

Applied Behavior Analysis

Appplied behavior analysis seeks to bring about behavior change. Desired behaviors are increased and undesired behaviors are decreased. First the analyst determines the function of the target behavior. The function might be access to tangibles or edibles, escape from undesired tasks, attention, or automatic reinforcement (a behavior in which the individual can engage alone). Understanding the function of behavior allows us to effect change in the behavior (increase or decrease).

Once the function of behavior is established, the analyst devises a behavior plan which might include reinforcers (consequences which increase the behavior), punishments (consequences which decrease the behavior), or extinction (ignoring the behavior). Reinforcers might include access to healthy snacks or toys or special attention. Punishment might be time out from play or other preferred activities. Ignoring behavior serves to extinguish it through the lack of reinforcement.

Behavior analysts maintain careful data records of the target behavior under behavior change (treatment) conditions. Continuing treatment is always based upon data. So, for instance, if a teacher wanted to increase the likelihood that students would bring her apples, she would smile and thank any student who did. If she wanted to decrease 'apple bringing' behavior she could either ignore the appearance of apples, or place students in 'time-out' for bringing them. *Not likely!* But hopefully the example makes the point.

Applied behavior analysis is absolutely the most effective treatment for children with developmental disorders. It is also effective with behavior disorders and learning disorders. Teaching parents how to apply the principles of behavior is paramount to success of a behavior plan.

