Constellations Behavioral Services

Running an Effective School-Based ABA Program

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CONSTELLATIONS
Behavioral Services

ABA Therapy can be an incredibly effective treatment for students across a wide range of ages. Our Clinic for Autism is available for students under the age of 5 and/or students who are not ready to begin learning in a traditional school setting. However, if an older child is still in need of ABA therapy while enrolled in a school system, we can work with school districts to provide the student with the necessary in-school support. This program availability is ideal for the children and their families who need it, but running an effective school-based ABA therapy program on the administrative side takes a lot of preparation, training and close management. This guide is meant to **break down all of the necessary components of running a school-based ABA therapy program**.

"If they can't learn the way we teach, teach the way they learn."

— O. Ivar Lovaas

Components of An Effective ABA Therapy Program
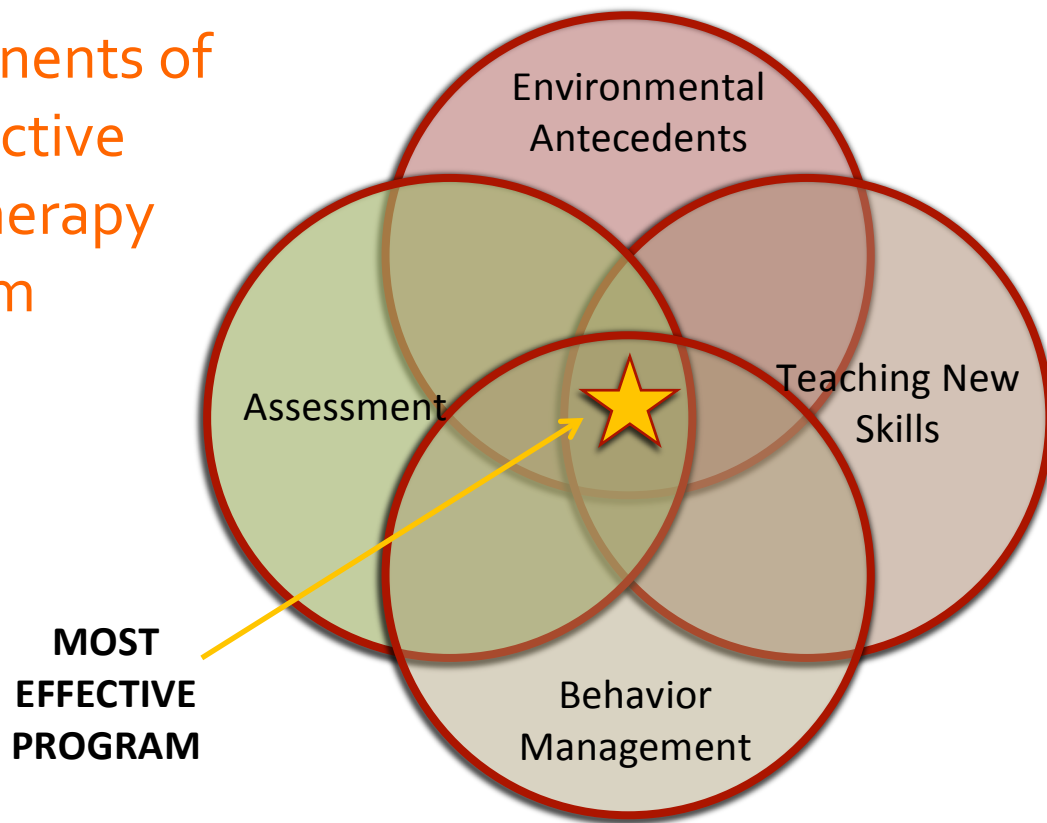
ENVIRONMENTAL ANTECEDENTS:

- Work space
- Schedule
- Staffing
- Resources
- Training

TEACHING NEW SKILLS:

- Discrete trial training
- Incidental teaching
- Task analyses

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT:

Behavior support plan that includes. . .

- Preventative strategies
- Reinforcement system
- Consequence plan
- Data collection

ASSESSMENT:

- Skills assessment: VB-MAPP/ABLLS-R
- Functional Behavior Assessment
- Functional analyses

All four components must be present, functioning efficiently and integrated into a complete system in.

1	Environmental Antecedents

In order to effectively provide therapy to students, environmental antecedents must be carefully managed in a way that is thoughtfully controlled. All antecedents should be **individualized and based on each child's assessment.** Antecedent controls will be different for each student based on his/her needs.

WORK SPACE

A student's work space should be distraction free and be equipped with materials that are easily accessible to the child. The space should contain a student-specific program book or bin. The space should be arranged in a way that meets the students needs, which means taking into consideration things like desk placement, visuals and other factors that influence a student's work space.

SCHEDULE

A child's schedule is incredible important and should really only contain relevant activities that are determined by the student's assessment. Each student will have a specific schedule design that aligns with the BSP and includes all related service sessions. In a school-based program, you have to make every second count, so the schedule is a vital part of running an effective program. For most students, the bulk of their daily schedule will be dedicated to individual work time. Group instruction and inclusion opportunity are also important facets to a student's day. Specials and other opportunities for skill building should also contribute to the composition of the schedule.

STAFFING

Each student will require a different level of staff attention and oversight. If 1:1 paraprofessional support is required, it is vital to know who is responsible for the student during each activity or block of the day. That being said, working with behaviorally-challenged students is not an easy task and each minute requires precise focus and attention. The program must operate with a logical staff-rotation schedule so that no one staff member gets burnt out. This will not only negatively impact staff members, but it will also impact the quality of therapy. All staff must have access to all student information that is relevant **before** they begin working with the child to ensure the fidelity of program implementation.

RESOURCES & TRAINING

It is key that all staff are properly trained in the areas of disabilities, behavior management, skill acquisition and prompting/fading. Without the right people in place, the program will not be effective. Materials such as the program book, prescription sheet, stimuli, data sheets, and others must be readily available. A broad array of reinforcers such as technology, edibles, toys and other activites must be available to support the therapy. Finally, your staff needs **your** support.

Everyone learns through the Laws of Behavior: Reinforcement, punishment, extinction, shaping, prompting and prompt fading.

The difference between people with typical development and people with developmental disabilities is the **precision and systematic application of the Laws of Behavior in order to shape the behavior of an individual.**

TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT	DELAYED/DISABLED DEVELOPMENT

Natural Environment

- Stimulus rich
- Chaotic
- Salient stimuli gain our attention
- Habituation to non-relevant stimuli

Learning occurs…

- Unprecisely
- Unsystematic
- Natural fading of prompts to independence
- Fast rate of acquisition (sometimes in only 1 trial)
- Generalization to novel contexts
- Maintenance/retention of skills
- Skills acquired under proper stimulus control without explicit teaching

Social stimuli are highly reinforcing

Contrived Setting

- Limited distraction
- Instructional control
- Training to get attending
- Reduce sensory input to aid with habituation

Learning requires…

- Precision
- Systematic application of principles
- Prompting
- Prompt fading
- Repeated presentations to acquire skill (many trials)
- Generalization training
- Maintenance probes/retention trials
- Training required for proper stimulus control (across all operants)

In order for students with disabilities to learn most effectively, a variety of techniques must be used. These include Discrete Trial Training that allows the instructor to teach the foundational skills necessary to learn from the natural environment; Natural Environment Training which is a great way to capture and utilize a child's interests and motivation to teach new skills (requesting, play skills, etc.); and finally Task Analyses that is used to teach behavior chains or tasks that require multiple steps.

3

Behavior Management

Behavior management strategies should be individualized, function-based and determined through assessment and data collection. By knowing the variables that maintain behavior, you can make direct changes to that behavior rather than relying on punishment-based consequent strategies alone.

IDENTIFY TARGET BEHAVIOR:

- Preliminary data
- Observable data (only things you can see and measure)
- Behavior that interferes with learning
- Do behaviors occur in isolation or in context of an episode?
- Do multiple behaviors reliably occur together?

HAVE OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS:

- Get everyone on the same page
- Define the behavior – what does the behavior look like?
- Include clear examples and non-examples

COLLECT ABC DATA:

- Record information related to antecedents, behavior and consequences
- Also include relevant idiosyncratic information that may be affecting behavior (medication changes, sleep disruption, family changes, puberty,etc)
- Record data over a period of time for the best reliability (several weeks)

ANALYZE THE DATA:

- Uncover relations between specific antecedents/consequences and episodes of behavior
- Determine the behavioral function hypothesis

Behavior is a function of social positive reinforcement, social negative reinforcement, automatic positive reinforcement and automatic negative reinforcement. **Treatment for each function is different and a treatment for one may be reinforce for another**. This is why you must develop a plan based on the individual student that includes preventative strategies, a reinforcement system, a consequent plan and consistent data collection. Observe the data closely and frequently so you can monitor and modify the plan as needed.

All aspects of treatment using the ABA approach are based on data collection and assessment.

Assessment Methods for Identifying Behavioral Function

- Data Analysis: Collection of ABC data that has demonstrated a strong correlation between environmental conditions and the occurrence of challenging behaviors
- Functional Behavior Assessment: Uses file review, caregiver interviews, descriptive assessment (FAST, QABF) and ABC data to determine correlations between environmental conditions and the occurrence of challenging behavior
- Functional Analysis: Consists of conditions during which highly trained individuals manipulate environmental conditions to evoke instances of challenging behavior. Because the experimenter has evoked the behavior, we have gone beyond correlations and can then assume causation

Once your plan has been implemented, it is important to monitor the ongoing collection of data and to monitor progress and effectiveness of interventions. To do this you will need to keep ABC data sheets, student specific "Daily Data Sheets" on target behaviors, incident reports if necessary, and updated graphs so that you can easily identify trends in behavior.

Assessment Methods for Determining Current Performance & Skill Deficits

- Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS-R) – comprehensive assessment looking at 466 skills across 25 content areas
- Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP) – looks at 170 milestones across 16 skill domains. Milestones are linked to age norms and the assessment also includes a barriers-to-learning and transition assessment that helps provide guidance for the development of IEP's
- Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS) – used for older students to assess independence in basic living skills, community participation, daily living in the home, etc
- Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) – provider/caregiver interview used to gather information about social skill deficits