

**ARE YOU DOING ABA?**

**BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS OF  
EFFECTIVE ABA PROGRAM  
IMPLEMENTATION**

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# THANK YOU

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**SWABA**

Swedish Association for Behavior Analysis

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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- 1. You will be able to state at least three behavioral indicators of effective ABA programming**
- 2. You will be able to state at least three behavioral “red flags”, that may indicate problems with ABA services**
- 3. Behavior of instructor**
- 4. Behavior of the learner**

# PURPOSE OF THIS TALK

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- **The provision of high quality behavior analytic services treatment services requires more than “ABA trained” staff implementing of a set of “ABA” procedures**
- **The biggest threat to the field (IMO), is the tremendous growth in less experienced personnel supervising “ABA” programs who are taught procedures but do not understand the science behind the effective use of these procedures**

# NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT

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- **Knowledge of a range of procedures used in ABA programming is NECESSARY to provide quality services**
- **However it is not SUFFICIENT to ensure quality ABA services**
- **Analysis of where errors occur and where to remediate programs requires a high level of understanding of the basic principles that undergird learning**

# HIGH QUALITY ABA SERVICES

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- **A deep of knowledge/understanding of core strengths and deficits of individuals with ASD**
- **A deep knowledge of curriculum**
  - **What to teach and where to go next**
- **A deep of knowledge/understanding of effective instructional design**
- **A deep knowledge/understanding of the principles and practices of ABA**
  - **The science of behavior**

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- **Before we can talk about quality and effectiveness of individual child programming we need to talk Big Picture**

**SYSTEMS**

**FREE YOU UP**

← — — *to* — — →

**FOCUS ON THE ACTIVITIES & WORK THAT**

**YOU DO BEST.**

# SYSTEMS QUESTIONS

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- **Does the agency, program, school have in place the basic systems to provide ABA services?**
  - **Highly trained staff, curriculum materials, supervision and monitoring of staff and child outcomes, & ...**
- **Who is accountable for learning outcomes?**
  - **Is a person specified how is monitoring your child's data and effectively communicating how they are doing ?**
- **How often is status of learning evaluated systemically?**
  - **How often will you get quantitative and qualitative information about your child?**



# HIGH QUALITY ABA PROGRAMS

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- **Systems for conducting assessments and using these data to guide treatment**
- **Systems for providing feedback on programs monitoring the effects of changes**
- **Systems to ensure programming is correctly focused on relevant objectives and moving forward**

# INDIVIDUAL CHILD PROGRAMMING



# RULE # 1

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- **IN A GOOD ABA PROGRAM:  
CHILDREN MAKE PROGRESS**
- If they have been receiving services for several months and are not making progress or are regressing...
- There is a problem with the program
  - In a good ABA program additional support to the program model should be occurring
  - Program changes
  - Higher level clinical support and monitoring

# IS MY CHILD'S ABA PROGRAM EFFECTIVE?

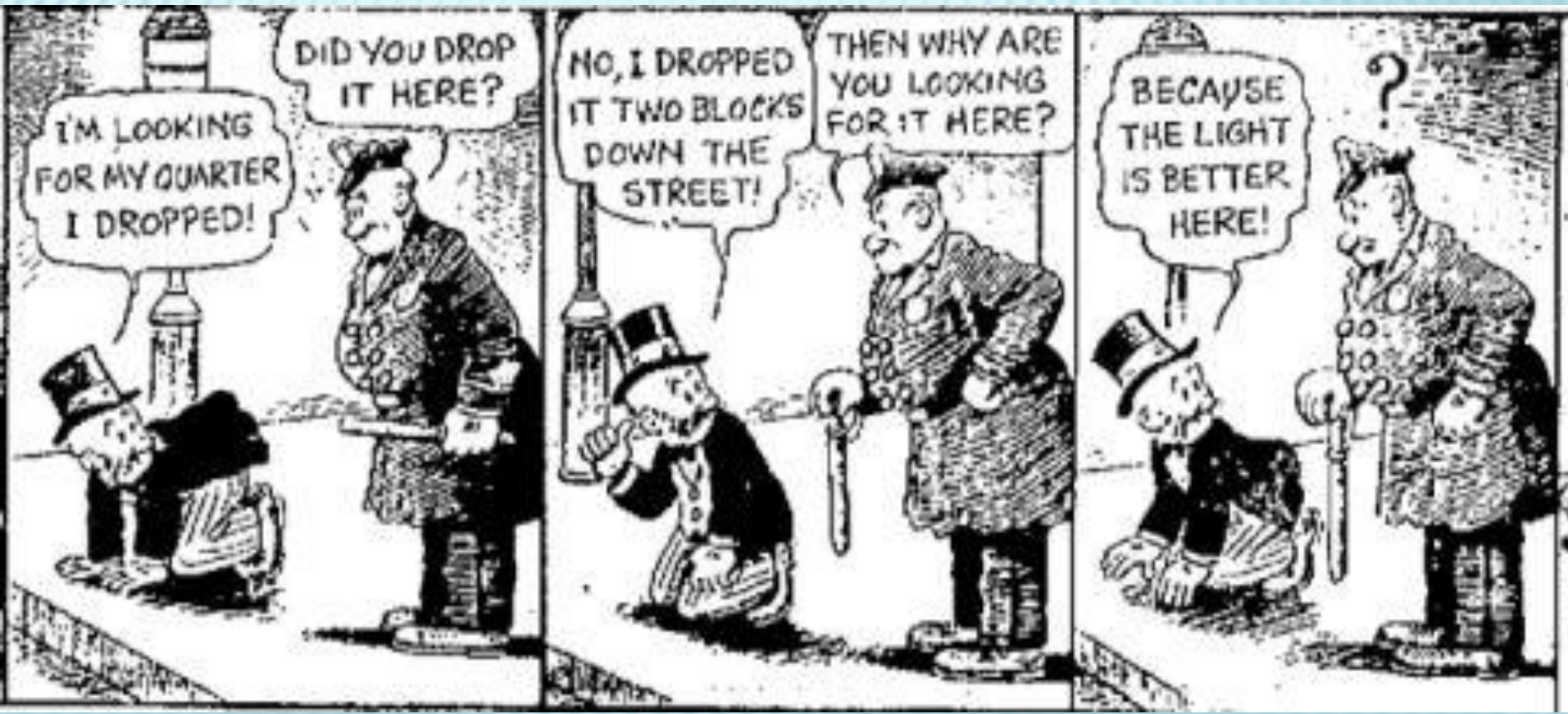
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## ➤ **General Questions:**

- **Is your child making progress on a range of targeted skills?**
  - **Not just one or two but most if not all curriculum areas?**
- **Are you seeing improvements in initiation of expressive communication**
  - **This presumes that programming is in place in this area**
- **Are rates of interfering behavior measurably decreasing ?**
- **Related to core ASD diagnostic features**

# WHY ARE THEY NOT MAKING PROGRESS?

To find the answer you need to look in the right place



# BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS OF GOOD “ABA PROGRAMMING



# WE LOOK AT BEHAVIOR

**If you want to know why learning is or is not happening then you should probably look at the behavior of the learner and the behavior of the teacher**



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SO LET'S TALK  
ABOUT BEHAVIOR



# LEARNER BEHAVIOR

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- **The learner initiates going to the area where instruction occurs or with the instructor**
- **If higher levels of reinforcement are available there compared to other settings, they will go there**
- **The fact that the child avoids that context tells you that you have a reinforcement schedule and quality problem**

# LEARNER BEHAVIOR

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- **Attending to consequences being provided as reinforcers**
  - If they are not looking for it, reaching for it and working hard to get it...
  - It is not a reinforcer for this task or this behavior
  - Watch the learner

# LEARNER BEHAVIOR

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- **Response to first instruction**
- A well structured teaching session has clear SD's and effective use of reinforcement
- When this is true, learners will quickly discriminate which responses produce reinforcement
- Well structured sessions reinforce short response latencies

# LEARNER BEHAVIOR

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- **Responses occur only after the Instruction ( $S^D$ ) has been given**
- No anticipatory responses means that the instructor does not reinforce errors and responding before instruction presentation
- Anticipatory responding = responding to materials rather than verbal instructions and that doing so produces access to reinforcement
- Corollary:
  - No REACH-GRAB-TAKE
  - NO Scrolling

# LEARNER BEHAVIOR

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- **Physical Posture of the Learner:**
  - Sitting up, oriented to the instructor or reinforcers being used
  - If the learner is being frequently prompted to sit up, look at the instructor, and or materials...
  - And these forms of behavior are occurring at high rates...
  
- Its not distractibility – It is reinforcement **SELECTING** these behaviors over sitting and attending

# LEARNER BEHAVIOR

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- **We do not see persistent errors in discrimination responding tasks**
- Inadequate reinforcer for the correct discrimination
- Consequences for correct & incorrect responses are equivalent from the learners perspective
- It's highly likely the “prompting or redirection” used in response to errors is reinforcing

# LEARNER BEHAVIOR

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- **Rate of skill acquisition is relatively consistent across all tasks**
- If we have identified the most effective arrangements of instruction and reinforcement, rate of acquisition across tasks should be relatively uniform
- If it is not: The explanation is in instructional practices – not the learner

# TEACHER BEHAVIOR

**FIRST DAY OF ABA THERAPY, THERAPIST IS LIKE:**

**YOU GET AN IPAD**

**AND YOU GET A TRAIN**

**AND LOOK AT  
THESE BUBBLES**

**LET'S PLAY SOME GAMES**

[facebook.com/behavnorman](https://www.facebook.com/behavnorman)





# TEACHER BEHAVIOR

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- **The ratio of reinforcer delivery is *significantly* higher than ratio of corrective responses**
  - Reminders
  - Redirection
  - Verbal prompts
  
- Response effort for reinforcement

# TEACHER BEHAVIOR

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- **They can describe the “purpose” of each instructional activity and program with respect to the curriculum goal**
- **Why are we doing this ?**
- **Because this skill**
  - **Addresses a core deficit of autism**
  - **Is preventing learner from...**

# TEACHER BEHAVIOR

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- **Instructional programs specify:**
  - Clear  $S^D$
  - Actual actions/behavior of the learner
  - Response to correct skill demonstration
    - Topography of the specific reinforcer to be delivered (magnitude, quality)
  - Response to incorrect skill demonstration
    - Does not involve any forms of the specific reinforcer to be delivered for correct responding
- Instructional Elements Checklist

# TEACHER BEHAVIOR

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- **Little to no use of mentalistic terms to excuse/explain the occurrence of problem behavior**
  - Mood, bad day, transition problems, anxiety, non-preferred, not motivated, sensory needs, tired
- What do all of these terms have in common?
- No actual behavior is described and ...
- They blame the learner for the behavior – not the environment

# TEACHER BEHAVIOR

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- **Can describe topographically the functional reinforcer maintaining problem behavior**
- Provides this form of reinforcement contingent upon adaptive behavior
- Has a regular schedule for delivering it in the context of skill acquisition programs
- Does not provide this form of reinforcement when problem behavior occurs

# TEACHER BEHAVIOR

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- Rate of instruction: Reflects **learner variables** and not solely a function of data collection
  - Data collection does not interfere with instruction
  - Faster learners (probe data)
  - Flexible and dynamic instruction requires that instruction change as a function of learner acquisition or errors
  - Key Metrics: Attending, rate of reinforcement, learner initiation, correct responding, behavior during gaps in instruction

# FOCUS OF INSTRUCTIONAL TARGETS



- Are the core diagnostic features of ASD being targeted or are the majority of instructional objectives related to visual discrimination tasks?
- Working on the child's strengths in a format that is easy for most staff
  - Not addressing the harder and critical deficits

# INITIATION VS RESPONDING

- How much of the vocal/verbal behavior is initiated by the learner?
- If the adult is always talking first..





# OTHER RED FLAGS

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- Intervention for errors and problem behavior involve abstract language procedures not visual support

# OTHER RED FLAGS

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- Reliance on use of questions (above the learners language level and low probability of learner response to these questions



# SUMMARY

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- Learner Behavior:
  - Initiation & Attending
  - Latency of responding
  - Rate of correct responding
- Teacher Behavior
  - Reinforcement
  - Structure of instructional routines
  - Clarity of purpose (curriculum)
  - Communication & Support

# QUESTIONS ???

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