

Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)

Behavior analysis is a natural science of behavior that was originally described by B.F. Skinner in the 1930's. The principles and methods of behavior analysis have been applied effectively in many arenas. For example, methods that use the principle of positive reinforcement to strengthen a behavior by arranging for it to be followed by something of value have been used to develop a wide range of skills in learners with and without disabilities.

Since the early 1960's, hundreds of behavior analysts have used positive reinforcement and other principles to build communication, play, social, academic, self-care, work, and community living skills and to reduce problem behaviors in learners with autism of all ages. Some ABA techniques involve instruction that is directed by adults in highly structured fashion, while others make use of the learner's natural interests and follow his or her initiations. Still others teach skills in the context of ongoing activities. All skills are broken down into small steps or components, and learners are provided many repeated opportunities to learn and practice skills in a variety of settings, with abundant positive reinforcement. The goals of intervention as well as the specific types of instructions and reinforcers used are customized to the strengths and needs of the individual learner. Performance is measured continuously by direct observation, and intervention is modified if the data show that the learner is not making satisfactory progress.

Regardless of the age of the learner with autism, the goal of ABA intervention is to enable him or her to function as independently and successfully as possible in a variety of environments.