

Beginning a Verbal Behavior Program

by
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1. What is ABA/VBA?

ABA is the science of Applied Behavior Analysis. It provides a structure for looking at human behaviors, what causes them and how to make them increase or decrease. It also provides a basic structure for teaching new skills (behaviors we want to increase!) The basic information you need to know regarding the teaching procedures include: shaping, prompting, fading, chaining and differential reinforcement. VERY simplistic explanations are provided below:

- a) **Shaping-** A process through which we gradually modify the child's existing behavior into what we want it to be. This is typically done by adjusting the requirements before reinforcement is given. For example, if a child is just learning to say words, he may just be asked to touch an item before receiving it. Later, we may require the beginning sound, a syllable and eventually the word.
- b) **Prompting-** Assistance given by the teacher to promote correct responding. One of the primary differences between most traditional ABA programs and the VB model is the use of "errorless learning" in the VB model and "no, no, prompt" procedures in traditional ABA models. Prompts range in intrusiveness from physical guidance, to demonstration, verbal cues, visual cues, pointing, and within stimulus prompts such as proximity. We should always try to use the least intrusive prompt that will cause the behavior to occur. For example, when initially teaching a child to "touch" a given object or picture, you may need to actually move his hand to the object at the beginning.
- c) **Fading-** This is a critical part of teaching children to NOT become dependent on prompts. Any prompts used are gradually removed as the child becomes successful until he can respond correctly with no prompts. To use the above example, if we wanted to teach a child to touch a ball we may start by physically moving his hand to the ball, and then provide less physical guidance by just touching his elbow, then pointing at the ball etc. until the child was able to successfully touch the ball when told to. (Most children would not require this many prompts to learn to "touch" an object)
- d) **Chaining-** Basically this means that skills are broken down into their smallest units and are taught in small units that are "chained" together. Forward or backward chaining are both techniques that are frequently used in teaching a new skill. An example of forward chaining may be to teach a child to say a sentence, one word at a time. (Say "I", Say "I love", say "I love you!") If we taught the same sentence using backward chaining we would teach it from the end first! (Say "You", say, "love you", Say, "I love you".)
- e) **Differential Reinforcement-** Reinforcement is perhaps the most important part of teaching! It involves providing a response to a child's behavior that will most likely increase that behavior. The term "differential" refers that we vary the level of reinforcement depending on the child's response. "Hard" tasks may be reinforced heavily whereas "easy" tasks may be reinforced less heavily. We must systematically change our reinforcement so that the child eventually will respond appropriately under natural schedules of reinforcement (occasional) with natural types of reinforcers (social).



2. **What is Discrete Trial Teaching?** Discrete Trial Teaching is ONE technique used in both traditional ABA and Verbal Behavior programs. The technique involves:

- a) breaking a skill into smaller parts
- b) Teaching one sub-skill at a time until mastery
- c) Providing concentrated teaching
- d) Providing prompting and prompt fading as necessary
- e) Using reinforcement procedures

Each teaching session involves repeated trials, with each trial having a distinct beginning (the instruction), a behavior (child's response) and a Consequence (reinforcement or prompt- fade prompt)





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