



# ABA AND THE AUTISM COMMUNITY

By Taylor Robb

# THE COMMUNITY

- Three distinct parts:
  - Self-advocates.
  - Parents, Family members and loved ones.
  - Behavioral Health practitioners/healthcare providers.
- Relations to each other.
  - Defined by shared experience with Autism and goals related to it.

# ABA IN MODERN ERA AND DISTRUST

- Began around 1930's with Skinner's work. Common Practice starts in early 2000's.
- Prior to Common practice, many wide ranging and experimental approaches taken.
  - Not reflective of current practice.
- Wide disinformation on Internet and available access to studies main cause of discourse surrounding points of view concerning ABA.
- BACB's role.
- Global issue, not US Isolated.

# GROUPS DRIVING DISSENT

- Three different groups:
  - Self-Advocates that previously experienced treatment before Common Practice. (Witnesses)
  - Advocates who received non-firsthand information related to ABA. Family members and friends of community make up the bulk of this group. (Guardians).
  - Advocates who view ABA as “torture” and “distorting of identity.” (Crusaders)

# WITNESSES

- Individuals who received treatment before Common Practice.
- Could have been subjected to malpractice and developed trauma as a result.
- Is informed by first hand experience of what treatment use to be.
- Is not well informed about current practices and has not sought out information regarding it.
- Will be most reluctant to engage voluntarily.

# GUARDIANS

- Individuals who have not received first hand experience regarding ABA, but second, third, fourth hand knowledge of someone else's.
- Makes up bulk of the movement.
- Obtained their information mostly through online resources.
- Will be the first to engage and will demand the most change to practice or regulation regarding ABA.
- May be informed about current practice and, if so, may still not agree with it for variety of reasons.

# CRUSADERS

- Most vocal, passionate and uncompromising group.
- Made up almost entirely of self-advocates. Ex: ASAN.
- Has mixture of experience regarding ABA.
- Both sustains and feeds off other two groups.
- Potentially driving force behind movement.
- Does not care if their information reflects current practice or not.
- Dogmatic.

# BRIDGING THE GAP

- 1. Listen to what they have to say. Empathize with their perspective. “I hear what you are saying. I’m sorry that was your experience.”
  - Validate their stance to get them to open up.
- 2. Ask them where they got their information from or where they heard about it, if not first hand experience.
  - Puts them on the spot to back up and justify their positions.
- 3. Let them be emotional, but don’t let that dictate the discussion.
- 4. Provide them information or opportunities to learn about current practice.
  - Dispels myths.
- 5. Establish contacts with them to create further dialogue.

# DEALING WITH CRUSADERS

- Ultimately cannot be reasoned with.
- Will not entertain notions of change or that treatment will better an individual's life.
- Will try to stoke divisions and create rifts in any steps towards reconciliation.
  - Will demand to be involved in process to achieve this goal.
- Cannot be ignored. Only pushed back against through informing public of ABA practices and benefits.
  - Transparency helps with this as well.

# BEST WAY FORWARD

- Communication and Listening.
- Understanding perspectives and empathizing with each other.
- Sharing information and refuting disinformation.
- Change the nature of the movement.
- Gradually eliminating the extreme elements in the movement through trust and partnership.
- Create a common goal and understanding for people with Autism.