

Autism and ABA Intervention Strategies

By Stacey Ratner

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) has received a great deal of attention because of the growing number of children with autism. Many argue that ABA is the instruction of choice for children with autism, when it's applied in a particular way, for a specific number of hours. ABA, based upon the principles of learning theory, is designed to improve socially significant behaviors and reduce problematic ones. It's a systematic process of observing and recording an individual's behavior, and using the information collected to shape instruction and devise more effective intervention strategies. Children will increasingly engage in behavior that's reinforced, while behavior that isn't reinforced is likely over time to occur less frequently or end all together.

Reducing problematic behaviors requires careful assessment to determine the function of the behavior and what may be reinforcing those behaviors. Based on the functional assessment of the behavior an intervention plan can be developed.

Upon completion of a needs assessment the instructor can determine what the child knows and what he needs to learn. Next, the instructor develops a meaningful individualized curriculum plan that details how to teach the skill and record results. Data is collected and analyzed to assess progress, to see if the methodology is appropriate and when to move on to more complex skills.

ABA has many teaching techniques, including Discrete Trial Instruction, verbal behavior, incidental teaching and natural environment teaching to name a few. It's important that the instructor utilizing ABA understand the many techniques and apply them appropriately.

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Skill Building

Sessions should be fun for the child. In addition the child must have an opportunity to practice the skills being taught and generalize them in a variety of settings. Although instruction may initially start in a one-on-one highly structured approach, the goal is to have the child learn in a less intense structured manner and more natural way. Most importantly, parents, teachers and therapists need to work together as a team. When everyone works together the child will benefit the most.

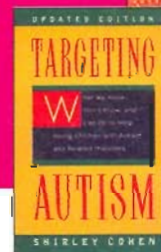
— Ratner



Children with Autism: A Parents' Guide Second Edition by Michael D. Powers (Woodbine House, \$17.95)

Right from the Start: Behavioral Intervention for Young Children with Autism by Sandra L. Harris and Mary Jane Weiss (Woodbine House, \$16.95)

Targeting Autism: What We Know, Don't Know, and Can Do to Help Young Children With Autism and Related Disorders by Shirley Cohen (University Press, \$17)



RESOURCES