

# History of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

## Introduction

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a scientific approach to understanding and modifying behavior. It is widely used in the treatment of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities. The field has evolved over decades, with contributions from psychology, behaviorism, and education.

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## Early Foundations of ABA

### 1. Behaviorism and Classical Conditioning (Late 1800s – Early 1900s)

ABA has its roots in **behaviorism**, a psychological approach that studies observable behavior rather than internal mental states. Key figures in early behaviorism include:

- **Ivan Pavlov (1890s)**: Conducted experiments on classical conditioning, showing that behaviors could be learned through association (Pavlov, 1927).
  - **John B. Watson (1913)**: Introduced the idea that human behavior is shaped by the environment and can be conditioned through reinforcement (Watson, 1913).
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### 2. Operant Conditioning – B.F. Skinner (1930s-1950s)

One of the most influential figures in ABA history is **B.F. Skinner**, who introduced the concept of **operant conditioning** (Skinner, 1938).

- He discovered that behaviors could be shaped using **reinforcement (rewards)** and **punishment**.
  - His work led to the development of **positive reinforcement**, a fundamental principle in ABA.
  - Skinner's research on **behavior modification** was applied in various settings, including education and therapy (Skinner, 1953).
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## The Birth of Applied Behavior Analysis (1960s-1970s)

### 3. The Work of Baer, Wolf, and Risley (1968)

In 1968, **Baer, Wolf, and Risley** published a landmark paper, "*Some Current Dimensions of Applied Behavior Analysis*," which officially defined ABA as a scientific discipline (Baer et al., 1968). They outlined seven key principles of ABA:

1. **Applied** – Focused on socially significant behaviors.

2. **Behavioral** – Measurable and observable behaviors.
  3. **Analytic** – Demonstrates a clear relationship between interventions and behavioral changes.
  4. **Technological** – Uses clear, replicable procedures.
  5. **Conceptually Systematic** – Based on behavioral principles.
  6. **Effective** – Produces meaningful change.
  7. **Generality** – Results last over time and across environments.
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#### 4. Ivar Lovaas and Early Autism Therapy (1970s-1980s)

- **Dr. Ivar Lovaas**, a psychologist at UCLA, applied ABA techniques to children with autism.
  - In **1987**, Lovaas conducted a study showing that **early intensive behavioral intervention (EIBI)** could significantly improve language and social skills in children with autism (Lovaas, 1987).
  - His work laid the foundation for **modern ABA therapy for autism**.
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#### ABA in Modern Times (1990s-Present)

##### 5. Growth and Standardization (1990s-2000s)

- The **Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB)** was established in **1998** to create ethical and professional guidelines for ABA practitioners.
- The use of **ABA therapy expanded worldwide**, especially in the treatment of autism.

##### 6. Recognition and Insurance Coverage (2010s-Present)

- In 2014, the **U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** recognized ABA therapy as a medically necessary treatment for autism (CMS, 2014).
  - Many countries and states now **mandate insurance coverage** for ABA therapy.
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#### Conclusion

ABA has come a long way from its roots in behaviorism to becoming the **gold standard therapy for autism** and other developmental disorders. Today, it continues to evolve, incorporating new research and ethical practices to improve individuals' lives.

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#### References

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