

What is Applied Behaviour Analysis?

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is an evidence-based approach to learning and behaviour that utilises the child's desire for positive experiences to support them to develop skills and positive behaviours. It also aims to reduce socially inappropriate or dangerous behaviours. The principles of ABA guide how a consultant approaches the development, implementation and review of a program of therapy.

Who can benefit from ABA?

ABA is a systematic and evidence-based approach that anyone can benefit from. While the majority of the published research focuses on the efficacy of ABA in supporting skill development and behaviour management for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), similar results can be seen when the principles of ABA are used to support children with or without a disability to learn.

What does ABA teach?

ABA uses a variety of techniques to break complex skills or behaviours down into a smaller sequence of steps. This process can be applied to the teaching of simple physical activities such as copying hand actions (motor imitation) through to complex behaviours such as severe head banging. ABA assesses your child's skills and behaviours in order to plan a teaching sequence that enables your child to achieve the desired outcome.

What is involved in an ABA therapy program?

- Observing a particular action or reaction (behaviour).
- Identifying what happened before the behaviour occurred (antecedent).
- Identifying what happened after the behaviour occurred (consequence).
- Analysing the role of antecedents and consequences in encouraging or discouraging that particular behaviour to identify why the child may be behaving in that way (function).
- Developing a plan to make positive or appropriate behaviour more appealing and negative or inappropriate behaviour less appealing to the child by modifying antecedents and consequences.
- Responding in planned and consistent way to a child's behaviours to ensure that they are able to practice and learn with a clear understanding of what is expected of them.
- Teaching the parents and family members the ABA techniques so that they feel confident in being able to manage the child's behaviours.

What is the parent's role?

ABi specialises in family focused therapy programs that empower parents and other important people in your child's life to use the principles of ABA to support long term skill development and behaviour support. A successful program of therapy requires a partnership between the consultant and parents. The consultant will bring technical knowledge and skill, the parents being knowledge of your child and their environment.

Therefore, as part of developing an individual therapy program, the consultant will work with you to identify the important people in your child's life and what roles they might play in supporting your child on this journey. This creates consistency which is vital to giving your child the best possible chance to benefit from therapy.

Who decides which behaviours or skills are the focus of therapy?

Our consultants work with your family and other important people in your child's life to develop an individual therapy program that focuses on family priorities. You may have very specific goals such as 'I would like my child to be able to hold a pencil' or 'I would like my child to stop biting her brother'. Or your goal might go broad, 'I would like my child to be able to play with other children more easily' or 'I would like my child to be ready for school next year'.

Once priorities and goals have been identified, the consultant will conduct assessments in order to develop an individual therapy program. Based on the results of these assessments, the consultant may make recommendations about:

- breaking long term goals down into smaller steps;
- the order in which to work on your different goals;
- skills your child needs to develop before they can begin working towards a set goal.

The consultant will then develop an individual therapy program based on the goals and priorities you have decided upon.

How long does the therapy go for?

There are no specific set timeframes on how long therapy goes for because each child is different and receives an individualised plan. Typically our programs are often delivered weekly or fortnightly and the therapy is directed toward specific goals that last for several months. However, the parents are consulted about their personal preferences as well. How long a program of therapy goes for depends on the child's skill level, how many goals are being worked on, how complex those goals are and what other supports are available to the child and family.

An example of one type of program that we offer would be a short program of therapy lasting three months that targets two or three concrete goals. This may involve the child participating in therapy sessions with a consultant once a week combined with a parent workshop. The family may then feel confident to continue applying the principles of ABA in supporting the child's learning without the continued involvement of a consultant. Or they may decide that they only need periodic review sessions with a consultant. Other families may feel that their child benefits from an ongoing program of therapy with therapy goals being regularly reviewed by a consultant then developing new goals as the other goals have been mastered.

As we have previously mentioned, each child and their family's needs are different and we tailor programs to meet these individualised needs. The consultant can provide recommendations to assist you, as a parent or carer, to decide what length of therapy is right for your child and your family.

What does a session look like?

What a session looks like will depend on a range of things including your child's strengths, how old they are and the goals that have been prioritised. The length of an individual therapy session may be shorter for a very young child or where a child is working on a skill they find very challenging. As a child gets older or becomes more skilled sessions may get longer. Typical sessions are usually 1 or 1 and a half hours depending on the circumstances.

At ABi a session with a consultant will generally commence with a catch up on how things have been going since the last session, followed by an opportunity for your child to practise with the consultant one or more of the skills that form their individual therapy program. The consultant will collect data about how your child responds to during these structured sessions to inform the ongoing development of your child's therapy program. At the conclusion of the session you will have an opportunity to

discuss the session with the consultant and to make adjustments to your child's program as appropriate.

Can my child's siblings be involved?

Absolutely. ABi delivers a family focused model of service and we acknowledge that siblings are important people in the child's life. Young siblings may join in the therapy sessions, particularly with goals like developing play or social skills. Siblings who are old enough may take on a more formal role in your child's therapy by sharing their knowledge and skills with the consultant and even in supporting your child to engage in therapy or rehearse their newly developing skills.

Where will therapy take place?

Therapy can take place in our clinic, in your home or in another location such as your child's preschool or school, or even in a location like your local park or shopping centre. As part of developing an individual therapy program, the consultant will discuss options with you and make recommendations about a suitable location for therapy based on the types of goals you have identified.

What services does ABi offer?

ABi offers a range of early intervention, support and therapy services including:

- Behaviour support
- Skill development
- Early intervention
- Occupational Therapy
- Speech Pathology
- Psychology
- Groups Program including Social Skills, Play Therapy, School Readiness and Secret Agent Society (SAS)
- School Transition and Individual Education Plans
- Parent training workshops

How do we get started?

To get started, called reception on (02) 9569 7700 to obtain registration forms or email info@abinsw.org.au.