

# Verbal Behavior

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will explore verbal behavior by defining and discussing the following:

1. Verbal vs. Vocal Behavior
2. The Importance of Verbal Behavior

## 1. Verbal vs. Vocal Behavior

In ABA, “verbal” is not the same as “vocal.” Verbal behavior is behavior that results in reinforcement from another person. It refers to any behavior for which the reinforcement is mediated by another person, who has been trained to respond.

Verbal behavior is an approach that focuses on a word’s function instead of its form, like expressive vs. receptive language.

It is important to note that not all vocal behavior is verbal behavior. Some vocal behavior is not emitted for the result of gaining socially mediated reinforcement.

➡ **EXAMPLE** You might be driving alone in your car and decide to sing along with the radio. This is vocal behavior. You are using your vocal cords to sing, but you are not gaining any socially mediated reinforcement from another listener or passenger in the car.

In addition, not all vocal behavior requires a listener.

➡ **EXAMPLE** Suppose you are alone, receive an exciting email, and exclaim aloud “YES!” This, too, is vocal behavior. You said it aloud, but it does not require a listener to be present in order for you to vocally say something.



## THINK ABOUT IT

What is an example of a “vocal” but not “verbal” behavior that you have engaged in recently? For instance, singing in the shower, talking to yourself while completing a task, etc.

Verbal behavior (remember, this is for the purpose of gaining socially mediated reinforcement) can include a variety of behaviors. Individuals with ASD have social communication deficits, and many are able to communicate better through alternative methods.

Alternative Method	Example
Gestures	Pointing to something you would like to order on a menu.
Spoken language	Saying “Hello” to a friend.
Augmentative communication devices	Using an app on an iPad to order a hamburger.
PECS	Using a picture icon of a glass of milk to request some milk.  (Stands for Picture Exchange Communication System and is a specific alternative communication system ( <a href="https://pecs.com/">https://pecs.com/</a> ))
Sign language	Saying “My name is Joanna,” using American Sign Language (ASL).



## THINK ABOUT IT

What is an example of a “verbal” but not “vocal” behavior that you have engaged in recently? For instance, have you tapped your toe to indicate impatience to your significant other, waved hello to a friend, or clapped your hands to indicate pride to your child? All of these communicate something and receive some sort of reinforcement by another person who responds, by hurrying up when you tap your toe, waving in return when you wave, or smiling when you clap for them.

## Video Transcription

[VOCALIZING] I want yogurt.

Sure, you can have yogurt. Thank you.

[HUMMING JAWS THEME]

Shark.

You are so smart!

Ready, set--

Go!

--Go! Uh-oh.

Cookie. Nice asking. Way to go.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Verbal Behavior

Any behavior for which the reinforcement is mediated by another person, who has been trained to respond

## 2. The Importance of Verbal Behavior

In verbal behavior, the focus is on the word's (or gesture, sign, icon, etc.) **FUNCTION** instead of its **FORM**, as with expressive or receptive language. A word's function means we focus on how the word is used (to greet someone) rather than the word itself (Hello).

So, why is verbal behavior important? Well, acquiring language is more than learning to say a word or a definition.

➞ **EXAMPLE** For instance, identifying a dog when you see one in the neighbor's yard, at the dog park, and at the playground rather than only saying "dog" when shown a picture of one.

In addition, it is essential to teach the patient to use words in a meaningful way.

➞ **EXAMPLE** For instance, requesting a sandwich when they are hungry rather than simply identifying a picture of a sandwich.

The development of communication frequently leads to the decrease of other challenging behavior by the individual.

➞ **EXAMPLE** For example, asking for a break instead of hitting, or asking to go play with friends rather than throwing materials.

We have established that many patients with ASD or other developmental delays have delayed language. One of the most basic skills for anyone is to be able to communicate needs (thirst, hunger, cold, hot, etc.). So, every patient needs to be able to make their needs known, whether this is vocally, with sign language, with a communication device, or through icons.

In the next lesson, we will look at some of the different verbal operants: the mand, tact, echoic, and intraverbal. This is a brief introduction to just some of the verbal operants. Future coursework in ABA will dive a lot deeper.



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about verbal behavior, which is behavior that results in reinforcement from another person. You explored the difference between **verbal and vocal**, noting that some vocal behavior is not emitted for the result of gaining socially mediated reinforcement, and not all vocal behavior requires a listener. You also learned about the **importance of verbal behavior**, given that every patient needs to be able to make their needs known.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Verbal Behavior

Any behavior for which the reinforcement is mediated by another person, who has been trained to respond.

