



Fact Sheet: Applied Behavioural Analysis

It can be difficult for parents to navigate the many treatments available for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and while there are a number of interventions available, it is Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) based interventions that emerge as the leading therapy.

Compared to other treatments, or no treatment, ABA-based interventions can:

- decrease the severity of a child's symptoms,
- increase IQ, learning rate, language skills, visual/spatial skills, social skills and adaptive behaviour,
- improve academic and social experiences at school (if intervention commences before school), and
- contribute to immediate and future social participation and later economic contribution.

What is ABA?

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is an intensive and structured therapy program for children with an autism spectrum disorder.

ABA helps children to develop important life-skills they need, such as behavioural, self-help, social and learning skills, to interact with others and to cope with the challenges of everyday life.

Each child is unique and so the therapy itself is designed to meet the child's individual needs, and build a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Together, early intervention and ABA treatment supports many pre-school aged children with ASD to succeed alongside their peers.

Starting an ABA program

Generally, ABA therapists work one-on-one with the child at your home for many hours each week. Based on the research, around at least 15-20 hours per week of intensive ABA therapy is needed to ensure the benefits are long-term.

ABA therapists are supervised by program supervisors – ABA service providers, like Inclusive Directions – who design the tailored program that will be delivered.

The focus of ABA programs is on all areas of childhood development as well as addressing problematic behaviours, for example:

Childhood Development

- play
- self-help
- learning skills
- fine and gross motor
- verbal and non-verbal communication

Problematic Behaviours

- tantrums
- self-injury
- obsessions
- socially inappropriate behaviours

Ideally, ABA therapy is conducted before children start school – the earlier a child can start therapy, the sooner the child can apply the new behaviours and achieve the program benefits. As such, ABA therapy is usually aimed at children between the ages of two and six, but that's not to say it's not effective for older children, adolescents and adults.

How long does ABA therapy take?

To be successful, ABA therapy has to be fun so children feel motivated to take part and learn, so therapists use positive reinforcement, such as praise, toys and games, to make sure the sessions are fun. Also, the program is tailored to the child's age and skill level, and incorporated into other programs and activities the child is involved in, such as child care, kindy and occupational therapy for example.

A 20-hour per week program typically involves two to three-hour sessions, with breaks, each morning and afternoon, five days a week.

Children typically work with the therapist for a few hours at a time interspersed with short play breaks that also give the therapist an opportunity to record the child's data and prepare the next task. Typically each hour, one long break of 10-20 minutes is taken.

Each session therapists follow a detailed program designed by an ABA program supervisor. The therapist is responsible for collecting detailed information about the progress your child is making.

Every two to four weeks, the program supervisor will arrange a review meeting with the parents, therapists and any other professionals working with the child, and analyse the information that has been collected by the therapist/s in the weeks leading up to the meeting.

The meetings typically run for around two hours and are held to review progress, make program changes where required, and to provide feedback to therapists.

What role do parents play?

Parents are a very important part of the ABA program and need to be fully informed so they can help their child apply their new skills to every-day life situations.

Some parents undertake ABA training so they can understand the ABA framework, implement some of the therapy themselves and reduce costs. However, some prefer therapists to deliver the program. Regardless of your decision, the most important thing is to be involved and keep track of what your child is learning so that you can encourage them to use their new skills in their day-to-day life.

What will influence your child's progress?

Each child is unique, and the degree to which a child's development and/or behaviour is affected varies considerably. However, there are a number of factors that can impact on outcomes.

These include:

- The frequency of the intervention – Inclusive Directions recommends children do as many hours as possible.
- Parental involvement – regardless of whether parents act as therapists or not, their involvement in the program is vital.
- Understanding the program's basic principles – typically, when there is a good understanding of how the program works the approach, by parents, is consistent across the child's day.
- Age at intake – Inclusive Directions recommends treatment start as soon as ASD is suspected to improve the child's developmental progress.

What is SPECTRA?

Inclusive Directions follows SPECTRA, which is the acronym for Structured Program for Early Childhood Therapists working with children with Autism and directly targets the areas of ASD that are often delayed or absent in a child.

SPECTRA has been studied over the past 12 years at the Flinders Early Intervention Research Program, and has demonstrated improved outcomes for children with ASD. The results have been positive for many of the children involved, but there has also been a significant reduction in stress for parents after starting the program.

Further information

For more information about Inclusive Directions' Flinders Early Intervention Program, including our Parents and Families Manual, please contact Inclusive Directions on:

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Email info@directions.org.au

Visit www.directions.org.au/families/flinders-early-intervention-program/