Course 1

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Autism Overview:

Autistic Spectrum Disorders, including Asperger's Disorder and Pervasive Developmental Disorder, are neurological disorders that can have a significant impact on all areas of an individual's life, including language, social, and cognitive abilities. In this module, the most common characteristics of autism will be discussed in detail, including how those characteristics differ from those of typically-developing peers and how they impair a child's ability to learn.

ABA Overview:

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a science of human behavior in which empirically-validated principles are used to improve a wide variety of socially-significant behaviors. ABA technologies have far-reaching effects for a wide variety of people in numerous settings. Specifically for children with autism, ABA has proven to be the most powerful treatment. This module will introduce the broader concepts of ABA as a science and how those relate to treatment packages for children with autism, before more specific applications are detailed in later modules.

Common ABA Approaches:

The principles of Applied Behavior Analysis can be utilized to effectively improve behaviors across an enormous scope of human performance, including basic behavioral issues, simple motor tasks, as well as abstract cognitive skills and sophisticated social behaviors. In this module, three specific applications of ABA will be introduced—discrete trial teaching, natural environment teaching (or incidental teaching), and the use of task analyses.

Verbal Behavior:

In 1957, psychologist B. F. Skinner published Verbal Behavior in which he analyzed language based on the functional analytic principles of behavior analysis. In essence, a Verbal Behavior analysis of language is based on a learner's current environment and past history—that is, the relationship between a person's language behavior and the environment in which it occurs. In this module, this analysis of verbal behavior will be explained, as well as the importance of using this type of analysis as a part of language intervention for children with autism.

Instructions: Complete the guided notes for each video. Return them, with the DVDs to the AZA United Program Team for review. One unit of professional development credit will be given for each packet of guided notes accurately completed.

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Prompting:

Prompting procedures include a variety of assistive cues that instructors use to promote accurate responding from learners. While the success of all skill-building interventions is ultimately measured by a student's independence, prompting is a necessary means to that end, and the precise use of those procedures is critical. This module will include specific information and examples related to the following: rationale for using prompts, different types of useful prompts, and prompting hierarchies.

Fading:

While prompts are needed to cue correct responding initially, independent responding cannot occur until those prompts are gradually removed. The process by which this occurs is referred to as fading. Basically, fading is the process by which independence is increased by using less and less "intrusive" prompts, until none are needed. This module includes the specific strategies for instructors to use prompts while always actively working towards the fading those prompts.

Shaping:

Shaping an individual's behavior involves differentially reinforcing approximations of a desired behavior. That is, over many opportunities, by providing reinforcement for behaviors that are gradually and successively closer to the desired behavior, performance can be shaped over time. In this module, shaping procedures and examples will be presented in detail, including several that are relevant for many children with autism, such as sitting and responding to instruction, as well as waiting for and/or giving up reinforcement.

Errorless Teaching:

Errorless teaching is an antecedent strategy. This means that errorless teaching procedures occur before errors—prompts are used to prevent a student from making errors, then faded on subsequent "trials." Instruction and video examples in this module detail the use of errorless teaching procedures, which are presented in a most-to-least prompting hierarchy (differing from more-commonly used least-to-most prompting hierarchies), and the particular importance of this strategy for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

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Reinforcement:

Reinforcement is the process by which the strength of a behavior is increased as a result of some consequence(s) to that behavior. In many cases, when a consistent and immediate preferred consequence is provided following the occurrence of some behavior, the strength of that behavior (i.e., frequency, intensity, duration) will increase. The concept of reinforcement is a critical one for children with autism because motivation is an important element in skill building. In this module, the concept of reinforcement will be introduced, defined, and modeled. Additionally, viewers will learn strategies to assess new and changing reinforcers, as well as procedures to use that reinforcement to affect a range of behaviors (i.e., language, social, cognitive, etc.).

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Discrete Trial Teaching:

Discrete trial teaching (DTT) is a specific application of Applied Behavior Analysis; the two are NOT the same thing. DTT involves teaching skill components in a very systematic manner, with repeated practice and positive reinforcement. One discrete trial is a teaching unit that includes an instruction, a student response, and a consequence (though a prompt is often needed to cue the student response), then a short pause before the next trial. Discrete trial teaching involves the repeated presentation of many trials within an instructional session. This module provides instruction and examples related to using DTT in combination with other ABA strategies to teach a variety of skills.

Therapy Checklist:

Instructors are often overwhelmed when initially learning to apply the principles of behavior analysis and specialized applications such as discrete trial teaching. In this module, the "Therapy Checklist" will be reviewed in detail, providing instructors with a stepwise and at-a-glance summary of ABA and DTT as applied to teaching children with autism.

Behavioral momentum:

In physics, momentum is a measure of the motion of an object based on mass and velocity—essentially, the object's resistance to change. In other words, it is easier to keep an object moving once it has gained momentum. Behavioral momentum is the behavioral analogy drawn from that. For example, it is easier to keep a student participating once he/she has gained momentum (i.e., participated). This module includes the specific procedures and examples needed to understand behavioral momentum in various contexts, and use it to promote participation and a wide variety of skills (during formal teaching situations and incidental teaching opportunities).

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Graphing & Data Collection:

The best manner in which we evaluate the effects of any treatment must include measurement. All intervention strategies—whether based on ABA or not—should (1) be clearly and operationally defined, (2) speak explicitly to measureable outcomes (i.e., What specific behavioral changes should be observable in this student following treatment?), and (3) include repeated measurements of treatment outcomes. Data collection is a crucial component of treatment that allows us to evaluate treatment and make adjustments when needed quickly and accurately. In this module, viewers will learn how to effectively and efficiently track a variety of student performance targets, including behavior reduction targets as well as skill acquisition targets.

Using graphic representations of behavior to make decisions about treatment is a critical component to any effective intervention approach. Graphs enable instructors to view progress—or lack thereof—over periods of time at a glance. Their use enhances the decision-making process, both with regard to moving quickly from one mastered skill to another and to implementing adjustments quickly and when needed. In this module, viewers will learn to (1) convert raw data to a graphic format, (2) understand and use graphs to make decisions about programming, and (3) analyze student performance based on graphs.

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Set Up:

Beginning a program using Applied Behavior Analysis can be intimidating. Where should we do this? Do we need a dedicated room? What materials are necessary? What sort of data should be collected, and which behaviors should be measured? What must happen with those data? And, this student does not even comply/attend! What should be done to improve that? These questions will be explained in this module, and examples will be provided to demonstrate key points.

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Course 7
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Behavior Management:

Most people with significant language disabilities exhibit interfering behaviors. In many cases, these may include behaviors such as physical aggression, self-injurious behavior, non-compliance/avoidance behaviors, screaming/yelling, and repetitive behaviors such as hand/arm movements or vocalizations/noise-making. The frequency and severity of these behaviors can often be pervasive in that they limit opportunities for learning as well as socialization with peers; in some cases these behaviors can even be dangerous.

This module includes the following:

- Basic concepts of behavior—how all behavior is cued and maintained
- Functions of behavior—identifying outcomes—functions—that reinforce behavior
- Intervention design—planning strategies based on functions—relating treatment to function
- Positive behavioral intervention—emphasizing consequences for positive behavior

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Natural Environment Teaching (NET):

State-of-the-art treatment programs using evidence-based practices generally include various amounts of formal teaching sessions (i.e., DTT). However, these programs are typically not limited to that instructional format. The research literature on autism treatment clearly indicates the need for ongoing instruction/engagement, including incidental teaching opportunities, or Natural Environment Teaching (NET). NET can essentially be summarized as instruction which takes place outside the context of DTT, often during preferred activities/areas. This module will further outline the integration of NET into a comprehensive treatment package for children with autism, including the use of ABA strategies during NET.

Social Skills Programming:

Nearly all children on the Autistic Spectrum have social deficits to some degree. However, given the scope of typical social behaviors, the degree to which those deficits impact different individuals varies widely. For example, some children with autism may no interactions with peers (i.e., no initiating, no responding, no eye contact, no physical contact, no communication, etc.), while others may interact with peers frequently, but in disjointed ways (i.e., difficulty maintaining interactions, difficulty with the flexible nature of conversations, etc.). In this module, the core components of social skills programming will be detailed. For example, what activities should be used, what social behaviors should be targeted, which peers should be selected and with what training should they be provided, and where should this intervention occur?

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