

What is applied behavior analysis?

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is the application of the science of behavior analysis to socially significant problems and concerns. Over the past several decades, ABA interventions have been used to help children and adults struggling with developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, and mental health concerns in many different settings including homes, schools, offices, and other community and residential settings.

ABA interventions have been found to be effective for increasing important skills such as communication, problem solving, and making and keeping friends as well as for reducing problem behavior such as tantrums and aggression.

Many applied behavior analysts work with individuals with autism spectrum disorder. In fact, behavior analytic interventions are the only treatment approach with a significant body of empirical support documenting its effectiveness (*National Standards Project, Phase 2, 2015*).

We use the principles of ABA to support people with autism and their families to:

- learn to communicate with and interact with others
- develop self-control and self-management skills
- learn skills of daily living such as dressing and using the bathroom
- learn to play independently and with others
- increase academic skills such as reading and math
- decrease challenging behavior such as self-injury or aggression
- develop job-related skills
- build independence

Is ABA safe?

Tested by research and experience for more than 40 years, ABA practices have been endorsed by the Surgeon General, the National Institutes of Health, and the Association for Science in Autism Research. ABA should be practiced by an individual with expertise in behavior analysis.

At what age can my child benefit from the ABA approach?

Children can benefit from ABA interventions at any age. We implement ABA within a developmental framework such that the ways we teach and the skills we teach are developmentally

appropriate. For example, a behavior analyst working with a three-year-old might embed instruction in play whereas a behavior analyst working with a teenager might teach within a group format or during an academic routine. Adults can also benefit from ABA. At May Institute, we use ABA with the individuals we support across the lifespan. For example, ABA might be used to teach an adult with autism how to perform job-related tasks such as serving coffee in a restaurant, restocking shelves, etc. We also would use ABA to teach adults daily living skills such as cooking, cleaning, and hygiene.

In what environments are ABA techniques used?

ABA techniques work across all environments—home, center, school, and places of employment. Home-based services can require a significant commitment of time and energy from parents and other caregivers. Some of the advantages of working in the home are the early identification of problems, the ability to incorporate elements that are relevant to the child into practice, and the opportunity to include those people who are closest to the child as teachers. At May

Institute, in-home therapists can work directly with a child to teach the child skills and/or assist parents as they learn how to help their child acquire appropriate communication skills and functional living techniques.

Center-based programs are attended by children and often parents as well. Children attend center-based programs on a regular schedule. Many of these programs include groups of children. These programs are ideal for teaching children how to interact with peers. Center-based programs can be used to teach all aspects of communication and interaction such as expressing basic wants and needs, turn-taking, initiating and joining a conversation, and playing games.

In schools, ABA techniques are used to teach academic skills such as reading, teach communication and social interaction skills, and address problem behavior. May Institute professionals work with hundreds of schools across the country to provide services using ABA techniques to help individual students, teachers, and entire classrooms. May Institute also employs ABA methodology in its four private schools that serve children and adolescents with ASD and other developmental disabilities, and its school for children and adolescents with brain injury and neurobehavioral disorders.

In places of employment, ABA techniques are used to provide supports such as on-the-job coaching and job training.

How can I identify a qualified ABA professional?

Professionals utilizing ABA techniques should have solid practical experience in the field and meet high educational and professional standards. A Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) is a person who has obtained a graduate

degree in a program that included an approved course sequence in behavior analysis, has obtained approved supervised behavior analytic experiences, and has passed a certification examination in behavior analysis. BCBAs can practice behavior analysis independently and can supervise the work of individuals who implement behavior analytic services.

The entry-level degree to be certified as a BCBA is a Master's degree. Many behavior analysts receive doctoral-level training in Clinical Psychology, School Psychology, or in Behavior Analysis specifically. Clinical and school psychologists may be licensed to practice psychology and choose to not obtain the behavior analysis credential. If you are considering seeking services from such an individual, it will be important to ensure that he or she has training in behavior analysis and has received supervised experience working with people with autism using behavior analytic technology.

May Institute employs some of the most highly trained and experienced ABA professionals in the country. Our nationally recognized ABA experts teach at universities, publish regularly in professional journals, conduct grant-funded research, and make presentations at national and international conferences.

Is ABA right for my child?

A child with autism may benefit from ABA to teach or enhance communication, social skills, and social interaction, to increase independence, and to acquire other important skills. A child who exhibits problem behavior may benefit by learning other, better ways to behave instead of engaging in problem behavior.

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May Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides educational, rehabilitative, and behavioral healthcare services to individuals with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities, brain injury, and neurobehavioral disorders. Since its founding more than 60 years ago, May Institute has evolved into an award-winning national network that serves thousands of individuals and their families every year at nearly 140 service locations across the country. The Institute operates several schools for children and adolescents with ASD and other developmental disabilities. They are located in Randolph, West Springfield, and Woburn, Massachusetts; and Santa Cruz, California. It also operates a specialized school for children and adolescents with brain injury and neurobehavioral disorders; it is located in Brockton, Mass.

For more information, contact May Institute at 800.778.7601 or info@mayinstitute.org.