

The Basics of Applied Behavior Analysis



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What is Applied Behavior Analysis?

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) focuses on changing behavior in meaningful ways. This means changing behavior in ways that are important for an individual to be more successful in their environment and life. ABA strives to:

- Increase community and social opportunities
- Improve a person's independence
- Identify a ***target behavior*** in order to measure it and make sure interventions are working

What is behavior?

Any movement by humans or animals that is observable, objective, and measurable

We look at things that we can see happen

Although you may be able to tell if your child is “upset” or “angry” we want to focus on what “upset or “angry” **looks like** (ex: screaming, crying, etc.)

Although your child may engage in “tantrums” we want to know what exactly that looks like. For example, during your child’s tantrums, does your child hit and kick others, throws item, flop to the ground, cry, etc?

Is it a behavior, or not a behavior?

Examples of **behaviors**: walking, talking, waving, typing, tapping your foot, singing, brushing your teeth, playing soccer

- These are all examples of behaviors because they are movements that you can see happen and can measure

Examples of **non-behaviors**: being quiet, not eating food, not paying attention, defiance, angry, upset

- These are examples of non-behaviors, or things that would NOT be considered to be behaviors because they are things that you cannot see or cannot measure

Why do we measure behavior?

To see how often it occurs (frequency), how long it occurs for (duration), or when it occurs (time of day)

- We measure behavior to see if behavior changes when we put a treatment intervention in place

Example: When Jacob gets angry, he kicks a chair one time and slaps his leg four times.

- This example measures how often the behaviors occur (frequency - kicking chair one time and slapping leg four times)

Example: Nick tantrums (screams, cries, kicks legs) every morning for about 15 minutes each time

- This example measures when the behaviors occur (time of day - mornings) as well as how long the behaviors occur for (duration - 15 minutes)

WHY does behavior occur?

Behavior happens for a reason!

We want to know “why” a behavior occurs

The “why” is also called the function of a behavior

Challenging behavior is often a form of communication

If we know why the behavior happens (the function), we can teach the child a safer, more appropriate way to get their needs/wants met



Why do people do what they do?

To get something or someone

- Examples of behaviors to get something or someone:
 - “Can I have the ____?”
 - “Hey, can I talk to you for a second?”
 - Hitting peer that is playing with their favorite toy

To avoid something or get out of a situation

- Examples of behaviors to avoid something or get out of a situation:
 - “No thanks, I don’t really want to go.”
 - “Is it okay if I take a break for a little bit?”
 - Ripping up homework

3 functions of behavior - reasons “why” behavior occurs

1 | Attention



2 | Escape



3 | Tangible



Attention: engaging in a behavior to get attention from someone else



- Soothing: Roman is whining/crying when Mom is on the phone. Mom comes over to Roman and says, “What’s wrong? Tell mommy what’s wrong. It’s okay.”
- Reprimands: Jojo screams at the top of her lungs until mom tells her to “Stop all of that screaming! Don’t scream like that.” (Any kind of attention is better than no attention for some kids)
- Physical: Luca lays down on the floor and starts kicking and screaming when Dad is cooking dinner. Dad stops cooking and gives him a hug and a kiss and he stops whining.

Escape: engaging in a behavior to get out of something or avoid it

- Example: Rosetta starts to cry and stomp her feet when Dad says it's time to go to school. Dad says she doesn't have to go.
- Example: Mom tells Xavier to clean up his toys. He starts to throw them and Mom says, "fine, I'll clean them up."
- Example: Dad and Alex are in the store and Alex asks for candy. Dad says no and Alex starts screaming. Everyone else in the store stares at Dad. Dad buys candy for Alex and Alex stops screaming.

Tangible: engaging in a behavior to get access to toys, food, or activities

- Example: Anthony begins to cry when his brother takes his iPad. Mom gives the iPad back to him and Anthony stops crying.
- Example: Jerome screams and hits Dad when they say no to buying a new stuffed animal from Walmart. Dad buys the toy.

