



Applied Behaviour Analysis

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is a broad term, referring to evidence based therapy that focuses on behavior modification in children with behavioral concerns. ABA therapy is the predominant treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), and manifests in different forms (e.g., pivotal response treatment, picture exchange communication). ABA methods are also appropriate for individuals who do not have an ASD diagnosis, and alternatively have behavioral/conduct concerns.



Why ABA?

ABA techniques offer a multifaceted approach, which improves functionality across many domains in a child's life. Individual treatment plans based on ABA methods can assist children in developing appropriate and positive ways to interact with others (e.g., how to identify emotion in others), improvement of academic skills, and develop appropriate behavioural responses (e.g., instead of screaming, children are encouraged to use their words or pictures to indicate what they want). ABA based therapy is particularly ideal for children, as the development of their skill repertoire is applied across all settings (home, school and public). This ensures that the child is consistently generalising their skills across these settings (e.g., child understands that at home AND school their screaming will not result in what their desired outcome is). Importantly, ABA methods are supported extensively by empirical research, which makes them evidence based therapeutic approaches.

Principles of ABA

ABA theories hold that behaviours either being taught or observed can be broken up into three components; Antecedent (what happens before the behaviour occurs), Behaviour (the actual response) and Consequence (what happens after the behaviour occurs). Following this theory, ABA therapy is

derived from operant conditioning, which is based on presenting a child with a stimulus (e.g., request) and providing a consequence for the child's response (reinforcement/punishment). Please note, punishment does not refer to any form of verbal/physical abuse. The reinforcement is anything that when presented, will increase the likelihood of the target behavior occurring again (motivating the child to respond). Alternatively, the punishment is aimed at reducing the likelihood of a consequence from occurring (disapproving of the response). Prior to commencing therapy, it is required that potential reinforcers and punishments are identified, as these are the key to shaping the child's behaviour appropriately.

For example:

Positive Reinforcement

Child is asked to say "please", prior to giving them an ice cream

Child says "please"

Child is given the ice cream

Punishment

Child is asked to say "please", prior to giving them an ice cream

Child tantrums for ice cream

Child is not given the ice cream, until they are quiet and say "please".



Who can benefit from ABA?

ABA therapeutic approaches are widely used with children who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is particularly useful for children with ASD, as children at any level of functioning are able to be catered for. Treatment is often individualised and developed based on functional assessments and family observations of the child's behaviour. However, ABA methods are also applicable to children who do not have ASD. For instance, children whom have behavioural and emotional regulation difficulties may benefit from therapy based on ABA theory (subject to assessment).