

ONTABA's Parent Bulletin



The Ontario Association For Behaviour Analysis
Newsletter for Parents & Caregivers

There are many complex and challenging decisions for parents and caregivers to make when a member of their family is diagnosed with a disability or presents with behavioural challenges. Where do you begin? How can you tell the beneficial, evidenced-based treatment options from the plethora of information and misinformation available? What does evidence-based mean? What is behaviour analysis? The purpose of this special newsletter for parents and caregivers is to provide clarity and insight into these questions in the hopes that you can be better informed when making treatment decisions for individuals in your family who may require services of this kind.

Sincerely,
The ONTABA Family Outreach Committee
Sub-Committee of Public and Community Relations



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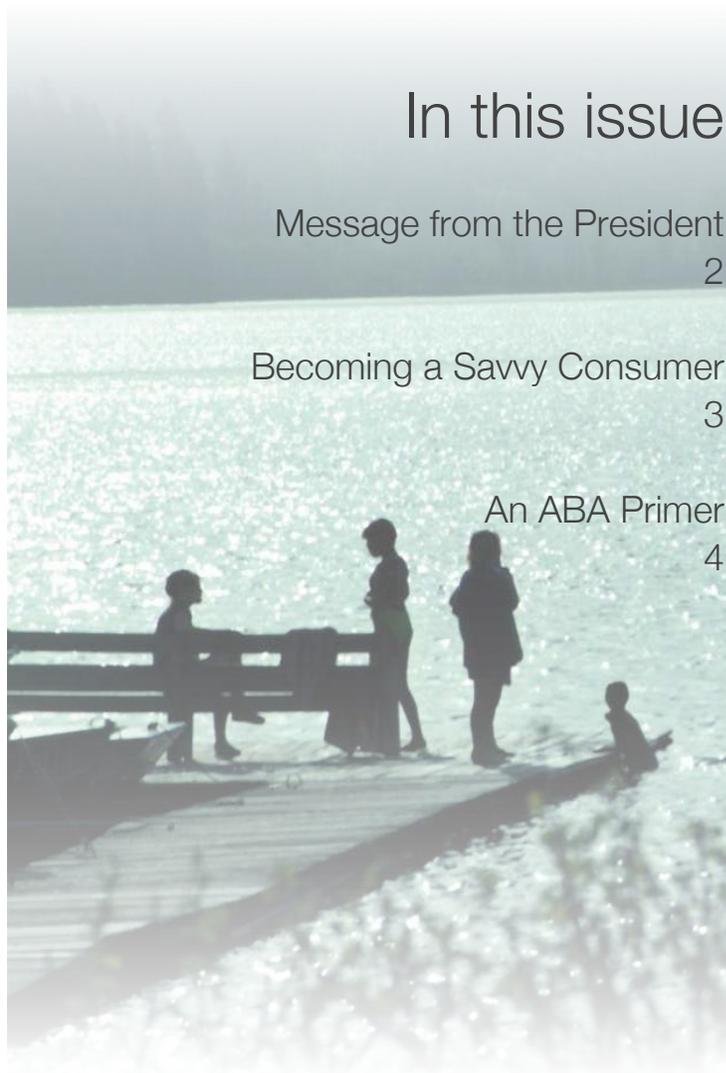
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Message from the President

The Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) is proud to launch a bulletin intended to provide information regarding current issues and research within the field of behaviour analysis. This bulletin is for parents, caregivers, family, and loved ones of those who receive behaviour analytic services in Ontario.

This year, parents, advocates, and groups such as the Ontario Autism Coalition demonstrated their persistence, strength, and dedication in advocating for evidence-based behaviour analytic services for children and youth with autism in our province. We were honoured to stand with parents at each Queen's Park rally and during a very emotional opposition day in May when parents demanded that changes be made. As a result of tireless parent advocacy, the government indicated changes would be made and committed to making behaviour analytic services more equitable, more flexible, and more accessible. Importantly, in late June the government also signaled a commitment to regulating the profession of behaviour analysis in the province. We believe that regulation is a critical step towards ensuring safe and high quality services for all individuals that receive behaviour analytic services in the province.

It is clear that there is still much work to be done and ONTABA is dedicated to continued advocacy to ensure access for all individuals in need of life-changing behaviour analytic services. Continuing the momentum of this spring's autism movement, ONTABA is building

relationships with the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to promote the effective and ethical application of behaviour analysis for families, children, youth, adults, and seniors living with autism, intellectual disabilities, dual diagnoses, behavioural and learning disorders, acquired brain injuries, complex mental illnesses, and other areas of social importance in which applied behaviour analysis has demonstrated positive outcomes.

ONTABA formed our Family Outreach Committee with the purpose of making information about behaviour analysis and evidence-based practices accessible to the broad community that we serve. Through the launch of this bulletin, the Family Outreach Committee will seek to fulfill its mission of providing practical information while also dispelling myths about behaviour analysis.

It is a critical time for parents and caregivers in Ontario. We hope you find this bulletin informative and useful. We look forward to continuing to strengthen our relationship with families and the community at large.

Sincerely,
Louis Busch
President, ONTABA



ONTABA, the Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis, is an Affiliate Chapter of the Association for Behaviour Analysis International. ONTABA currently has members from professions such as education, nursing, health care and psychology.

Our Vision: Fostering a culture of excellence, integrity, and expertise for the advancement and promotion of the science of behaviour analysis.

Our Mission: To demonstrate leadership, knowledge, and innovation in education, training, and research for the ethical and effective application of behaviour analysis.

Becoming a Savvy Consumer

By: Renita Paranjape M.Ed., BCBA
& Leanne Tull M.ADS, BCBA



Receiving a diagnosis of autism is often the first step in a long journey to effective treatment. As a parent, you are often confronted with a gamut of miracle cures, making misleading claims about products and therapies claiming to treat or even cure autism. It can be difficult to figure out which treatments are based on scientific evidence- or what advertised therapies have actually been vetted for use with the autism population. Fortunately, there is a go-to-resource that grapples with the array of considerations surrounding autism treatment.

The Association for Science in Autism Treatment (ASAT) - www.asatonline.org- is a comprehensive website that can help stakeholders and parents make informed choices about autism treatments. Navigating the ASAT website is quite easy. The site contains three main platforms: 1) For Parents & Educators, 2) For Medical Professionals, and 3) For Media Professionals.

Under the **'For Parent & Educators'** platform, there are four helpful sections:

1) What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?: This section provides a brief but comprehensive definition of the characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder, a synopsis of the perceived increase in the prevalence of autism, what we know about the causes of autism today, stories from parents, as well as several videos and resources.

2) Treatment: Here, you will find information about how autism is diagnosed as well as information on the diagnostic criteria from the DSM-5. You will also learn more about specific treatments which are organized in simple, easy to understand categories: a) what works, b) what needs more research, c) what doesn't work or is untested, and d) what doesn't work altogether. You will also find some information on setting up an evidence-based program, as well as some helpful links to resources to assist with this, often overwhelming, task. Making sense of autism treatment is the final piece under the treatment section. Choosing among the multitude of treatments for autism can be a confusing and a tremendous undertaking; however, the intent of this section is to assist and guide you in making important decisions about treatment.

3) Becoming a Savvy Consumer: Not convinced by the misleading opinions of medical professionals, even those with celebrity endorsements? Well, this section provides you with a wealth of information, such as why certain controversial autism treatments haven't been published in a peer-reviewed journals, red flags of pseudoscience, how to prepare to speak with a doctor about education, what to look for in a behavioural service provider, and questions to ask marketers of autism interventions.

4) Education: It certainly takes a village to raise a child! In this section, you will find resources you

may be eager to share with your child's educator, teacher, or support staff. Guidance topics aim to support demanding decisions related to transition planning such as, classroom placement, type of educational format, or steps towards inclusion, while advocacy topics shed light on ways to secure financial assistance. This section also includes an array of lifespan topics including, but not limited to: the use of Applied Behaviour Analysis for older learners, how to increase your child's interests, teaching safety skills, and preparation for employment. Much of the website content is regularly featured in the ASAT newsletter, Science in Autism Treatment, a newsletter published quarterly and available free of charge. The newsletters are generally jam-packed with information. Sections in the newsletter include: Topical Articles, Book Reviews, Research Synopses, Clinical Corner, Interviews, Focus on Science, and Forum. The Clinical Corner section of the newsletter is worth noting, as it highlights questions that parents and teachers have asked ASAT regarding treatment for individuals with autism. Experts in the field respond to these questions by giving examples of intervention strategies that have proven helpful for other children and adults with autism who may have faced similar issues.

If you have a question you would like ASAT to feature, please submit it to: newsletter@asatonline.org

Remember, you don't have to be lured by under-researched treatments; you can support real science in autism treatment. Visit the ASAT website and sign up for the ASAT newsletter to stay informed on effective treatments and approaches for educating an individual with Autism.



An ABA Primer

By: Dr. Reg Reynolds, Ph.D.,
C. Psych

There are about 130 different kinds of abilities. Some children are good in math; for others, math is quite challenging. Some children are good in art, and some find art quite challenging; some children are good in music, and some couldn't carry a tune if their lives depended on it; and so on. Some children are good in language, and some find language quite challenging; some like to socialize, and some find relating to others quite challenging. Autism (now officially incorporated into the broader category of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which includes conditions that used to be referred to by a variety of diagnostic labels, including Autism, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified) is a developmental disorder characterized by a deficit in social communication and by restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities.

Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) don't behave the way they do because they have ASD;

they have been given that diagnostic label because they have communication and social relating deficits (and sometimes other problems as well), and these deficits and their accompanying behaviours tend to isolate a person (hence the term "autism"). The term "autism" is descriptive rather than explanatory.

There are many different approaches to treating children with ASD. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that, for many with ASD, social communication is not learned automatically, but instead has to be taught. Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is based on the past hundred or so years of research into how learning occurs. Technically, it is defined as the science in which procedures derived from the principles of behaviour are systematically applied to improve socially significant behaviour to a meaningful degree and to demonstrate experimentally that the procedures employed were responsible for the improvement in behaviour (Cooper, Heron, and Heward, Applied Behavior Analysis, 1989). It is a science in that it is based on research. It is behavioural in that it is concerned with the learning of observables, which is why it focuses on behaviours rather than thoughts – behaviours can be observed and thoughts cannot.

ABA involves at least three kinds of learning:

1. Classical conditioning is about learning through association: Things that occur together tend to become associated with each other. For example, if you pair yourself and your approval with activities that the child finds enjoyable, your child will

come to associate you and your approval with those enjoyable activities and, as a result, will associate you and your approval with enjoyment.



2. Operant conditioning forms the core of most ABA-based programs. Essentially, it works like this:

If some particular behaviour is followed immediately and consistently by a particular consequence, the child will learn to associate that particular consequence with that particular behaviour.

Certain consequences most often, consequences that the child experiences as rewarding – result in the child learning to produce the behaviour that they follow (presumably with the expectation that they will be followed by reward). We call those kinds of consequences "reinforcers" because they strengthen or "reinforce" the probability that the child will produce that particular behaviour.

If that behaviour-and-reinforcer sequence is associated with some particular antecedent event, such as a request or cue, the child will learn to produce that behaviour when provided with that antecedent.

While consequences that we think the child will find rewarding are usually going to be good reinforcers, this is not always the case, and the only sure way to determine what

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will be reinforcing for any particular behaviour is to present the consequence after that behaviour and see whether the behaviour is strengthened – remember, that is how reinforcement is defined. Nevertheless, for all practical purposes, you should reward any behaviour that you want the child to learn to do.

Experience with this kind of learning has shown that you don't have to worry about always having to reward your child for everything that he/she does, since once a behaviour has been learned, you can and must gradually cut back on how often you specifically reward the child for that behaviour. This is known as "thinning the reinforcement schedule," and it is a crucial part of ensuring that behaviours which are learned stay learned rather than being forgotten. In addition, most of the behaviours that you will be teaching will eventually generate their own rewards – in fact, just being able to do something new can be rewarding in itself, as the child will eventually discover for him or herself, so that you won't have to keep providing the reinforcers yourself. The natural environment will provide the rewards for you.

3. The third type of learning theory involved in ABA is Social Learning

Theory. The work of Bandura and Walters and their students on Social Learning Theory included study of the role of modeling in learning, including video modeling, as a way of teaching social behaviours. The learning principle involved is learning through observation. Learning through observation also has a very important part to play in your child's development.

Unless your child is being provided with ABA-based instruction by someone other than yourself, you will typically make use of each of these kinds of learning within the context of caring for and playing with your child.

In the interest of putting ABA into perspective, here are the principles that govern education:

- Determine what the child already knows.
- Break the material to be learned into relatively small steps.
- Starting where the child is, teach the next steps in each part of the curriculum.
- Measure the change.
- Modify your procedures and teaching targets as necessary to

ensure continuing progress.

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You may notice that they are remarkably similar.

This is an excerpt from the presentation 'An ABA Primer' developed by Dr. Reg Reynolds, Ph.D., C. Psych. Full document available as a PDF. Information contained in this excerpt is taken from the book, Children with Autism: An ABA Primer by Dr. Reg Reynolds available online through Amazon, Chapters, or in Toronto from www.parentbooks.ca



The ONTABA Family Outreach Committee

We hope you found this issue helpful. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions for future content, please let us know! contact@ontaba.org

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The Family Outreach Committee is a sub-committee of Public and Community Relations (Chair: Sarah O'Donoghue). Special thanks to Lesley Barreira (ONTABA Newsletter Chair) for production assistance.

