

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): What It Is and What To Expect

What is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)?

Applied Behavior Analysis is a field of study that focuses on the application of the principles, methods, and procedures of the science of behavior, which are the result of years of research of human development and behavior. Applied Behavior Analysis studies the interactions between people and the environment to determine the effects the environment has on a person's behavior. In clinical practice, ABA is used to teach new skills (i.e., academic skills, academic skills, independent living skills, social skills, play skills, communication skills, etc.), improve performance in already acquired skills (i.e., faster task completion, more accurate responding, etc.), and decrease unwanted and challenging behaviors such as aggression, stereotypy, self-injurious behavior, noncompliance, and other socially inappropriate behaviors.



Intake Appointment (Session #1)

- At the intake appointment, a diagnostic interview will be conducted with the caregivers to obtain detailed information about the referral concerns and your child's developmental history, medical history, and family history. Direct observations of your child will occur during the intake appointment by either the intake psychologist or a behavior therapist. The information from the direct observations will aid in diagnosis and treatment decisions. At the end of the intake appointment, the psychologist will discuss clinical impressions regarding a diagnosis(es) and initial treatment recommendations/options based on the information available. The number of hours and therapy sessions your child will have is based on a variety of factors including the needs of the child, therapist availability, payment/insurance coverage, and the family/child's availability to attend therapy sessions. Ongoing treatment at Keystone will be provided by behavior therapists, behavior analysts, occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, and/or clinical psychologists. Factors influencing this decision include the nature of the referral concerns, therapist specialties, and scheduling availability. Multiple therapists will work with your child so that skills generalize across settings and people.

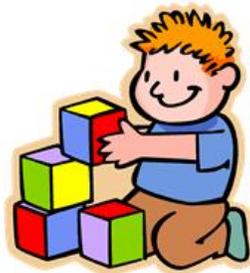
Skills Assessments: If problem behavior is not deemed to be the primary focus of initial treatment efforts, a skills assessment of the language, social, self-help, fine/gross motor and play skills currently in your child's repertoire will be completed. Depending on the frequency and duration of therapy, as well as the current skill level of your child, the total number of sessions necessary to complete the baseline assessment can vary. ***If problem behavior is likely to hinder progress during therapy sessions, the problem behavior will be assessed and treated prior to working on skill acquisition. Please refer to the What to Expect – Behavioral Treatment for more information about problem behavior treatment.

Treatment Phase (Duration of treatment varies from several months to years)

- **Development and Implementation of the Individual Treatment Plan (ITP):** The results of the skills assessment provide the necessary information to generate an individual treatment plan (ITP) for your child that will address the referral concerns. The therapist will discuss with you the proposed goals and assessment results. Each child has his/her own program book that contains his/her treatment plan, curriculum skills graphs, data sheets outlining the specific goals targeted

for each program in acquisition and other graphs for behavioral interventions of various kinds. Data will be collected and analyzed on an ongoing basis so that your child's progress can be monitored. As your child masters skills, the treatment plan will be updated to reflect your child's progress. In the event that progress is slower than expected, treatment plans can be updated to reflect revised teaching strategies and new goals.

- **Family Therapy:** Parent involvement in treatment is highly correlated with successful outcomes. The Lead Therapist will conduct the parent training component in which caregivers will be taught the basics of ABA including teaching new skills, preventing/managing problem behavior, and how to generalize and maintain skills acquired during ABA sessions. Progress updates will occur during family therapy, as well.
- **ABA Therapy Sessions:** Therapy typically occurs in the clinic but will also take place in home, school or community locations. Some sessions will also address problem behaviors and skills assessments. Acquisition skills are identified through a variety of skills assessments including the Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP), Assessment of Basic Learning and Language Skills – Revised (ABLLS-R) and Early Start Denver Model (ESDM). For school-aged children, the Sunshine State Standards and Brigance for are also used to help determine appropriate goals for academic skill acquisition. Problem behaviors can also be addressed during skill acquisition sessions on an as needed basis. A typical therapy session in the clinic consists of alternating between table teaching and Natural Environment Teaching (NET); however therapy sessions can vary from child to child based on their individual needs. Table teaching sessions and NET sessions are described in more detail below:
 - **Table teaching** sessions most often include: language/communication (i.e., receptively identifying items or pictures, labeling items, answering questions, etc.), matching items, sorting items, academic tasks (i.e., writing, math, reading), motor imitation, and attending skills.
 - **Natural Environment Teaching** sessions usually consist of incidental teaching and therapist contrived learning opportunities to work on many skills areas including social skills, language/communication skills, play skills, and independent living skills. Incidental teaching is a child-initiated teaching interaction. Many of the skills that are initially taught during a table session will also be targeted during NET sessions once they have been mastered, in order to ensure that mastered skills can be performed in a variety of environments and with a variety of people.



The Keystone Team is excited and honored that you have chosen us to assist with your quest to reach your child's highest potential!