

# Intro to ABA and the Ins and Outs of the Current Landscape of ABA

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# Objectives

1. Brief introduction to ABA
2. Current State of Practice of ABA

# What is ABA?

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- > **Applied Behavior Analysis is an intervention that utilizes different evidence-based teaching strategies to teach positive, prosocial behavior, and decrease challenging behavior and behaviors of concern**
- > **Focus of behaviors of social importance that are meaningful to the client and family for individuals across the life span.**
  - **What skills and behaviors are needed to increase quality of life?**
- > **Intervention that uses scientific methods and approach to demonstrate reliable relations between behavior and implementation intervention**
  - **Objective description**
  - **Measurement**
  - **Experimentation**

# **Why ABA vs other treatments and intervention?**

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- > ABA is the most effective treatment currently available for autism**
  - Evidence-based**
  - Robust literature base demonstrating the effects of ABA on skill acquisition, decreases in challenging behavior, increases in behaviors we want to see happen more.**
  - Also effective for intellectual and developmental disabilities**
- > The best time to start intervention is the time you start intervention**

## **Who provides ABA?**

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- > ABA is provided by Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) and Registered Behavior Technicians.**
- > BCBAs are registered as Licensed Behavior Analysts in WA state and are under the Department of Health.**

## Examples of ABA programming

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- > **ABA programming is designed to meet the needs of each individual learner. Not a curriculum!**
- > **For some learners, it may look like:**
  - **Teaching play skills to a young learner**
  - **Teaching appropriate ways to communicate frustration and engage in meaningful coping strategies**
  - **Teaching social skills**
  - **Teaching self-management strategies**
  - **Teaching skills needed for job tasks**
  - **Teaching daily living skills**
  - **Teaching alternative replacement behaviors for challenging behavior**

## What does it look like?

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- > **It should be fun!**
  - For the most part... when we work on hard things that may result in behavior as we are working to teach and new skills!
- > **Should include client/family input**
- > **Should have ecological validity (should fit into the context of each individual setting/home)**
- > **Should have social validity (consumers should like it!)**
- > **Should have cultural validity**



## **How much ABA is the right amount?**

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- > Dependent upon the needs of the individual with ASD and their family.**
- > This is identified by ABA team through assessment and evaluation.**
- > Different for each child and each family**
- > Number of hours should consider other important activities in a learner's day.**
  
- > If you have met a child with ASD, you have met one child with ASD.**

## **ABA in Washington State**

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- > Issues of access**
- > Lack of providers that address challenging behavior**
- > Training for Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs) is often not enough to effectively support the range of challenging behaviors that occur**
- > ABA has developed as a business**
  - ...And all that comes with that!**

## **What to do when ABA is not available**

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- > We know that the core components of high-quality, effective intervention are the following:**
  - Extended, intensive instruction**
  - Coordination and collaboration across services**
  - Technical and social support for families**
  - Access to inclusive settings**
  - Quality of life influenced goals and curriculum**

# Unintended Outcomes of ABA

An emerging opinion about ABA from its consumers and the autistic community is that it has caused trauma in autistic people who have experienced it. We acknowledge that treatment using ABA has caused trauma and those who have had these experiences should be listened to carefully. ABA done well can be a life-changing support, however, there have been and continue to be examples of implementation of ABA that has resulted in trauma. We encourage those who have experienced trauma to share their stories so the community can listen, validate, and adjust.

# History of ABA

- Seminal article published in 1968 by Baer, Wolf, Risley
- Used to teach valued skills across multiple areas of focus (addiction, wearing glasses, taking medication)
- Ivar Lovaas published a study in 1987 demonstrating the effects of early intervention for young children with autism. This changed early intervention and demonstrated students were learning, gaining new skills.
- We have learned a lot since then. As we should! All sciences evolve.

# Learnings

- Value of diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Being "indistinguishable" from your peers is not an appropriate outcome measure (Lovaas, 1987)
- Appropriate outcomes measures are individual to the individual and family
- Interventions and outcomes must be sustainable, acceptable, and culturally responsive
- Our goals were, and continue to be, to increase quality of life for each individual and their family
- Reform of ABA

# Current Practice of ABA

- State-of-the-art intervention today does not look like it did in 1987
- Current practices incorporate issues of compassion, self-determination, diversity, inclusion, social justice
- Increased work in trauma-informed practices
- Although there are still examples of flawed behavioral practices being used in many communities, when implemented with fidelity and by properly trained staff, ABA continues to be the most effective treatment modality for people with ASD

# Questions

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**THANK YOU!**

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