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# PROMISING PRACTICES



## Applied Behavior Analysis uses scientific principles to produce behavior change

Three years ago, [The Arc of the Ozarks](#) introduced Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to improve its services for more than 800 individuals, many of whom have autism spectrum diagnoses or dual diagnoses (developmental disabilities and psychiatric diagnoses). The organization provides residential, therapeutic recreation, community integration, and employment programs in the Springfield, Missouri, region.

ABA draws on scientific principles of behavior, such as positive reinforcement, that are based on empirical research. ABA is a proven approach to decreasing an individual's problematic behaviors and increasing socially appropriate behaviors and skills. The goals of ABA include producing a socially significant change in behavior. ABA is appropriate:

- For persons at any age from infancy to adulthood.
- In any setting, including biological and adoptive homes, residential placements, schools, vocational settings, childcare centers, and other community settings.

The Arc of the Ozarks' ABA is overseen by three board-certified behavior analysts who provide instruction on consumers' individualized treatment Integrity Checklists. The checklists summarize all caregiver skills in each consumer's behavior support plan. Behavior analysts then model interventions for caregivers and provide opportunities for caregivers to practice the interventions.

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### About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

Find current and past issues of ECS Promising Practices at:

[www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices](http://www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices)

Issues are categorized by topic: Business Practices, Community Services, and Employment Services.

When developing behavior service plans, behavior analysts spend time in consumers' natural settings—their homes, schools, day programs, community locations, and job sites. Behavior analysts set up practical data collection systems for caregivers to use, which combined with that collected by the behavior analysts helps monitor progress in behavior change.

### **Training is vital for successful ABA implementation**

A recent [CARF International](#) survey report commended The Arc of the Ozarks, "The organization's ABA department ensures that staff is well trained on evidence-based interventions through a comprehensive process it has developed."

Sara Ibbetson, lead behavior analyst at The Arc of the Ozarks, explains, "All staff members working in specialized programs attend a three-class sequence on basic ABA principles, which consists of Principles of Behavior, Behavior Function Basics, and Antecedent Manipulations. These courses include active responding exercises and guided discussion for staff members."

### **Successful use of ABA requires collaboration between areas of practice**

Staff members at all levels of The Arc of the Ozarks work together to carry out ABA. The CARF survey report summarized how their tasks interact with each other: "After a behavior service plan is developed, they [behavior analysts] meet with the staff one on one to verbally review the plan and strategies. Staff observes and refers to a corresponding Integrity Checklist while someone from the ABA department carries out the plan. The behaviorists then use the Integrity Checklist to monitor staff members as they carry out the plan. This checklist results in a score and helps staff members to see areas they need to improve in order to effectively carry out the plan. The ABA department continues to work with staff members until they have demonstrated success. The Integrity Checklist it has developed for each plan provides a concrete measure for the strategies on the plan and provides data on the effectiveness of their training methodologies."

She continues, "These in-house training procedures are supported by behavior analytic research and represent current best practices in the field."



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## **A variety of services dovetail with each other to provide comprehensive support**

The range of ABA services provided by The Arc of the Ozarks includes:

- **Functional behavior assessments** identify maladaptive target behaviors. The assessments lead to positive behavior support procedures to reduce inappropriate behaviors while increasing appropriate, functionally equivalent replacement behaviors.
- **Analogue functional analyses** allow behavior analysts to examine target behaviors in a controlled setting.
- **Behavior support plans** focus on teaching and reinforcing appropriate behaviors by modifying the consumer's environment. Recommended interventions are unique to each individual consumer, situation, and target behavior.
- **Caregiver training and follow-up** are essential when caregivers participate in a behavior support plan. Training generally occurs in the consumer's home and focuses on assisting caregivers with learning interventions. Training includes oral and written instruction, demonstration of caregiver skills, guided practice, and immediate feedback.
- **Skills assessments** measure academic and verbal tasks that consumers have mastered or not yet mastered. The assessments provide specific, measureable results to determine progress.
- **Functional communication training** teaches individuals appropriate ways to communicate and replace inappropriate behaviors.
- **Discrete trial training** teaches skills in a controlled and systematic manner. The training is individualized to the needs of each learner and provides repeated learning opportunities.

The Arc of the Ozarks' ABA department has established relationships with several local public schools, churches, and developmental disability service organizations. The Arc of the Ozarks also hosts a local Behavior Analyst Certification Board®-approved practicum experiences through a local college. The internship not only assists in developing future behavior analysts, but it also allows a greater number of consumers to receive ABA services.

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For more information about ABA at The Arc of the Ozarks, contact Sara Ibbetson, lead behavior analyst, at [sibbetson@thearcoftheozarks.org](mailto:sibbetson@thearcoftheozarks.org), or (417) 864-7887.

The Arc of the Ozarks' website is at [www.thearcoftheozarks.org](http://www.thearcoftheozarks.org).

[www.carf.org](http://www.carf.org)