

Skill Acquisition Programs

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WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will explore skill acquisition programs by defining and discussing the following:

1. Play Skills
2. Motor Skills
3. Adaptive and Safety Skills
4. Social Skills
5. Cognition Skills
6. Academic Skills

1. Play Skills

Individuals with ASD sometimes require specific teaching through interventions such as modeling, shaping, chaining, and prompting to develop certain skills.

Children with ASD might have difficulty learning different play skills. There are many types of play skills including:

- independent play
- parallel play,
- cooperative play
- pretend play

These skills can be taught using modeling and imitation training to demonstrate the skill and/or prompting to guide the patient on how to perform the skill.



HINT

Access the following article for further reading on this type of skill acquisition program.

Quigley, J., Griffith, A. K., and Kates-McElrath, K. (2018). A comparison of modeling, prompting, and a multi-component intervention for teaching play skills to children with developmental disabilities. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 11, 315-326.

2. Motor Skills

ABA can also be used to teach motor skills, both actions and movements.

Modeling and imitation training can be used to teach:

- visual motor skills (coordinate eyes and body movements)
- oral motor skills (movements of the mouth – tongue, lips, jaw, cheeks)
- gross motor skills (large movements, such as running, jumping, and skipping)
- fine motor skills (small movements, such as buttoning, grasping, and writing)

Chaining might also be used with movements and activities that can be broken down into individual steps.



Access the following article for further reading on this type of skill acquisition program.

Kirby, K. C., & Holborn, S. W. (1986). Trained, generalized, and collateral behavior changes of preschool children receiving gross-motor skills training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 19(3), 283–288.

3. Adaptive and Safety Skills

Adaptive and safety skills are a large group of skills that can include life skills such as toilet training, brushing your teeth, doing your laundry, and planning/preparing meals and safety skills such as asking for help, how to safely cross a street, and identifying community signs.

These skills can be taught in a variety of ways such as shaping, chaining, modeling, and prompting. The way the skill will be taught depends upon the patient's prerequisite skills, behavior, and environment. Your BCBA will create an individualized plan that best fits the patient's needs to teach these skills.



Access the following article for further reading on this type of skill acquisition program.

Bergstrom, R., Najdowski, A. C., & Tarbox, J. (2012). Teaching children with autism to seek help when lost in public. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 45(1), 191–195.

4. Social Skills

Social skills can range from greetings to gaining attention to understanding figures of speech to dealing with conflict. There are many different assessments that can help to determine gaps in skills so that the BCBA can identify what specific social skills to prioritize for the patient's individual needs.

These skills can be taught through modeling, chaining and prompting. As with the other skills, the best approach depends upon the individual patient's needs.



Access the following article for further reading on this type of skill acquisition program.

Hanley, G. P., Heal, N. A., Tiger, J. H. and Ingvarsson, E. T. (2007). Evaluation of a classwide teaching program for developing preschool life skills. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 40, 277-300.

5. Cognition Skills

Cognition skills include thoughts, emotions, knowledge, and beliefs. This can involve both identifying your own and making inferences about others. To develop cognition skills, we might teach:

- perspective taking
- identifying or tacting emotions
- goal setting
- self-regulation
- understanding intentions and sarcasm.

Programs may also use prompting and fading, modeling, and chaining.



Access the following article for further reading on this type of skill acquisition program.

Stauch, T. A., Plavnick, J. B., Sankar, S. and Gallagher, A. C. (2018), Teaching social perception skills to adolescents with autism and intellectual disabilities using video-based group instruction. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 51, 647-666.

6. Academic Skills

Finally, we can use ABA to teach academic skills. This might start with teaching pre-academic skills such as responding to their name and attending to a task. Academic skills also include skills specific to individual subjects, such as:

- math (numbers and operations)
- reading (vocabulary)
- writing (sentence structure).



Access the following article for further reading on this type of skill acquisition program.

Stanley, C. R., Belisle, J. and Dixon, M. R. (2018), Equivalence-based instruction of academic skills: Application

to adolescents with autism. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 51, 352-359.



BIG IDEA

Teaching new skills is an important part of ABA to build the patient's repertoire, promote independence, expand the access to new environments and experiences, and increase short- and long-term access to reinforcement. Before teaching a new skill the BCBA will use assessments to evaluate and identify the patient's abilities and needs. Then, the BCBA will create an individualized program for the patient to learn these new skills.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about skill acquisition programs that teach different types of skills, such as **play skills, motor skills', adaptive and safety skills, social skills, cognition skills, and academic skills.** An article related to each type of skill acquisition program was also included in this lesson.