WHAT IS ABA AGAIN?

Applied Behavior Analysis

- Applied → applied science → interventions from behavioral research implemented in real world situations such as homes, schools, communities
- Behavior → operant behavior → controllable behavior maintained by consequences
- Analysis → data driven hypotheses and interventions

A common therapy for individuals with autism spectrum disorder

- Early Intervention treatments can provide therapy for 20-40 hours/week
  - Plans are developed by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and carried out by a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) with supervision at 5-20%
- Many other applications of ABA including adult services and organizational behavior management
A noticeable trend in ABA that I LOVE and am happy to be part of –

More compassionate care through perspective taking and compromise

Consider: If this learner could consent to treatment- would they consent to this intervention?
BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATION

And children are coming to us with behaviors that are saying, “Societal rules are too hard for us”

And we should be saying back, “It’s okay, we’ll help you get there”
WE NEED TO BUILD SCAFFOLDING TO HELP THEM

INSTEAD OF JUST INSISTING THEY DO THINGS OUR WAY
# ABA Basics

## Behavior ABCs in Observational Analysis

- **Antecedent** – the trigger for a behavior
- **Behavior** – the target behavior
- **Consequence** -- what happens after the behavior to maintain it

## Behavior ABCs in Intervention

- **Antecedent** -- prevention strategies
- **Behavior** – teach replacement behaviors
- **Consequence** -- reinforcement of desired behaviors and punishment of maladaptive behaviors
1. Increase use reinforcement strategies while reducing use of punishment strategies
2. Increase use of DRA and DRO strategies while reducing use of extinction strategies
CAN WE HAVE PUNISHMENT FREE ABA THERAPY?
HOW?

Focus on the use of Positive Reinforcement
FOCUS ON
R+ TIP #1

Spend the start of each session pairing and during this time conduct informal preference assessments

- What is interesting and reinforcing to the learner that day?
- Use it and build off of it
- Need variety to avoid satiation

Example: If a learner is interested in dinosaurs for the day. After playing with dinosaurs during the initial pairing for the day, look for an opportunity to be in control of some favorite dinosaurs. Ask child to complete learning targets and reward effort with fun and novel dinosaur activity such as pretending the dinosaur is eating their foot.
Behaviors can be the learner communicating that an activity is HARD for them

- Increase rate of R+ leading up to that activity (build momentum to earn R+) and throughout that activity
- Simplify the task by breaking it down into components and teaching one step at a time
- Errorless learning – provide practice with prompts for correct answer before they have time to get it wrong

Example: If a learner will not transition to a table time activity, you could take the dinosaurs he is playing with to the table and continue playing with the dinosaurs there. You can build off of the play and then pause the play to ask the learner to do an already mastered activity and reward the correct answer or approximation with a fun dinosaur interaction. Several more already mastered trials can be run like this before asking the learner to do a step of a difficult task with errorless learning
Using the ABC model, we could stop providing the consequence that is maintaining a behavior and over time, the behavior should cease.

But first.....

Individuals will commonly have an extinction burst. This is when an individual will try increasing more extreme behaviors in an attempt to gain access to the item or attention they are used to receiving.

Example: A learner has a history of swearing in class followed by being sent to the principal’s office. This often occurs on test days. After several incidents of this, the principal asks the teacher to stop sending the child to his office for this behavior. The next test day, the student immediately swears in class. The teacher ignores this behavior. The student then swears more but the teacher still ignores the behavior. The student then goes up to the teacher and calls her many mean names that include more swear words. The teacher redirects the student to his seat and he then flips his desk and runs out of the room.
The problem with extinction bursts

Dangerous

Learners can end up adding more extreme behaviors to their repertoire

Traumatic for learner and staff or family
CAN WE AVOID EXTINCTION BURSTS?
HOW?

- If there is a chance that you are going to give in to a behavior, it is better to give in sooner. We don’t want learners practicing bad behavior.
  - Look for precursors—small behaviors that happen before the big behavior and respond to those instead.
  - Build a plan for addressing the behavior through teaching replacement behaviors such as functional communication.

- Utilize Differential Reinforcement procedures instead of Extinction procedures on their own.
DRA - DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT OF ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIORS

- Ask yourself: What is the replacement behavior I want them to do instead? Prompt and reinforce that behavior while putting the undesired behavior on extinction.
  - This provides the child an alternative way that is socially acceptable to access the item or attention they are seeking so it decreases the likelihood of an extinction burst.

- Ex: Count & Mand (Request) Strategy
  - A young learner with limited vocabulary is crying because they want access to an item out of reach. You ask them to wait and provide a finger visual for 5 seconds (this 5 seconds provides distance between the undesirable behavior and the replacement behavior to avoid creating a behavior chain). You then prompt them to point at the desired item (or request via sign, vocalization, or AAC) as opposed to an extinction procedure where you tell them “no” and wait out behavior.
- Sometimes requesting is out of reach for children in the midst of a meltdown or sensory overload. Turn towards DRO instead of DRA.

- Look for moment where the learner is engaging in a behavior OTHER then undesired behavior, such as taking a deep breath or being calm, and reinforce that.

- Example: Count & Distract Strategy
  - A learner is crying and lying on the floor because it was time to put away a favorite toy dinosaur and transition to work. Bring out a different reinforcing item such as bubbles and when you a have five seconds of calm, reinforce the calm behavior by blowing bubbles until the learner is interested in the bubbles. Once you have gained the learner’s interest stop blowing bubbles and ask them to complete a maintenance target such as pointing to their knees. Reinforce this with bubbles and continue to build behavioral momentum in this way.
Item Access Behaviors

- Sometimes items just aren’t available or okay to have even when properly requested.

In this case offer alternative. If this is unsuccessful move to DRO procedure such as count and distract.
Escape Behaviors

- After implementing DRA/DRO procedures, ensure learner has some compliance before moving on to next activity. You may need to COMPROMISE on how much compliance but you must have some.
- Compromising examples: You can bring the work to the learner to eliminate the transition component or you could run maintenance (already mastered) targets to ease the difficulty of the work.
PERSONAL NOTE

For me personally, this trend towards alternatives to punishment and extinction procedures has been transformational.

Focusing even more attention on all of the things that are going RIGHT and less attention on what’s not perfect has led to more joyful days. Shorter duration of tantrums and aggressive behavior left me with more energy as they can be exhausting and wearing.