



Autism Collaborative Centers of Excellence (ACCE) Standards

Evidence-based best practice guidelines to elevate the quality and consistency of services for individuals with autism spectrum disorder and their families in Northeastern and Northcentral Pennsylvania

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Based Behavioral Interventions in Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a relatively common developmental disability affecting 1 in every 59 children in the US. ASD is a behaviorally-defined condition with many known and unknown causes. The following are guidelines are suggested as best practices in behavioral interventions for ASD.

- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a discipline devoted to the understanding and change of human behavior. It is a scientific problem-solving approach with a goal to produce socially significant behavior changes to improve the quality of life for children and adults. ABA is not just for individuals with ASD.
- ABA is distinguished by its focus, goals and methodology. It uses direct observation, data collection and functional analysis to assess environmental conditions that contribute to problem behaviors and skill deficits. The assessment information is used to modify social and learning environments to promote positive behaviors. Professionals who are specifically trained and certified to implement ABA are called Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) and are certified by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB). BCBAs receive specific education, training, supervision in ABA and must achieve a passing score on a competency examination to receive their certification. While BCBAs are certified in the use of ABA, psychologists, behavior specialists, teacher, counselors and others often utilize interventions based on the science of ABA as well.
- ABA is not just one specific program or method but rather a set of scientific principles upon which a number of behavior change tactics and skills acquisition programs are developed. Some of the specific methods include Natural Environment Training (NET), Discrete Trial Training (DTT), Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Token Economy Systems. ABA interventions for individuals with ASD often employ antecedent strategies based on assessment and object measurement of the targeted behavior of concern which can range from functional communication, social skills and play skills to reduction of self-injurious behaviors and physical aggression.
- FBA is a systematic information gathering method that is conducted to develop a hypothesis of the function or purpose of a challenging behavior and the maintaining consequence(s). A psychologist or board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA) usually leads the multidisciplinary team that should include caregivers. Identification of medical concerns, history of behavior and treatment, possible triggers, reinforcers and consequences that will not maintain the challenging behavior(s) are essential pieces of information as part of the FBA process.
- Outcomes of an FBA include guidelines for the design of positive behavior support plans (BSPs) which include proactive strategies / antecedent strategies to prevent challenging behaviors. Behavior intervention plans (BIPs) focus on addressing or responding to challenging behaviors and increasing appropriate replacement behaviors.
- A common finding among the systematic reviews from the National Standards Project, Phase 2 (ref) was that interventions based on principles of ABA have a track record of effectiveness

when incorporated in well-designed programs for individuals with ASD. A few of the basic elements often used in both Comprehensive Treatment Models (CTMs) and Focus intervention practices include: modeling, visual supports, prompting, task analysis and discrete trial training.

- The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) recommends that ABA interventions must be customized to the strengths, needs, preferences and environmental circumstances of individuals and their caregivers. Intervention plans need frequent data analysis and accommodation to changes that occur over time. The intervention plan should have an emphasis on caregiver training, with well supervised personnel preferably led by a highly trained staff with experience with individuals with ASD.