

## **GUIDELINES FOR CONSUMERS OF APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM**

Autism Special Interest Group (SIG), Association for Behavior Analysis

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The Autism Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Association for Behavior Analysis believes that all children and adults with autism and related disorders have the right to effective education and treatment based on the best available scientific evidence. Research has clearly documented the effectiveness of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) methods in the education and treatment of people with autism. Planning, directing, and supervising effective ABA programs for people with autism requires specific competencies. Individuals with autism, their families, and other consumers have the right to know whether persons who claim to be qualified to direct ABA programs actually have the necessary competencies. Consumers also have the right to hold those individuals accountable for providing quality services, i.e., to ask them to show how they use objective data to plan, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions they use.

Formal credentialing of professional behavior analysts (i.e., registration, certification, or licensure) can provide safeguards for consumers, including means of screening potential providers and some recourse if incompetent or unethical practices are encountered. At present, however, procedures for credentialing professional behavior analysts are in place in only a few states. Until they are implemented more widely, the Autism SIG recommends that consumers seek to determine if those who claim to be qualified to direct ABA programs for people with autism meet the following minimum standards:

- I. The qualifications embodied in the standards for certification as a behavior analyst in the State of Florida, Department of Children and Families, which can be summarized as follows:

### Formal training

- \* Master's or doctorate in behavior analysis, or in psychology, special education, or another human service discipline with an emphasis in behavior analysis
- \* Coursework in principles of learning, principles of behavior, or basic behavior analysis; experimental analysis of behavior; behavioral assessment or methods of direct observation of behavior; applied behavior analysis; single-subject research designs; legal and ethical issues
- \* Supervised practicum, internship, or employment experiences in applied behavior analysis

### Competencies

- \* Ethical considerations
- \* Definition and characteristics of applied behavior analysis
- \* Basic principles of behavior
- \* Behavioral assessment
- \* Descriptive analysis
- \* Demonstrating functional relations
- \* Measurement of behavior
- \* Data display and interpretation
- \* Selection of target behaviors and goals
- \* Behavior change procedures
- \* Generalization and maintenance of behavior change
- \* Managing emergencies
- \* Transfer of technology
- \* Support for behavior analysis services

(For details, see "Identifying qualified professionals in behavior analysis" by G.L. Shook & J.E. Favell in Behavioral Intervention for Young Children with Autism, edited by C. Maurice, G. Green, & S.C. Luce; Austin, TX: PRO-ED, 1996; and "Essential content for training behavior analysis practitioners," by G. L. Shook, F. Hartsfield, & M. Hemingway, The Behavior Analyst, 1996, Vol. 18, pp. 83-91).

II. Additional training and experience in directing and supervising ABA programs for individuals with autism:

\*Formal training and/or self-study to develop knowledge of the best available scientific evidence about the characteristics of autism and related disorders, and implications of those characteristics for designing and implementing educational and treatment programs, including their impact on family and community life.

\*Formal training and/or self-study to develop knowledge of at least one curriculum consisting of: (a) a scope and sequence of skills based on normal developmental milestones, broken down into component skills based on research on teaching individuals with autism and related disorders; (b) prototype programs for teaching each skill in the curriculum, using behavioral methods; (c) data recording and tracking systems; and (c) accompanying materials.

\*At least one full calendar year (full time equivalent or 1000 clock hours [@ 25 hrs/wk for 40 weeks]) of hands-on training in providing ABA services directly to children and/or adults with autism under the supervision of a behavior analyst with a master's or doctorate and at least 5 years' experience in ABA programming for individuals with autism. The training experience should include at a minimum:

- a. Provision of ABA programming to at least 5 individuals with autism.
- b. Designing and implementing individualized programs to build skills in each of the following areas: "learning to learn" (e.g., observing, listening, following instructions, imitating); communication (vocal and nonvocal); social interaction; self-care; academics; school readiness; self-preservation; motor; play and leisure; community living; work.
- c. Using both discrete-trial and incidental or "naturalistic" teaching methods to promote skill acquisition and generalization.
- d. Incorporating the following into skill-building programs: prompting; error correction; discrimination training; reinforcement strategies; strategies for enhancing generalization.
- e. Modifying instructional programs based on frequent, systematic evaluation of direct observational data.
- f. Designing and implementing programs to reduce stereotypic, disruptive, and destructive behavior based on systematic analysis of the variables that cause and maintain the behavior.
- g. Incorporating differential reinforcement of appropriate alternative responses into behavior reduction programs, based on the best available research evidence.
- h. Modifying behavior reduction programs based on frequent, systematic evaluation of direct observational data.
- i. Provision of training in ABA methods and other support services to the families of at least 5 individuals with autism.
- j. Provision of training and supervision (at least 1 hour of supervision per 10 hours of client contact for at least one-half of the training period) to at least 5 professionals, paraprofessionals, or college students providing ABA services to individuals with autism.

The Autism SIG urges consumers to ask prospective directors or supervisors of ABA services to provide documentation of their qualifications in the form of: membership in the Association for Behavior Analysis; degrees; letters of reference from employment supervisors and/or families for whom they have directed ABA programming for similar individuals with autism (with appropriate safeguards for privacy and confidentiality); any registration, certificate, or license in Applied Behavior Analysis per se (i.e., not psychology, special education, education, or another discipline with no emphasis in behavior analysis); results of any competency exams they may have taken in Applied Behavior Analysis; participation in professional meetings and conferences in behavior analysis; publications of behavior analytic research in professional journals. A few workshops, courses, or brief hands-on experiences do not qualify one to practice Applied Behavior Analysis effectively and ethically.

DISCLAIMER: This document suggests guidelines for consumers to use in determining who is qualified to direct Applied Behavior Analysis programs for individuals with autism, as recommended by the Autism Special Interest Group of the Association for Behavior Analysis International. It does not represent the official policy, position, or opinions of the Association, its members, or its Executive Council.