

# aba

## applied behavior analysis

### **What is applied behavior analysis?**

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) methodology involves the application of basic behavioral practices (positive reinforcement, repetition, and prompting) to facilitate the development of language, positive skills, and social behavior as well as to help reduce everyday social problems and serious behavior disorders.

Data collected and analyzed at May Institute support the findings of hundreds of other studies that indicate ABA is the most effective method to teach children and adolescents with autism, pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), and other developmental disabilities, as well as brain injury and other traumas.

### **Is it safe?**

Tested by research and experience for more than 35 years, ABA practices have been endorsed by the Surgeon General, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Association for Science in Autism Research. The skills and experience of an ABA professional are essential for success. Continuous and systematic evaluation of effectiveness is a fundamental component of the ABA methodology.

### **What type of problems can ABA address?**

ABA can be used to teach a variety of skills and positive behaviors, including functional living skills, language, reading, social skills, positive peer support, academic engagement, and more. ABA methodology is also effective in decreasing inappropriate behaviors such as noncompliance, tantrums, bed-wetting, feeding problems, aggression, and self-injury.

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

ABA can be effective in working with individuals of all ages. However, research shows that skill development programs that are provided at a young age foster better outcomes and can often reduce the likelihood of more severe or dangerous behaviors later in life.

### **What is an example of ABA?**

Professionals at May Institute used ABA to successfully teach a 4-year-old boy with PDD to share toys with other children. Before intervention, Andy tended to play by himself and hoard his toys. When a peer or adult would ask him to share, he would vigorously refuse. This behavior left him very much isolated.

Using ABA techniques, clinical staff and teachers at this May Center for Child Development helped Andy learn to share and be more agreeable to giving up a toy when asked. At the start of play opportunities, teachers practiced sharing with Andy, gently guiding him to share and praising him

each time he did so. Later, when he was with his peers, teachers periodically prompted sharing. As Andy began sharing more, they faded the intervention. The teachers also measured sharing among 4-year-olds without PDD in Andy's class. They found that, before intervention, Andy shared far less than his peers. After intervention, however, Andy shared as often and sometimes more often than the other children. In this case, ABA was used to teach an essential social skill that was otherwise undeveloped as a consequence of PDD.

## In what environments are ABA techniques used?

ABA techniques work across all environments — work, home, and school.

Home-based services 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 assist parents as they learn how to help their child acquire appropriate communication skills and functional living techniques.

Likewise, children in school benefit from being in a familiar setting and doing activities that are relevant to them. 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 five private schools that serve children and adolescents with autism, PDD, and other developmental disabilities. One May Center has a split-model preschool program that provides services in school in the morning and at home in the afternoon, reinforcing the importance of repetition, consistency, and positive reinforcement in the ABA approach. The May also uses ABA techniques in its school for children and adolescents with brain injury.

## How can I identify a qualified ABA professional and what should I expect?

Professionals utilizing ABA techniques should have solid practical experience in the field and meet high educational and professional standards — ideally a Ph.D. or Psy.D., licensure, and board certification by either the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) or the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP). May Institute employs some of the most highly trained and experienced ABA professionals. Our nationally recognized ABA experts teach at top universities, publish regularly in professional journals, and make presentations at national conferences.

Before utilizing ABA practices, qualified professionals should evaluate a child with behavioral problems to identify his or her specific needs for intervention and support. They will observe a child in several situations to determine where and why the problem behavior occurs. Once an evaluation is complete, a recommendation can be made regarding the type of program and setting that is best for the child and the family.

## Is ABA right for my child?

Parents who feel their child might be helped by ABA-based procedures should take several things into consideration: the time and resources of the family, the severity of the behaviors, and the help available in the community.



*May Institute is a nonprofit organization that offers early intervention services, school and home-based consultation, parent information, and federally funded research and education programs. The Institute operates schools for children and adolescents with autism, PDD, and other developmental disabilities in Chatham, Randolph, West Springfield, and Woburn, Mass., Freeport, Maine, and Santa Cruz, Calif. Over the past 50 years, May Institute has evolved into an award-winning national network that serves over 25,000 individuals and their families at nearly 200 service locations in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, and on the West Coast.*

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