Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): The Basics in Laymen’s Terms!

- Remember that ABA is simply changing the environment in order to change behavior!

- **The A-B-C Contingency: Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence**
  - Antecedent: what happens before the behavior
  - Consequence: what happens after the behavior; consequences can be both positive or negative; they either increase the behavior (reinforcement) or decrease the behavior (punishment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present Stimulus</th>
<th>Remove Stimulus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase Behavior</td>
<td>Positive Reinforcement (i.e., give student sticker)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decrease Behavior</td>
<td>Positive Punishment (Type 1) (i.e., give student detention)</td>
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- **Discrete trial training (DTT)** is one facet of ABA which involves presenting a discriminative stimulus (SD) that elicits a response, then applying a consequence (positive or negative) that affects the frequency of that response. Stimuli are presented and consequences are applied quickly and repeatedly in a controlled setting.
  - Example of one discrete trial: Mrs. Smith said to John, “Show me red.” John pointed to blue, so Mrs. Smith said, “No” in a low voice without smiling.
    - Discriminative stimulus (SD): “Show me red.”
    - Response: John pointed to blue.
    - Consequence: Mrs. Smith said, “No” in a low voice without smiling.
  **Therefore, John is less likely to make this mistake again.**

- The **three functions of behavior** include 1) escape (what we often call avoidance or ‘getting out of something’), 2) attention, and 3) tangibles (trying to obtain a physical item, such as food or ball).
  - Control is not a function in itself, but student may attempt to ‘control’ environment in order to gain escape, attention, or tangibles!

- Both positive and negative consequences are either socially mediated (to obtain, student requires another person, item, or activity) or automatic (to obtain, student needs no one but him/herself). Socially mediated consequences include gaining attention, having an item taken away, or obtaining access to a preferred activity; automatic consequences include self-stimulating behaviors.

ABA: The Basics
Kristal Lowry
How we use ABA in the classroom!

- Reinforcement: Positive behavior and correct responses are reinforced; negative behavior and incorrect responses are not reinforced.
- Differential reinforcement: Reinforcement is given for the closest approximation to the desired behavior, but not for other attempts (i.e., behavior is ‘shaped’ by reinforcing baby steps and not reinforcing behavior that is not at least as good as what has already been demonstrated by student). Students are corrected when they are unsuccessful due to a lack of understanding or knowledge.
- Errorless learning: Tasks are arranged so that students are certain to obtain the correct answers. Prompts (verbal, visual, physical) are provided when learning new information and gradually removed (or faded) as students become more successful.
- Individually designed instruction: Tasks are arranged according to each student’s individual skill level, and consequences are determined individually since not all consequences are reinforcing or punishing for everyone!
- Mixed and varied instruction: Activities are changed often and less-preferred tasks are alternated with more-preferred tasks to avoid fatigue and increase motivation (i.e., “First-then,” reading then drawing, math then hands-on science experiment).
- Fast paced instruction: Momentum is built in asking fast-paced questions and connecting ideas, and an upbeat pace is maintained to hold student attention.

Things to keep in mind when using ABA at home!

- Sources of motivation are different for each child (as they are for each adult)! One adult may do yard work because he likes to have a nice yard (positive reinforcement), while another adult may do yard work to get out of having to do chores inside the house (negative reinforcement). Finding what “makes a child tick” is key in motivating him to engage in a particular behavior!
- Many children are not motivated to do something “because his parent said so” or “because it’s the right thing to do.” That’s OK! If you aren’t sure what your child would be willing to work for, ask him, or observe the activities he chooses to engage in during his free time.
- Be sure the child knows exactly what it is he has to do in order to earn the reward! Expectations should be simple, clear, and most importantly, reasonable. If a child never earns the reward, he is much less likely to try again. Expectations can always be increased once the child has learned the behavior initially.
- Remember to directly teach good behavior. Never assume that a child has a skill that he has not demonstrated before!
- When reinforcing, include a comment about the behavior which is being reinforced (“Thank you for working so hard on your homework tonight!”)
- Deliver reinforcement immediately and consistently after appropriate behavior!