time-out after 2 minutes, offered reassurance, and walked child to kitchen to find an acceptable snack

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15

Example #2

- Frequency, duration, intensity?
- Function of behavior?
- Effect of reinforcement?
- Possible interventions?

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16

Example #3 (specific bx)

Target bx: "Shutting down"

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Lecture in Geometry class	8:39 (24 mins into class) – Put head on desk	Initially ignored 8:43 – told to sit up and pay attention. Complied.
Finished lecture, teacher assigned classwork	8:55 (5 mins into assignment) – rested his head in hands, closed eyes	8:57 – teacher knocked on his desk, reminded him assignment would be graded. Returned to work.
Went to English class, teacher broke students into small groups for work	n/a (9:15 – 10:00)	

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17

Example #3

- Frequency, duration, intensity?
- Function of behavior?
- Effect of reinforcement?
- Possible interventions?

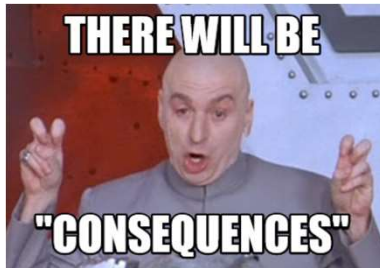
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18

Principle 2

- Consider different types of consequences, and the effects of each!
- Terminology:
 - Positive** = Adding or providing something
 - Negative** = Removing something
 - Reward** = Something that makes behavior **more likely** to repeat
 - Punishment** = Something that makes behavior **less likely** to repeat



19

Table of consequences

	Positive	Negative
Reward	Providing something that makes behavior more likely to repeat Ex: Giving candy (or verbal praise) to people answering questions	Reinforcing a behavior by removing something unpleasant or unwanted Ex: "No homework if you behave the rest of the class period"
Punishment	Adding/providing something that makes behavior less likely to repeat Ex: Spanking, assigning a letter of apology	Discouraging a behavior by removing something desirable Ex: Taking away recess, cell phone privileges, etc.

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20

Applications for SLPs

21

Next steps:
Putting it all together

1. Is this behavior appropriate for intervention? *Use a neurodiversity-affirming perspective.*
2. Use FBA to determine the function of behavior, as well as antecedents and consequences
3. Intervention: Functional replacement? Antecedent intervention? Varied consequences?



22

Step 1: Select a target bx

- Meaningful and important; improves child's QOL
- Easier to target high-frequency behaviors
- No need to address everything at once; 1-2 behaviors at a time, incremental progress is okay

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23

Step 1: Select a target bx

Neurodiversity-affirming targets	Controversial, problematic targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional regulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced self-harm • Reduced aggression • Versatile, functional communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multimodal • Multipurpose • Advocating for self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained eye contact • Reduced stimming • Reduced echolalia • Oralism • Tolerating unpleasant stimuli

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24

Step 2: FBA

- Functions:
 - Request/obtain? Escape/avoid? Stimming?
- Antecedents:
 - Environmental stimuli (light, sound)
 - Social factors (social context, social demands)
 - Intrapersonal factors (hunger, fatigue, stress, demands of masking)
- Consequences:
 - Which consequences are currently employed?
 - Which consequences does this child respond to?
 - Do these consequences respect the child's humanity and autonomy?

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25

Step 3: Intervention

- Consider both **antecedent interventions** and **consequential interventions**!
- Antecedent intervention: Target the antecedent in order to prevent the challenging behavior
- Consequential intervention: Alter the consequences to reduce the frequency/duration/intensity of the challenging behavior

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26

Step 3a: Antecedent interventions

- Adult-implemented environmental accommodations
 - Control unwanted sensory input directly (e.g., dimmed lights) or indirectly (e.g., ear protection)
- Adult-implemented social/academic supports
 - Explicitly state the rules and expectations for group projects, "play-dates," unstructured recess time, etc.
- Direct instruction for self-advocacy
 - Ensure that the child has the skills and the opportunity to signal that they are overwhelmed, or can request their sensory needs

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27

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Step 3a: Antecedent interventions

Example:
Visual Activity Schedules
https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_LSHSS-20-00073

VAS type	When to use	Example activities	Sample VAS
Across activity	Group activities change each session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm up Skill instruction Practical activity and feedback Group game play Wrap up 	
Within activity	Single task includes multiple components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board games Card games Art activity Creating social media post Completing multistep social interaction 	
Identifying OTIs	Student has low engagement or participation in variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board games Card games Art activity Forms show the number of responses a student has to display to meet expectations Materials choice Partner choice Activity order choice 	
Incorporating choice	Students display challenging behavior frequently or try to regulate changes to activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting multiple students at job site with different tasks Everyone needs to practice social turn-taking, but other tasks will change to target different goals Supporting students in inclusive elective technology courses 	
Required tasks list	Typically, with older students who are completing varied tasks OR students have to complete some, not all tasks during therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting multiple students at job site with different tasks Everyone needs to practice social turn-taking, but other tasks will change to target different goals Supporting students in inclusive elective technology courses 	

Note: VAS = visual activity schedule; OTIs = opportunities to respond.
*Images created using Boardmaker software.

28

Step 3b: Consequential interventions

- Plan A: Reinforce a preferred alternative behavior
 - Ex: If a child engages in aggressive or self-harm behavior when overwhelmed, praise/reward them when they use a stress ball or disengage to "cool down"
- Plan B: Employ teaching or regulatory strategies embedded within punishment
 - Ex: Time-out is more than just withdrawing preferred activities, it may also be a quiet, safe space to re-regulate
- Avoid: Corporal punishment, withdrawal of essentials
 - "Essentials" may include sensory needs, AAC, food/drink

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29

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Step 3b: Consequential interventions

Example:
Behavior-specific praise
https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_LSHSS-20-00073

	BSP nonexamples	BSP examples
Behavioral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Good job." "Awesome!" "Keep it up!" "Nicely done." "Good paper, you got an A!" "You did well." "I liked your project." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Good job keeping your hands to yourself!" "I appreciate how much effort you're putting into this assignment." "Alexandra, thank you for firing up so quickly!" "You did a great job of providing examples to support this section." "I like the way you transitioned between paragraphs." "You've really improved your vocabulary. I can tell you're using more words in your writing."

Note: BSP = behavior-specific praise.

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30

Collaboration

31

Collaboration

- **Collaboration** = Two or more **co-equal** parties, **voluntarily** engaged in **shared decision-making** as they work towards a **common goal** (Friend & Cook, 2000)
- Collaborate with parents/educators to align behavior management policies, collaborate with behavior analysts
- Benefits:
 - Improved child outcomes
 - Improved generalization
 - Complementary skillsets
 - Interprofessional education



Wallace et al., 2022:
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0040059921990690>

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32

Barriers

What are the barriers to collaboration that you encounter?

- Lack of time
- Limited communication
- Inequality, professional hierarchies
- Professional boundaries
- Differences in knowledge, training
- Setting/location
- Lack of interdisciplinary culture



<https://tinyurl.com/57mzwdkt>

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33

Two-way collaboration

- SLPs can learn:
 - Which strategies and interventions are currently in place?
 - Which strategies and interventions are successful?
 - Antecedents: How do we avoid challenging behaviors?
 - Consequences: Which motivators and reinforcements have been effective?
- SLPs can teach:
 - Connection between behaviors and communication
 - Effective ways to minimize behavioral problems via empowered communication
 - Neurodiversity-affirming concepts and strategies
 - ...Everything we've discussed today

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34

Collab w/parents, educators

- They are generally the experts on the child
- You are the expert on communication, maybe even behavior
- Generally most effective to reinforce behavior management systems already in place
- **But**, you may have to advocate for the child!

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35

Collab w/ behavior therapists

- Again, you may have to advocate for the child!
- May have to work through fundamentally different perspectives
 - Oralism vs. multimodality
 - Language as a behavior?
 - "SNUG" communication: Spontaneous, Novel, Unique, Generative
 - Neurodiversity-affirming vs. neuroconformative behaviors
- If necessary, compromise is preferable to conflict (or conflicting services)
- Find and emphasize common ground

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36

Collab w/ behavior therapists



Lane & Brown, 2023: <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322221144652>



37

Discussion, Q&A

38

Thank you!

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39
