

## **Pyramid Certified Classrooms: Incorporating Communication into ABA Classrooms While Keeping Everyone Smiling!**

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Given the significant increase in the incidence of learners with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) over the past decade, most if not all school-based Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) will have students with ASD diagnoses on their caseload. Further, it has become increasingly common for behavior analysts to be a member of the educational team. As such, it is not only important that SLPs be able to collaborate effectively with the behavior analysts on the team, but also use the strategies derived from Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to strengthen our own treatment and assessment protocols.

ABA is defined as, “The process of systematically applying interventions based upon the principles of learning theory to improve socially significant behaviors to a meaningful degree and to demonstrate that the interventions employed are responsible for the improvement in behavior.”(Baer, Wolf and Risley, 1968; Sulzer-Azaroff & Mayer, 1991). There are many misconceptions regarding ABA. A common fallacy is related to the idea that ABA refers only to discrete trial training. Though it is true that discrete trials are one aspect of ABA, the field encompasses a wide variety of other valuable teaching components, such as prompting strategies, error correction and generalization. These terms will be defined for the audience and practical examples of the application of these concepts in relation to communication lessons will be explored.

Further, a functional approach to ABA, known as the Pyramid Approach to Education, will be presented. The Pyramid Approach to Education, developed by Dr. Andy Bondy, is a unique model of teaching that establishes effective learning environments for individuals with ASD and/or related disabilities. The Pyramid Approach is based on two types of learning elements: structural and instructional. The structural elements form the base of the Pyramid, creating an environment conducive to learning. The base elements include functional activities; reinforcement systems; functional communication and identification and replacement of contextually inappropriate behaviors (CIBS). The instructional elements form the top of the Pyramid and include information relevant to the creation of effective lessons including generalization; lesson formats; teaching/prompting strategies and error correction. All elements involve data-based decision making. When all of the elements are combined, the approach results in success in a range of settings. Specific examples of each Pyramid element will be described to illustrate the use within communication lessons.

Following an overview of this model, an intensive certification process, known as Pyramid Certified Classrooms, will be explored. This model includes training and consultation regarding implementation of all elements. Educational team progress is monitored through ratings and self-assessment on the Pyramid Classroom Certification Checklist. Representative data from one program will be shared, demonstrating significant positive changes that were completed within a single school year.

Participants in this workshop will leave with a very practical structure for creating or improving their current speech and language activities. Further, this workshop will allow participants to gain a better understanding of behavioral principles and jargon, in order to better collaborate with behavior analysts. Increased knowledge and collaboration of these topics will ultimately result in increased student progress!

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*Model: The Pyramid Approach to Education*

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