

Professional Competency Standards for Providing ABA Services to Children on the Autism Spectrum (a CT FEAT parent; added 2013)

It is well established that, for children on the autism spectrum, the most effective interventions are based on applied behavior analysis (ABA). Unfortunately, parents are sometimes told that their child is receiving an “ABA program” when the professionals involved don’t have the necessary competence to provide the service.

How can a family determine if a professional working with their child has the requisite training and skills? *Connecticut Public Act 10-175*, which became law in July of 2012, establishes minimum professional standards for providing ABA services to children with autism who have either an IEP or Section 504 Plan.

The Legal Requirements

The full text of *An Act Concerning Special Education* can be found at:

<http://govrel.uconn.edu/summary/2010/2010PA-00175-R00HB-05425-PA.pdf>. The relevant language of the *Act* begins in Section 2, providing that if a child on the autism spectrum has an IEP or Section 504 Plan requiring applied behavior analysis services then the provider of the service needs to demonstrate competency in one of the following ways: 1) be a person who is licensed by the Department of Health or certified by the Department of Education and whose professional licensure or certification includes applied behavior analysis within its scope of practice; or 2) be certified by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) or Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA), provided the latter is working under the supervision of a BCBA.

The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB)

The BACB’s website (<http://www.bacb.com/index.php?page=100155>) lists all certified BCBA’s and BCaBA’s. So it’s easy enough to verify whether someone working with your child is appropriately credentialed. But, if your school has hired someone who is not a behavior analyst (i.e. not certified by the BACB), how can you determine whether providing ABA is truly within the “scope of practice” of whatever license or certification they do have?

The Meaning of “Scope of Practice”

There are two things to consider: 1. What does scope of practice mean? 2. What are the competencies of a behavior analyst according to the BACB? By answering these questions and then looking at the education & experience of the professional, a person should be able to determine if providing ABA services to a child with autism is within the professional’s scope of practice.

Wikipedia states: “Scope of practice can be easily identified by three categories. If requirements for practicing a skill or profession satisfy all three requirements then it is within that person’s scope of practice:

1. **Education and training** — Has the person been educated academically or on-the-job and have documentation proving education to do the item in question?

2. **Governing body** — Does your state, district, province or federal government that oversees the skill or profession allow (or not explicitly disallow) the item in question?
3. **Institution** — Does the institution allow a person or their profession to do the item in question?"

As of the present date (March 2013), Connecticut does not have a governing body that oversees Behavior Analysis. Hence, we must look at a professional's education, training and experience to determine if providing ABA services is within their scope of practice.

Educational Requirements

The educational requirements stipulated by the BACB, which are detailed at <http://www.bacb.com/index.php?page=158>, provide a helpful frame of reference. In order to sit for the BCBA exam, an applicant must have a master's degree in a related field and have completed the following course of study:

Coursework: The applicant must complete 225 classroom hours of graduate level instruction (see Acceptable Coursework below) in the following content areas and for the number of hours specified:

- a. Ethical considerations 15 hours
- b. Definition & characteristics and Principles, processes & concepts - 45 hours
- c. Behavioral assessment and Selecting intervention outcomes & strategies - 35 hours
- d. Experimental evaluation of interventions - 20 hours
- e. Measurement of behavior and Displaying & interpreting behavioral data - 20 hours
- f. Behavioral change procedures and Systems support 45 hours
- g. Discretionary 45 hours"

Experience Providing Behavior Analytic Services

Scope and practice also requires experience providing behavior analytic services. The BACB lists competencies in ten content areas:

<http://www.bacb.com/Downloadfiles/TaskList/207-3rdEd-TaskList.pdf>

Some of these competencies refer to the knowledge the professional should have gained in their course work while others refer to demonstrated experience applying this knowledge. This is where a parent can look at a professional's experience and ask if they have performed these tasks with individuals with autism and how often they have done so. The competencies state the professional should be able to use their knowledge to:

1. Assess behavior including organizing data and completing a functional analysis of behavior.
2. Experimentally evaluate treatment making sure they do so in an ethical manner.
3. Measure an individual's behavior in an appropriate manner.
4. Display and interpret the data collected on the individual's behavior.
5. Select intervention outcomes and strategies taking into consideration the resources available, the clients' preferences, and the efficacy of treatment based on research.
6. Plan and monitor behavior change treatments using proven strategies in an ethical manner.

7. Train and support those who work directly with the child and collaborate with others who provide treatment to the individual.

Behavior Analysis is an Applied Science

Always keep in mind that the “A” in ABA stands for “APPLIED.” This means that expertise in implementing this powerful teaching technology cannot be fully acquired in books or classrooms. Anyone who claims that it is within their “scope of practice” to develop and supervise an ABA program for children with autism must, in addition to satisfying the above described educational requirements, be able demonstrate extensive experience APPLYING these procedures in the real world with real children or adults.

Helpful References:

Behavior Analyst Certification Board: www.bacb.com

Revised Guidelines for Consumers of Applied Behavior Analysis Services to Individuals with Autism and Related Disorders Autism Special Interest Group (SIG):
http://www.abainternational.org/special_interests/autism_guidelines.asp

What is ABA? <http://www.shapingbehavior.com/whatisaba.html>

Massachusetts Association for Applied Behavior Analyst’s Position on Licensure of Behavior Analysts:
http://www.massaba.net/images/pdf/maph_support_of_hb_1901.pdf

How do I Hire a Qualified Behavior Analyst? From Reinforcement Unlimited:
<http://www.behavior-consultant.com/discuss-hireBA.htm>