

# Autism Parenting Magazine

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# ABA and Verbal Behavior Therapy: How it Works

By **Angela WEST, MS, BCBA, LBA**

**A LOOK AT ABA AND VB AND HOW THEY MAY BE ABLE TO HELP YOUR CHILD.**

**M**any children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) experience delays or communication struggles. Utilizing Verbal Behavior (VB) methods based on Applied

Behavior Analysis (ABA) and incorporated into your child's therapy program might help build skills for nonverbal/nonspeaking children and parents hoping to increase their child's communication.



## What is verbal behavior (VB)?

Based on the principles of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and the theories of BF. Skinner, VB teaches communication and language. In his book *Verbal Behavior* (1957), Skinner introduced that language is behavior. Focusing VB components within ABA can help young children learn language skills, older children with delayed language skills, or children who use sign language or other assisted communication.

Through this method, children learn language by connecting words with their purposes. Verbal operants are at the core of VB. A verbal operant is commonly utilized in ABA therapy to enhance verbal behavior and yield considerable progress in communication among children with ASD.

Using operants, children can learn to communicate both verbally and nonverbally. Skinner broke down different types of language into four main operants based on how they are learned:

| Operant     | Meaning   | Action   |
|-------------|---|--|
| Mand        | A request – allows students to ask for what they want or need.  | Asking for an “apple” by name when they want it. |
| Tact        | A label or name for an object – draws attention to something. Teaches the student to point out something that they want another person to notice. | Telling someone when they see an “apple.”        |
| Echoic      | Repeated or echoed word – imitation.  | Repeating “apple” when someone says it.          |
| Intraverbal | More complex – answering a question. Involves interaction with others.  | Answering “apple” in response to a question.     |

In addition to the four main operants, ABA therapists may incorporate a listener behavior or listener

responding operant into their work with autistic students.

| Operant           | Meaning               | Action                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Listener Behavior | Following directions. | Pointing to an “apple” when asked. |

## What are verbal behavior programs?

Verbal behavior programs are ABA programs that teach your child to functionally use a word in all types of situations rather than only speak the word. This method offers more than teaching or building vocabulary; it helps the child understand why words are used and how they can be used to communicate their needs or wants. Children come to realize that language serves a purpose that can meet their needs.

For instance, using the apple as an example, the child doesn’t just learn that the fruit is called an apple. They learn if they are hungry, using the word “apple” can fulfill their need for food. Behavior analysts use positive reinforcement during VB to encourage children to reach their goals. They may also use prompts to assist children in achieving the correct answer, a process called “errorless learning”.





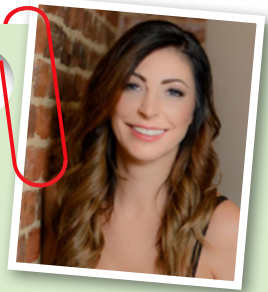
## How can ABA and VB help?

If your child is nonverbal or delayed in their communication, ABA and VB can make a world of difference in achieving successful communication skills. Each provider should begin with an assessment to determine your child's needs, current skill set, and how best to incorporate verbal behavior programming to improve their communication.

While the principles of ABA are constant, programming for each child is unique, and tailored based on an individualized assessment. Over time, this programming will be adjusted to build on the skills your child is learning in therapy.

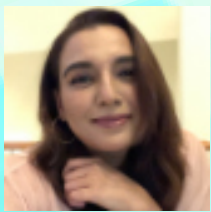
For best results, ensure that the goals you have for your child and the treatment goals outlined by your provider are aligned. It is necessary for caregivers to actively reinforce these therapeutic strategies in all aspects of your child's environment even after

the therapy session ends. The combination of caregiver involvement, ABA, and VB programming will likely lead to the best outcomes for your child.



**Angela West, MS, BCBA, LBA,** Founder and Chief Clinical Officer of Behavioral Framework, is Board Certified and Licensed as a Behavior Analyst in Virginia and Maryland. With over 15 years of mental health and ABA experience, Angela has diverse programming and behavior management knowledge. Angela has a long history of developing and expanding ABA programs in both Maryland and Northern Virginia.

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Join Rachna at [myspectrumacademy.com](http://myspectrumacademy.com) for advice and support tailored to you and your family's individual needs or pick up a copy of her new book:

**Conscious Autism Parenting.**



## 8 Habits of Successful Autism Parenting

As much as we need to care for the needs and extra support our children need, there isn't a chance of that happening for long term, with great energy, lightness and happiness, if you haven't first checked in with yourself.

So let me stop here for a second and ask you the very important and much needed question?

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