

Disability Programs Specialized Services
Episode 14: Introduction to Behaviour Analysis
With Trevor Friesen

Transcript

Hello and thank you for being here with me. My name is Trevor Friesen. I'm a board certified Behavior Analyst working for the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay. Today, I would like to talk to you about something called Applied Behavior Analysis or ABA for short and how it may be helpful when it comes to supporting someone with a disability. So what we're going to cover today, we're going to try and answer a few questions.

Okay. So the first, "What is Applied Behavior Analysis or ABA?" Next "How is ABA useful?" And then after, "How do I actually analyze behavior?" So once I know what it is what am I supposed to do with it? So let's start with the first one. What is Applied Behavior Analysis? Maybe you've already heard of this term ABA before.

Maybe you've heard of someone doing ABA by sitting at a table with a learner using picture cards to teach a concept. While this is one of the ways that teaching might happen, depending on the strength of the learner, I'm here today to offer some tools and perspectives that maybe you didn't know were part of a behavior analytic approach.

So before we can do that, though, we need to kind of have an idea of what I mean when I say behavior. Because often when people use the word behavior, they're talking about things that people do that are unpleasant things like tantrums or violence or aggressive language. But I want you to think of it more simply, okay? I want you to try and remove emotion from the word behavior and think about it like this: behavior is just an action activity or process which can be observed and measured.

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And then often these actions, activities and processes are initiated in response to stimuli which are either internal or external. I'll let you sit with that a little bit. It's it's pretty dry, right? But remove the emotion from it. Okay. Now, the more simple version, the one that I like: Behavior, is anything that we do, unpleasant or pleasant that we can see and or measure.

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This is a more simple way to look at it. Now, you might be saying, Trevor, this is a pretty cold way of looking at people. People aren't machines. And you're right. Sometimes I think it can feel like because behaviour analysis is a science and science is heavily focused on what we can see and measure. This makes research in this area sound pretty cold.

So applied behaviour analysis is really just taking what we think we know about behaviour. Right. The information that we've gathered from research and attempting to apply it to the real world to provide supports and to teach new skills in a way that positively affects the life of the individual and then those that are around them as well. And remember, in the real world, there are things going on inside of us.

It's important not to forget that things like feelings and thoughts and memories and sensations and all of these internal things influence the way that we behave. So as practitioners of applied behaviour analysis, when we're beginning to look at behaviour and providing supports to others, it's important to remember that there are things going on inside the person that's affecting their outward behaviour as well, even if we can't see them.

How is ABA useful? Well, ABA is just another set of tools in your toolbox. You can take what you like from it and you can add it to your own approach to see if it's helpful for you and the people that you're supporting. Anything that you don't like, you can just leave it in the toolbox. ABA tools help us to figure out the needs of the person and begin to provide the supports or teach the skills. But it's important to remember that these tools aren't meant to change someone.

They're meant to guide you towards meeting the person where they're at. So depending on the person, you might just ask them what they need and what's important to them. But in other cases, they may not have the skills to share this information with you. And this is where ABA is useful. Last question. How do I analyze behavior? And this really forms the foundation of my presentation to you today.

So if you've stuck with me so far, congratulations. Because here is where we're going to start kind of digging into the fun stuff. How do I analyze behavior? So first I want to do a little activity, and it's going to wake up our behaviour analytic brains okay. So maybe you've done this before. I want you to look really closely at the two pictures A and see of the donuts.

I want you to take 30 seconds and I want you to try to find at least three differences between pictures A and see. I'll give you 30 seconds starting now.

Okay. Time is up.

So how did you do? If you look closely on the screen, at your pictures, at the picture, you can see I've circled with red circles where there are some differences. They're pretty subtle. It took me a long time. I don't know how you guys did. So why did I start you off with this activity? What does it have to do with behaviour analysis and trying to identify somebody's needs that aren't being met or the supports that they need?

Well, when we're trying to figure out why someone is behaving the way that they are remember behaviour, pleasant or unpleasant, take the emotion out of - it when we're trying to figure out why someone is behaving the way that they are, as behaviour

analysts, our job is to look for differences in the environment before and after the behaviour. So what I mean is what changed around the person as a result of their behaviour?

Let me give you another example.

Imagine a child named Johnny. He's at daycare, so he's daycare aged. And when he's at daycare, he's hitting other kids. When Johnny hits, sometimes nothing happens. Sometimes he sent to time out and sometimes he scolded. Someone says, "Hey, don't do that!" So daycare staff, they've tried a few different things, and sometimes things work, but not all the time.

There's still lots of hitting happening So applied behaviour analysis would be looking at what's happening before and after each time Johnny hits to try and figure out what supports are needed or what needs aren't being met. Why? Why is the hitting happening? So if you remember the activity that we just did, where we looked at the difference between the picture A and the picture C, behaviour happened somewhere in between A and C and being able to describe what's going on in A.

And what happens in C helps us better understand why a behaviour is happening and what we might change in A or in C, which is going to help meet the needs of the person performing the behaviour. And either give a new skill or provide a support that's going to increase a skill and decrease the hitting. Because I think we can all agree hitting is not something that's very helpful or appropriate at any age.

So I want to use our example of Johnny who's hitting when he's at daycare. Okay. So we go to the daycare, pretend we're behavioral analysts now. We've been called in, we go to the daycare, and we're going to observe Johnny during playtime because this is when his educators say it's happening the most often. And this is what we see: in A we see that Johnny is playing next to his friend who has his favorite toy car, B

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Johnny hits his friend, C the friend drops the toy car and Johnny starts to play with it.

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So sit with that for a moment. Right. What what changed between A and C? How is A different than C as a result of the hitting in B? What was different between A and C?

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That's right. Okay, so, Johnny, he didn't have the toy car in A, then he hit and then he got the toy car right. It can't , sit with that for a minute. It can't be that simple, can it? Maybe? Let's do another one. So this time, I want you to imagine a child named Jack at daycare who's hitting instructors this time.

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Okay. He's hitting instructors when they tell him to clean up his blocks. And playing with blocks is one of his favourite activities. So usually what happens? Being the good behaviour analyst that we are, we're asking a lot of questions, right? So we ask the educators what happens when this happens? When he does his hitting, and they tell you, well, when Johnny hits, usually we just leave him be.

So you say, okay, I'm going to come and I'm going to observe this behaviour at the daycare and I'm going to try to figure out what supports are needed or what needs what are what are some of Jack's needs that aren't being met that's causing him to do this hitting. So we go and this is what we see.

Jack is playing with the blocks and the daycare instructor says "Jack, it's time to clean up." Jack hits his instructor. The daycare instructor says "Oh, well." And they don't put away the blocks. Jack doesn't put away the blocks. Jack keeps playing with the blocks. So using what we've learned, what's changed between A and C as a result of the behaviour? This one's a little bit trickier.

What's changed between A and C because of what happened in B? So for Jack, he was playing with the blocks, the instructor said to put them away. That was in A. He hit. And then suddenly that instruction to put them away disappeared in C. Right? The blocks don't get put away. He got to keep the blocks so he gets to keep playing.

So look, at this point, you might be saying, "Trevor, that's great, but how do I actually analyze behaviour?" And I have really good news for you. We just did. Okay. We just did. Let me explain. We chose a behaviour, hitting, we looked at what happened before and after. Right? A, B, C. So for Johnny, right? Remember, we saw that Johnny didn't have a car in A, he hit and in C, he got the car. For Jack,

there was an instruction to clean up. He hit in C, the instruction was removed. He got to keep playing right So we covered the behaviour part, right? We know what behaviour is when we covered the analysis part. But now what? There's still the applied part, right? It's called applied behaviour analysis. We covered behaviour and we covered analysis. What about the applied part?

What are we actually going to do? Using what we think we know about behaviour now. We're going to try and apply it to the real world to create some supports and to teach some new skills. So we're going to talk about Johnny's behaviour first. Okay. Do you remember Johnny? Johnny is the one who was hitting to get the toy car.

This is what we think we know. We went we gathered information. This is what we think we know about it. Okay. Johnny was hitting others. And I think we can all agree that this is not a behaviour that's going to be helpful for him. Right? It's not a behaviour. Hitting is

not a behaviour that's going to help him to navigate his world independently, especially as he gets older.

It's likely going to get him into some trouble. So when Johnny hits, we think we know that it's to get the toy car. Great. So here's what we can do before the hitting happens to try to meet that need. Okay, let's give a first you know, kind of one of these first strategies that we can do to try and get in before the hitting happens to meet that need. So, we could make sure that Johnny has lots of toy cars nearby during playtime right?

Remember, the educator said this is when it's happening the most it's during play time, and we saw it happen specifically for a car. So if Johnny has this really, you know, high motivation to play with cars, he really likes it a lot. We can provide him that. We can give him lots of cars nearby. So if he has enough cars to choose from, maybe he doesn't need to do any hitting.

I already have the cars. Here's another way to think about it. What if maybe the need that he has, it isn't just for toy cars, but maybe it's more toys with wheels? There's something about the wheels that Johnny likes. So we could give Johnny a different toy or make sure that there's a different toy nearby that he likes just as much or maybe even more than cars.

Right? To help meet that need. So these are just two easy things that you can do right away that might make hitting to get the cars happen less, but we aren't done yet. Okay. Even with all of our careful planning and efforts to meet Johnny's needs and support his development, he might still hit his friends, right? He might still do it.

And why not? Hitting in the past has worked to get him a toy car or maybe to get other things. Okay, so we need to think about how we can teach Johnny a skill that's going to get him a car, but without hitting his peers, what can we give him? What tool can we put in his toolbox to help him navigate his world independently and without without hitting?

Because that's going to get him into trouble. So if Johnny hits right, even though we've put all of these really good strategies in place, the first thing that we have to do is make sure that when Johnny hits his friend to get the car, which is what we think we know, right? We've gathered our information. When Johnny hits his friend to get the car, we make sure that Johnny doesn't get the car.

Okay. I think we can all agree that hitting is not an appropriate way to communicate with others, and especially if the learner, so if Johnny, has the strengths to use a different form of communication. So in our story, let's assume that Johnny does have these strengths. Let's assume that he's capable of forming some words and he copies other people's words when he hears them.

There's no issues there. So he does have some of the strengths required to use a different form of communication than hitting. So, something that we might do is we might teach Johnny to say "car" when he wants the car instead of hitting to get the car

right. In B he's hitting. We try and change it so that maybe he says "car" to get the car instead.

So now that means that our A-B-C would look like this Johnny is watching his friend play with a toy car. Johnny says "car" and the friend gives the car to Johnny, hopefully. Right. We know sometimes kids don't want to give up stuff, but let's let's assume that they do in our story. Okay. That's what we're hoping for. But I understand that this can be a tough thing to teach, and it takes a lot of practice, and you may even have to practice it one on one with an adult, right?

Johnny might have to practice it one on one with an adult before he tries it with a friend. We can't just assume because he does it a couple of times with us that he's going to go do it with a friend. You might have to practice it a bunch of times, and it might also take a long time before you see any changes.

And so sometimes that feels like nothing's even changing. But for Johnny, maybe it's going to take lots and lots of practice, one on one, where every time he says car, he gets a car. Every single time he says car, he gets a car. So that when he finds himself in that situation with his peers, with his friends, he doesn't think about hitting.

He goes right to saying car, which is a more appropriate way to request things from your friend compared to hitting. Okay, so before we talk about Jack, there's something I want you to think about and it's having to do with when we are picking which skills to teach. So thinking about Johnny, he didn't get to choose the skills to be taught right or the supports to be used.

And this is because in our made up story, he doesn't have really strong enough communication skills maybe to be able to share that information with us. He can do a few words right and copy a few words, but asking a daycare aged student, which skills do you want to work on? What's important to you? These are tough questions, and he might not have the skills to be able to advocate for himself that way.

So how do we pick our interventions or which skills to teach when the person is not necessarily able to tell us? Well, firstly, his caregivers should definitely have some say, right. They should always be involved in that process. And then also your decision should also be based on the needs that the caregivers and your team and you have observed.

And then ask yourself, will the intervention or the skills being taught meet those needs? What's what's the reason why? Why are we targeting this thing at all? Is it useful? What makes this skill useful for Johnny? And again, I think in this case, teaching someone how to request in a way that's not harmful to themselves or others is a skill that's going to serve them well for the rest of their life, not just in daycare.

But each case is different so maybe there are cases that you are involved in or you're caring for someone where the person does have the skills to advocate for themselves.

And if so, they should also be involved in the process of selecting what supports they want and the skills that they want to learn in order to lead a self-determined life.

Okay. So let's get back to Jack. If you remember, Jack is our friend who likes to play with the blocks and he's hitting his instructors when it was time to clean up. And if you remember, it looked like this. So Jack was playing with the blocks. The daycare instructor says it's time to clean up. Jack would hit the instructor, the daycare instructor would say, Oh, well, and wouldn't put away the blocks.

Jack wouldn't put away the blocks. They'd leave and be and he gets to keep playing with the blocks. So the difference between A and C is that the instruction to clean up was taken away. Okay, so thinking about this, what kinds of supports could we give to Jack that would help to meet those needs and reduce the hitting?

We'll get we'll get to the skills and stuff after. But let's let's start at the beginning. What are the things that we can put in place that we can give him that would meet those needs and reduce the hitting that he's doing right now? So let's start with one that I think some of you might already be familiar with.

Okay. So maybe the need that Jack has is the need for a warning. You can support this need by using a time timer, right, to show how much time is left and reminding Jack that when the timer beeps, it will be time to clean up. If a warning is all that Jack needs, right, then this might actually be a really useful support to offer him.

If you don't have a time timer, you can do the same thing using your phone. So what you would do is you would open up your clock and you could put a timer for, say, one minute, and you could go like this "When the phone beeps, it's going to be time to clean up." Maybe that's not quite going to meet his need.

Maybe there's something else going on maybe Jack is uncertain about his day and what is coming next. And that uncertainty causes stress and worry and anxiety and maybe even irritability. It's hard to know. So you could use something like a visual schedule like this, right? That shows Jack what will happen during the day. And these can be simple, hand-drawn schedules like this.

They don't have to be perfect, or it can be real life pictures of the activities but whichever version you choose, it should let Jack know what to expect during the day. So if Jack is daycare aged and let's assume is not reading yet, giving him a visual schedule in handwritten list, like a handwritten list with words is not going to be very helpful.

And these pictures, they may not be clear enough for Jack as they are now, but maybe they are right. You have to kind of play to Jack's strengths. You need to meet his needs, right? Meet him where he's at. So if the visual schedule as it is right here is meeting Jack's need, if it's something that is going to be helpful for him, then go right ahead.

This might be just what he needs to thrive in his day care environment. So using this visual schedule as an example, time to play with blocks is immediately followed by going outside to play. So if Jack likes to go out to outside to play, he might be more willing to clean up the blocks since the next thing is really fun.

So you might try something like this, if you're going to try a visual schedule with Jack in this scenario, right when it's time to play with blocks, right? So right when you get started, you're going to point at the image like this and you're going to say, Right now it's time to play. You can play with blocks if you want.

And then after we're going to go outside. And then a couple of minutes before it's time to actually clean up, let's let's show them again, okay? It's time to clean up the blocks and now it's time to go outside. If the visual schedule like this is the kind of support that Jack needs, you would hope to see him happy to clean up the blocks and go outside right?

If this is helpful, you'll see a difference. But what if, right? There's always the what if. What if even with all of your time timers and your visual schedules, the hitting still happens? Right. And remember, it might still happen. And why not? It used to work. It worked very well before. What should you do then?

So in our case, the blocks still need to be put away. And in my opinion, I think I think that the instructor should put them away. Understandably, this might cause some anger and frustration for Jack, since before when he was hitting, it made the instructor go away in the blocks got to stay out. But my advice to you is to stay consistent and remember that the skill that we're teaching, Jack, is that hitting is not going to keep the blocks out.

And again, just like Johnny, this is a skill that he can take with him for the rest of his life. This isn't something that we just teach at daycare and then move on. This is a skill for the rest of his life. So if I've got your attention and you think that some of these tools might be useful, but you would still like my support, remember, I'm a behaviour analyst.

I work for the Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay. Here's what you can do: So if you're a caregiver, start off by speaking to someone from the clinic or social services and talk to them about what services might be available in your community that are going to be helpful. So, for example, special needs educator, educator at school or daycare, occupational therapists, speech and language pathologist, psychoeducator.

There's there's a long list. Okay. Find out who's available and who could help. You might be asked to answer questions like what does this behaviour look like? Right. You're going to them with a specific problem. What does this behaviour look like? When does it happen? And what have you already tried? And the good news is that we have some practice, right?

The skills that you've practiced here today with me is going to give you some tools to answer those questions when they're asked you. What happened in A? What happened in C as a result of the behaviour? Okay. Thinking about those things. So let's pretend that you're Johnny's that you're Johnny's caregiver. Okay. Remember, Johnny's the little boy who was hitting a daycare to get the toy from his friend.

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So you spoke to a community worker and you were able to get some help at daycare from your community Special Needs Educator and the daycare SNE and an occupational therapist. You had a nice team put together. Okay, you guys come up with an intervention plan together. Remember, because caregivers are involved in that process, and the intervention plan works sometimes, but not always.

So you and the community worker, the daycare staff and the occupational therapist, you all agree that it would be okay to ask for some more help. So let's imagine now that you are the lucky staff member who's going to receive this request from the caregiver. They've gone through their steps and they've come to you with a request for some help.

They'd like to get a behaviour analyst involved. What you're going to do as a staff member is you're going to reach out to your community's clinical advisor from the Disability Programs Specialized Services team, DPSS. That's our team. Okay. And again, you might be asked to answer questions like, What does this behaviour look like? When does it happen?

And what have you already tried? The clinical advisor is then going to take this information to their team. So to the DPSS team, and we're going to determine if it's possible to add a behaviour analyst in this case me to the case. Okay.

Now, there are some things that you need to remember. Okay.

DPSS is a regional team, which means that we don't necessarily live and work in the community, although we might visit sometimes. Okay. So you're going to be working with DPSS, and if a behaviour analyst like myself is involved, you're going to be working with them mostly by distance. Next, and this is really coming from me, behaviour analysis requires teamwork.

So if you work with the behavioural analysts like me, it's important that everyone; that's caregivers, community workers, staff, whoever, they understand that my job is going to be able to teach you to do my job. And then I'm going to supervise you over a period of time. My job is to teach you what I do and then to support you from a distance as you do it.

Okay. It's not a one and done afternoon training. It's ongoing. It's ongoing until, until you've got it under control for yourself. Okay. And then the last one is that remember, support might look different for each person. So support might be teaching new skills

like toileting. It could be teaching activities for daily living, like cooking and cleaning and communication skills like we talked about today.

So depending on the behaviour on a list background, they might be able to help people of different ages and different populations. So we today we talked just about kids, but remember, behavioural analytic tools, all there for is to guide you towards how you can support and meet the needs of the individual. That individual could be daycare age. They could be an adult.

It all comes down to what are their needs and how do we figure out what their needs are if they're not able to share that with us. And those are the tools that we kind of shared that we shared today. So I want to thank you very much for your time today. And that's it for me. Thank you very much.