

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction to Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)**

### **GOALS**

1. Define Applied Behavior Analysis.
2. Describe the seven dimensions of Applied Behavior Analysis.
3. Explain the role of the Behavior Analysis Certificate Board.
4. Describe the various certificate levels (RBT, BCaBA, BCBA, and BCBA-D).
5. Describe the requirements to become an RBT.
6. Describe the role of an RBT in comparison to the other certificate levels.
7. Describe the categories of the code of professional and ethical behavior of behavior analysts.
8. Complete this chapter's Exercises and Activities or those assigned by your instructor

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is the area of behavior analysis which focuses on the application of procedures derived from the principles of behavior analysis to influence socially important behavior. ABA is based upon the scientific foundation of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior and the philosophy of Behaviorism. Generally speaking, ABA is characterized as focusing on factors such as *behavior*, utilizing behavioral principles, emphasizing identifiable variables within the environment, utilizing detailed procedures in systematic ways, and emphasizing the demonstration of behavior change via objective measurement. Moreover, ABA focuses on environmental (as opposed to mentalistic) explanations of the causes of behavior. *What does this all mean?* Basically, ABA focuses on what people say or do and changes in a person's behavior. It is mainly concerned with implementing specific procedures to change the environment to produce measurable and lasting behavior change. All subjective *assumptions* (descriptions of behavior such as “sad” or “mean”) are removed from the equation and replaced with objective facts (actions such as crying or hitting).

For example, if I am trying to lose weight and I break my diet, an ABA approach would assess my environment (e.g., is there junk food in my pantry?) and implement a specific procedure (e.g., removal of all junk food from the house), and objectively measure progress (e.g., calories consumed, minutes spent working out, and weight) to determine the success of the intervention. Moreover, I would remind myself not to say, “I cannot lose weight, because I have low self-esteem.”

It would be an injustice to introduce you to ABA without briefly discussing the seven dimensions that have really shaped the field. Baer, Wolf, and Risely (1968) proposed seven dimensions to guide the field and practice of ABA:

1. *Applied*—focuses on socially significant behaviors
2. *Behavioral*—focuses on objective measurement (what the behavior looks like)
3. *Analytic*—demonstrates functional relationships
4. *Technological*—fully describes all procedures implemented in such detail that someone could replicate implementation

5. *Conceptually Systematic*—utilizes procedures based upon principles of behavior analysis
6. *Effective*—demonstrates behavior change through objective measurement
7. *Generality*—behavior change that is produced across behaviors, people, and settings.

Practitioners of behavior analysis provide services within these seven dimensions of ABA. In other words, practitioners utilize these seven dimensions to guide their work. They are sure to choose socially significant behaviors, or behaviors that will change the client's future in significant ways, and focus on behavior that is measurable (either what the person says or does). It is important to demonstrate that the intervention they implement is responsible for behavior change, and not some other variable. They must provide a step-by-step description of all interventions implemented so that others can continue to implement the procedure. Practitioners ensure that the interventions they implement are based upon the principles of behavior analysis, are evidence-based, and establish that a measurable change in behavior is observed. Behavior analysts ensure change across more than one environment (home and school), people (mom and dad), or behaviors (aggression and tantrums). *So, how can you ensure you are following these dimensions as a practitioner?* First and foremost, it is important to understand in more detail what these dimensions mean. These dimensions are expanded upon throughout this book. You will learn how to choose, define, and measure behavior to help meet these dimensions of ABA: *applied*, *behavioral*, and *effective*. Its procedures are based upon the principles of behavior analysis to help meet the *technological*, *conceptually systematic*, *effective*, and *generality* dimensions, and they illustrate how to evaluate outcomes to help you meet the *analytic* and *effective* dimensions.

Before we embark on this journey, you may be wondering if there is a body that oversees the practice of ABA, and how you go about becoming a practitioner. Let's spend some time discussing the body that oversees the credentialing of practitioners and the practice of ABA.

## THE BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS CERTIFICATION BOARD (BACB) AND CERTIFICATION

The Behavior Analysis Certification Board is a nonprofit corporation that oversees the professional credentialing needs related to behavior analysis services. The mission of the BACB is to protect consumers of behavior analysis by establishing, promoting, and disseminating professional standards. Moreover, their global vision is to increase the availability of qualified behavior analysts. The BACB website provides information regarding what behavior analysis is, requirements for credentialing at the different levels, ethical and practice guidelines, information regarding how to apply and sit for the exam, task lists regarding areas of knowledge in the field, information on continuing education, certificate registry, approved course sequences to qualify for the exam, how to maintain credentials, newsletters, and how to report a disciplinary action.

There are four levels of certification: Board Certified Behavior Analyst – Doctoral (BCBA-D), for individuals with doctoral training in behavior analysis; Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), for those with graduate-level education; Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA), for those with an undergraduate level of education; and Registered Behavior Technician (RBT), for those with a high school or higher level of education.

BCBA-Ds and BCBAAs are independent practitioners who provide behavior-analytic services and can supervise the work of BCaBAs and RBTs. BCaBAs may not practice independently and must be supervised by either a BCBA-D or a BCBA. They may supervise RBTs under the supervision of a BCBA-D or BCBA. An RBT is a paraprofessional who may only practice under the direct supervision of a BCBA-D, BCBA, or a BCaBA. Generally, BCBA-Ds and BCBAAs design assessment plans and interventions, while BCaBAs and RBTs implement these plans. BCaBAs and RBTs are considered the front-line staff and are the ones who directly work with clients on a routine basis, while the other practitioners oversee the program in a consultative format. *One could say that the RBTs are the ones who directly change behavior.* What an amazing profession, to be the one responsible for changing people's behavior in socially significant ways to better their lives and the lives of

those around them. *So you may be wondering (and we hope you are), how do I become an RBT? Lets look at the requirements necessary to become an RBT or behavior change agent.*

## RBT REQUIREMENTS

RBTs must be at least 18 years of age, have a high school diploma (or equivalent), complete 40 hours of training related to behavior analysis by a certified provider, complete a criminal background check, complete and pass the *RBT Competency Assessment*, and pass the *RBT Examination*. Moreover, RBTs are required to complete and pass the *RBT Competency Assessment* annually. Every RBT must have a certificant (BCBA-D, BCBA, or BCaBA) who is responsible for ensuring the RBTs is obtaining ongoing supervision for a minimum of five percent of the hours they are providing behavior-analytic services per month. The supervision must include at least two face-to-face, synchronous contacts per month during which the supervisor observes and provides feedback regarding the RBT service delivery. In addition, at least one of the two contacts must be one-on-one<sup>1</sup>.

*If you are at least 18 years of age, have a high school diploma or equivalent and you want to be a RBT, the first step in becoming an RBT is to find an approved 40-hour training.* There are a number of on-line providers that provide this 40-hour training and can be found by doing a search of the web using the terms “RBT training.” In addition, there are university-based programs that will allow you to take an RBT course that counts for this training requirement as well as a course toward your college degree. Once you have completed this training, passed your assessment, or are still in the process of completing this training, you will need to secure a “responsible certificant” (a BCBA-D, BCBA, or BCaBA) who agrees to be responsible for your RBT supervision. This is generally achieved by finding a behavioral agency and either securing employment or an internship.

One important aspect of becoming an RBT is to understand the ethical parameters guiding the practice of behavior analysis. One can

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<sup>1</sup>These requirements are based upon the standards presented by the BACB in January 2016 and are subject to change. Please review the BACB website for the most current requirements.

obtain the contents of the *Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts* (PECC) from the BACB website (bacb.com). The ethical standards of practice are just as important to know as the principles of behavior analysis. The PECC is related to the professional and ethical behavior of behavior analysts regardless of their certificant level. The PECC is comprised of 10 sections including: Responsible Conduct of Behavior Analysts; Behavior Analysts' Responsibility to Clients; Assessing Behavior; Behavior Analysts and the Behavior-Change Program; Behavior Analysts as Supervisors; Behavior Analysts' Ethical Responsibility to the Profession of Behavior Analysis; Behavior Analysts' Ethical Responsibility to Colleagues; Public Statements; and Behavior Analysts Research.<sup>2</sup> Although specifically addressing all the nuances of the PECC is beyond the scope of this text, all RBTs should become familiar with and follow this code prior to practicing behavior analysis. Thus, the next chapter provides a summary of the PECC and the responsibility of an RBT. With that said, it is important to point out that depending on where you are working as an RBT, and in what country or state, there are other ethical codes and laws that govern the work that you do. Thus, besides understanding the PECC, it is important to look into the ethics and professional laws that pertain to the work you will be doing. For example, if you will be an RBT in a school setting, then state and local educational laws will also affect how you perform your job.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A layperson's definition of applied behavior analysis would be the use of interventions that have proven to be effective to alter important behavior across situations. The practice of ABA is based upon seven dimensions including: applied, behavioral, analytic, technological, conceptually systematic, effective, and generality. The board that oversees the practice of ABA by RBTs, BCaBAs, BCBAs, and BCBA-Ds is the BACB. The board provides requirements, scope of practice, and professional and ethical codes of conduct for behavior analysts at all levels. Professional and Ethical conduct is as important in practic-

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<sup>2</sup>Based upon the published code on the BACB website January 2016.

ing behavior analysis as understanding the concepts, procedures, and principles of behavior analysis.

## EXERCISES

After you have completed the exercises below, you will want feedback. Your instructor has access (or can obtain access from the publisher) to sample answers for each of the following exercises:

1. List what your supervision (as an RBT) must include.
2. Specify what behavior is.
3. What is an important distinction that separates ABA from other disciplines?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Describe yourself and your experiences in ABA.
2. Why have you decided to participate in this experience? What do you hope to gain from it?
3. Identify the long-term goals, vision, and/or purpose of your host organization and how your participation can contribute toward them.
4. Go to the Behavior Analysis Certification Board's website ([www.bacb.com](http://www.bacb.com)) and
  - a. Specify a definition of behavior analysis.
  - b. Specify the requirements for becoming a registered behavior technician (RBT)
  - c. Print out the RBT task list that specifies what you need to know to sit for the *RBT Competency Assessment* and examination
4. Review the *Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysis* (PECC) ([bacb.com/ethics-code/](http://bacb.com/ethics-code/)).