Alphabet Soup:
Strategies for Autism Spectrum Disorders from A to Z

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Easy as A,B,C and 1,2,3...

A: Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)
ABA is the science of using learning principles to improve behavior

- Discrete Trial Teaching
- Direct Instruction
- Verbal Behavior
- Lovaas Therapy
- Intensive behavioral Intervention
- Incidental Teaching
- Precision Teaching
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Fluency Based Instruction

A: ABA Instructional Techniques (Simply Good Teaching)
- One to one instruction
- Small & Large group instruction
- Incidental Teaching
- Using assessments to guide instruction
- Data based decision making
- Generalization
- Task analysis
- Repeated practice/Mass Trials
- Based on solid principles of behavior

ABA Instructional Techniques
(Simply Good Teaching)

- Prompting
- Fading
- Shaping
- Chaining
- Menu of reinforcers
- Pairing with Reinforcement
- Errorless Learning
B: Behavioral Momentum

- Have students experience series of 'successes'... builds momentum!
- Ask student to perform known/simple tasks. Once a high rate of successful responses has been established, gradually introduce more difficult tasks.
- Sandwich challenging tasks between easy, preferred activities. (Premack Principle)
- Works the same for inappropriate behaviors. So redirect early!

C: Commenting

(less is often more)

- Use visuals (photographs/pictures/cues) instead of verbal instructions (attention) to assist with communication and to make rules/expectations concrete.
- Visuals assist with processing the information without providing unnecessary attention.
- Visual supports are less disruptive and easier to fade than verbal redirection.
- Visual supports can help reduce anxiety, remind students of what they need to be doing, follow a sequence to complete a task, remember rules & assist with transitions.

D: Design the Day

All environments should have Structure, Order & Predictability

- Build sensory opportunities into the daily classroom schedule
- Teach academic, social, communication, adaptive living, leisure goals
- One to one instruction
- Small group instruction
- Large group instruction
- Incidental Teaching
- Generalization
- Repeated practice
- Access to reinforcers (reinforcer/preference assessments)
- SCHEDULES!

E: Effective Instruction

- When instructions are provided correctly, the chance that students will respond appropriately increases.
- Get the students attention.
- Tell, don't ask. Use a calm voice.
- Don't repeat instructions. (Use visuals.)
- Reduce distractions.
- Provide positive feedback for compliance. (Different Reinforcement; Non-contingent Attention)
- Say what you mean, mean what you say.

F: “Finished” Procedures

- Visual representations help students understand how much work to do and what will happen upon completion. (predictability)
- Will increase motivation to complete tasks. (‘...the light at the end of the tunnel’)
- Examples:
  – Place flashcards in one basket and label the other basket as "finished".
  – List morning work and then have student choose reward at the end. Have student check off assignments upon completion.

G: Generalization

- Applying a skill learned in one situation to other environments, materials, and people.
- Some students can generalize without explicit instruction, others cannot.
- Generalization is very difficult for individuals with ASD.
- Begin generalization training immediately.
H: Hands On Prompting

- “Tell-Show-Do” (Errorless Learning Prompting Sequence)
- Verbal, Gesture/Model, Physical
  - **Tell**: provide a clear, concise instruction.
    - “do your workbox”, “sort”, “write your name,” “clean up”, “wash your hands”, “get in line”, “walk in the hall”.
    - All instructions should be stated, not asked. If the student complies with the instruction provide reinforcement.
  - **Show**: If the student requires additional prompting to follow through on your initial instruction, provide the least intrusive prompt necessary.
    - Provide a gestural/model prompt. If the student complies after your prompt, provide reinforcement.
  - **Do**: Provide physical assistance to ensure compliance. (no escaping the task)

I: Interactive Instruction

- Provides opportunities for students to work together with peers.
- Broadens educational experiences.
- Practice socialization and communication skills which are necessary in the community. (often requires facilitation and direct instruction)
- Pre-teach and prepare.
- Use social stories and role playing.
- Pick good role models.

J: Joint Attention Routines

- Predictable, logical sequences involving two or more people. Encourage communication skills, particularly spontaneous conversation.
- Provide frequent repetition of language.
  1. Choose meaningful and purposeful routine that requires a shared experience.
  2. Teach the routine and practice.
  3. Upon mastery, vary routine by leaving out necessary materials (sabotage). Prompt communication if needed.
  (Examples: passing out cups with no drink, writing task without a pencil, skip a person in a turn-taking activity.)

K: Kinesthetic Teaching

- Use movement to help students learn.
- Allow for movement breaks.
- ‘Hear, See, Do’ for optimal learning.
- Examples:
  - Role play social situations.
  - Practice letter flashcards while marching.
  - Teach ‘left’ and ‘right’ with a fun dance.
  - Hands-on manipulatives for counting
  - Incorporate movement activities into long instructional segments (circle time).

L: Let’s Break into Groups

- Adjust members of the group to provide appropriate instruction for each person.
- Start with basic activities that are appropriate for all.
- Arrange for individual or small group instruction for students leaving the group.
- Teach independent academics or skills.

M: Motivation

- Individuals with ASD do not come to school to make us happy. We need to provide incentive!
- “What’s in it for me?”
- Identify reinforcers. (Informal preference assessments)
- Provide access to those reinforcers only when earned.
- Pair yourself/peers with the student’s reinforcers.
True or False?
1. Sandwiching challenging tasks between easy preferred tasks is an example of behavior momentum.
2. ABA and DTT are the same.
3. Kinesthetic learning is another term for hands on learning and movement.
5. Staff should talk more and more to students with autism when upset.

Strategy Session
Pick a strategy from A-M.
Tell us how you have used this strategy, observed this strategy being used, or intend to use this strategy with a student in your classroom.

N: “NO” Rules
• “No” statements may be confusing.
• Provide “DO” vs. “DON’T” statements.
  **“Walk.” instead of “Don’t run.”**
• “No/Don’t” statements do not teach the appropriate behavior.
  *replacement behavior(s)*
• Always support with visuals.

O: “OOPS!” Strategies
• Student with ASD have difficulty with change in routine.
• Changes in routine are a part of life!
• Begin practicing changes in routine.
  – Students check their visual schedule.
  – Have an “OOPS!” or “Surprise!” symbol on the schedule.
  – Review the schedule at the beginning of the day and prepare the student for the “OOPS!”.
• Also works for students who need to be taught that it’s ok to make a mistake.
• Be a good model for these behaviors. Make a mistake!

P: Prompts
• Prompt Hierarchy:
  - Independent
  - Verbal
  - Gestural
  - Model
  - Partial Physical
  - Full Physical
  **Use least-to-most when student needs minimal help (mastered skills).**
  **Use most-to-least when for new/difficult skills. Creates success every time (errorless).**

Q: Quiet Programs
• Use visual supports (charts, scales) to teach students to volume control.
• Provide reinforcement for compliance. (Differential Reinforcement)
• Start teaching where the student is currently functioning.
  If a student can be quiet during instruction for 5 minutes, start there and build.
R: Reinforcement
- Increasing or strengthening the behavior.
- Reinforcement: Will increase the likelihood that the behavior will occur again in the future. Reinforcement always works, if you establish what is reinforcing for that individual.
  - Child selected, not teacher selected
  - Reinforcer Assessments in the classroom
  - Not the same for everyone, often changes
  - Consistent and Immediate
  - Paycheck, computer time, snack....

S: Schedules
- Schedules visually represent daily activities
- Reduces anxiety by making the day predictable
- Teach student to check his/her own schedule and cross off or remove the picture as the day progresses
- Make this part of the daily routine
- Everyone can benefit from a daily schedule
- This is not a support that should be faded out as schedules change over time

T: Token Economies
- Reinforcement Systems that make earning a reward concrete
- Have student choose reinforcer
- Provide “tokens” (checkmarks, points, plastic chips) contingent upon appropriate behaviors
- When token board is full, have student exchange “tokens” for reward
- Have the student self-manage when appropriate (fade your support)

U: Understand the Function of Behavior
- Attention: is the student getting attention?
- Escape: is the student getting out of something?
- Tangible: is the student accessing reinforcers/preferred items?
- Sensory: is the student fulfilling a sensory need? (for this to be the function of behavior, the student would have to engage in the behavior when alone and across environmental conditions)
**V: Visual Supports**

- Objects, photographs, drawings, words
- Why visual supports?
  - Remember sequence of events
  - Organize materials
  - Learn how to interact with others
  - Understand choices and abstract ideas
  - Understand verbal phrases
  - Manage own behaviors
- Visual supports can:
  - Reduce need for verbal prompts
  - Make ideas/words more concrete
  - Represent sequence
  - Provide a positive support throughout tasks
  (task analysis)

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**W: Wait Strategies**

- Student with ASD may need systematic and explicit instructions to learn to wait.
- Using a “Wait” card may help to make the abstract concept of waiting more concrete.
- Start with a short waiting period and reward compliance. Gradually build up wait-time.
  Look for natural opportunities to teach waiting. (lining up, getting lunch, ordering at a restaurant, accessing computer, taking turns)
- May need to use a timer to make length of wait time more concrete. (beeping timer/visual timer)

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**X: eXamine Your Data**

- Teachers will examine the data and determine whether or not behavior is changing (increasing desired responses; decreasing inappropriate responses)
- Help implement strategies and interventions based on data.
- Do we need to alter the plan? Validity? Fidelity?
**Y: Yes Management**

- Keep the atmosphere positive by saying “yes” as often as possible.
- It's not always possible to give a “yes” answer, BUT at times, you can phrase a “no” answer into a “yes” answer.
  
  **Question:** “Can we go outside?”
  **“No” Answer:** “No, not until we’ve finished.”
  **“Yes” Answer:** “Yes, as soon as we’ve completed our work.”

**Z: Zero Fault of Student**

- Sometimes, when students are not learning as expected, people see this as the student’s fault.
- If the student is not making progress or target behavior(s) are not decreasing, we, as the teachers, need to change our strategies. What we are doing is not working.
- As teachers, we must take the responsibility for effective instruction.

**Focus on the positive and believe in the potential of all of our students.**

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**Strategy Session**

Pick a strategy from N-Z. Tell us how you have used this strategy, observed this strategy being used, or intend to use this strategy with a student in your classroom.

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**Things We Need to Consider**

- How/When/Where do students with autism display challenging behavior(s)?

- What events/activities can result in challenging behavior(s) for our students with autism?

- What tools and strategies can be/are being used to lessen or prevent challenging behavior(s) for our students with autism?
Not all the information or approaches mentioned here will be relevant or appropriate for all people. Basic guidelines on how and when to implement a particular approach are provided throughout, however it is important to bear in mind that each person and situation is unique.

### Challenging Behaviors

- Non compliance
- Defiance
- Attention seeking
- Screaming
- Shouting at adult
- Hitting, punching
- Kicking
- Biting
- Self harm
- Trashing furniture/equipment
- Excessive talking, singing, questioning, teasing
- Inappropriate touching/smelling

### Cause: Change of Routine

**Including:**
- Order of Assignments
- Timetable/assembly
- Free' afternoons
- School trips/sports day
- Staff/pupil absence

**STRATEGY/TOOL**
- Clear and repetitive preparation (warning) of the event/change that may occur
- Teach 'coping with change-expected and unexpected' or have planned lessons that deal with these topics
- Make sure students are taught 'back up' plans

### Cause: Change of Routine at HOME or TRANSPORT

**Considerations:**
- Breakfast could have been rushed
- School uniform misplaced
- Had to take a different route to school because of construction or traffic
- A slight change to their morning routine could mean behavior issues during the school day
- Missed their normal bus to school

**STRATEGY/TOOL:**
- Encourage parents to contact the school if there are any of these changes to so that you are prepared
- Role Play or Social Stories giving pupils a reminder of how to behave or respond in different situations

### Cause: Environmental

**Considerations:**
- Classroom organization
- Lighting/temperature, noise levels
- Movement around school (transitions)
- People around

**STRATEGY/TOOL**
- Consistency - such as color/type of furniture, labeled drawers, visual timetables, use of communication in print
- Tidiness/clutter free
- Staggered movement between lessons

### Cause: Staff Interactions

**Considerations:**
- Staff persistence/insistence
- Lack of clear explanations
- Assumption
- Personality clashes (staff/pupil)
- Staff interference

**STRATEGY/TOOL**
- Be flexible in approaches and expectations
- Clear, simple, precise instruction/direction
- Take nothing personally
- Reduce number of staff giving directives

Remember: THEY ARE NOT TRYING TO BE BAD.
**Cause: Peer Interactions**

**Considerations:**
- Personality clashes
- Presence or behavior of others
- Student moods (towards others and self)
- Illness/medications
- Inability/difficulty in expressing feelings/emotions

**STRATEGY/TOOL:**
- Separation/work booths
- Guide student elsewhere (provide distraction)
- Role playing/learning about dealing with others and accepting differences
- Address situations immediately
- Flexibility of timetable to meet the needs of the pupils at the moment

**Cause: Work**

**Considerations:**
- Work refusal/non-cooperation to comply to work

**STRATEGY/TOOL:**
- Use timer
- Rewards ‘work now… this later’
- Change the task
- Assess skills
- Pick your battles
- Allow processing time
- Allow transition time
- Flexibility
- Change of person

**Extreme/Challenging Behaviors**

**STRATEGY/TOOL:**
- Look for precursor behaviors to minimize potential outbursts
- Knowing/following Behavior Intervention Plans
- Ensuring all staff have copies of Behavior Intervention Plans
- Removal of class or individual to safe area
- Use of quiet/sensory room
- First staff on scene to direct further support needed
- Additional staff TO NOT get involved in situations unless requested
- Staff to be trained in safe physical management
- Allow personal space (read the situation – be aware)
- Know when to restrain, know when not to restrain
- Use minimal, direct, simple language such as ‘sit, stop, stand’ and then offer alternative
- Allowing processing time
- Remember every day is a new day and start fresh

**What May Help in an Angry Outburst**

- Do not respond with anger or threats
- Put on soft music or use other self-calming strategies
- Put on headphones
- Speak softly so the student has to pay close attention to what you’re saying
- Try to redirect the student to positive activity
- Use distraction-change topic/activity
- Set a timer and give the child specific amount of time to stop
- Count out loud, ask the student to count with you
- If necessary, remove the student from the area or remove yourself

**Tips:**
- Stay consistent each time that an outburst occurs
- Do not give into the child’s demands, or you will reinforce the value of outbursts