

In the Spotlight

Essential Workers

For some of the adults served by Regional Center of Orange County, among the most challenging things about the COVID-19 pandemic have been the stay-at-home orders and rules banning large public gatherings that have prevented them from going to work. However, many of those we serve have jobs that classify them as “essential workers” who have been allowed to continue working.

Some do their jobs remotely, at least part of the time, while others have continued to report to their workplaces – following the same safety protocols as their coworkers without disabilities. Profiled here are just three of the many adults with developmental disabilities who have continued to perform important work and make valuable contributions to their employers and our community throughout the pandemic.

Austin Bullock

Austin Bullock, who has autism, works as a Reimbursement Analyst 2 in Patient Financial Services for UCI Medical Center. He was originally hired as a Biller 1 in June 2019, then promoted to his current position in



Austin Bullock

late November 2020. Due to the pandemic, he currently works from home most of the time, using his own computer equipment along with secure remote software provided by his employer. Austin lives at home with his parents, and has set up a home office there, with two monitors on a desk in his bedroom.

He enjoys working from home, since it allows him more flexibility with his time. As a salaried employee, he can, for example, work later on some days when he has time-sensitive projects, without worrying about getting caught in heavy traffic for his commute home from the office. However, since his department generates a lot of letters and packages that need to be mailed, early in the pandemic he also volunteered to go into the office periodically to ensure

those tasks were completed until other mailing arrangements could be made.

Barriers have been installed in the office to protect workers there. In addition, all employees are required to wear masks and practice social distancing. Each morning, office workers also have their temperatures checked and answer a set of questions aimed at uncovering COVID symptoms or potential exposure.

***“He put himself
out there and look at
where he is now!”***

Austin is one of the inspiring success stories from Project SEARCH, an internship program that enables adults with autism to gain valuable work

See **Essential Workers** on page 6.

Dialogue

Dialogue is published four times per year by the Regional Center of Orange County for people with developmental disabilities, their families and service providers. *Dialogue* can also be read online at RCOC's website: www.rcocdd.com.

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Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Board Meetings

March 4 • May 6 • June 3

As of this printing, decisions had not yet been made about how the next several meetings will take place (in-person or virtual). Please check the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website for the most up-to-date information.

RCOC Administration

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Save the Date for the 2021 Virtual Spotlight Awards Gala!

We're excited to announce that Michele Gile, the award-winning reporter for CBS2 and KCAL9, has agreed to return as our guest emcee for the 2021 Spotlight Awards! Due to continued safety concerns surrounding COVID-19, the event will take place **via Zoom at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, March 8.**



Michele Gile

The great thing about staging the event virtually is that everyone can attend! There's no need to purchase a ticket or arrange transportation. To join in the fun, simply go to the RCOC website (www.rcocdd.com), click on the 2021 Spotlight Awards link under News & Events, and register. Everyone who registers will receive email reminders about the event, and a link to click on at event time.

Honorees will receive their awards in advance but deliver their acceptance remarks live. A recording of the virtual event will also be posted on RCOC's website for members of the community who miss the live event.

Fun Ideas for the Evening

Individuals, families and residential service providers can make the virtual Spotlight Awards event even more fun by encouraging everyone in the household to get dressed up – just like they would for the traditional dinner-dance. It could also be fun to prepare a special meal or snacks, or perhaps serve popcorn to add to the festivities.

Several service providers have indicated they plan to host dance party "breakout rooms" on Zoom after the awards presentation. If you aren't able to join one of those, consider hosting your own household dance party, either by creating a playlist of your favorite dance tunes or clicking on a dance-themed playlist on YouTube.



Executive Director's Report

Participate in NCI to Help Shape RCOC's Priorities

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

People sometimes ask me how RCOC determines what issues and concerns to prioritize at any given time. There are a lot of things that go into those decisions – including the need to comply with mandates from California's Legislature and Department of Developmental Services (DDS) – but among the most valuable contributors to our strategic planning process is data we receive from the National Core Indicators (NCI) Survey.

In 2000, RCOC was a pioneer with NCI, participating in its surveys long before it became a DDS requirement in 2010. Then, as now, we think it's crucial to have objective data to help us craft policy, target resources, assess our "customer" service, and ultimately determine whether we're truly fulfilling our mission on behalf of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

NCI includes three separate surveys, each performed every three years, focusing on different segments of the community we serve: adults, families with pre-adult children living at

home, and families with adult children living at home.



We recently received the results for the latest Child Family survey and shared those

results in a virtual public meeting. That meeting presentation appears on RCOC's website, and there is also an interactive dashboard on the DDS website (www.dds.ca.gov) that depicts NCI results for all of California's Regional Centers.

As always, there was constructive feedback on areas for improvement which we appreciate. It was, however, gratifying to see us outperform the state average in a number of areas, including overall satisfaction with the services and supports families receive.

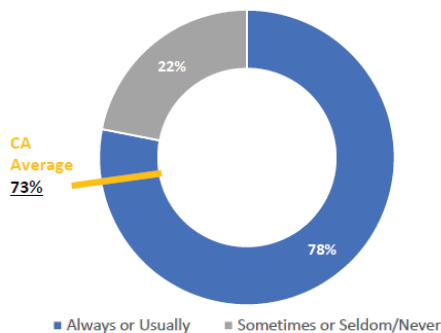
Another significant finding that points to how the surveys help shape policy is the area of emergency planning. In 2005, RCOC decided to incorporate emergency planning

into our IPP process. Back then, we had earthquakes in mind. However, more recently, the pandemic and massive fires in California have demonstrated the importance of this type of planning and we were pleased to see that it's another area where RCOC was rated much higher than the California average.

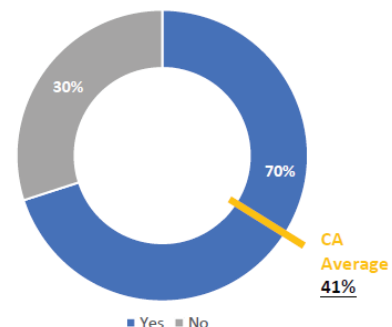
The next NCI survey, taking place in spring 2021, focuses on adults receiving services. Normally performed in-person, surveyors from the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) will instead meet virtually via Zoom with randomly selected individuals to ask questions about where they live and work, the kinds of choices they make, the activities they participate in within their communities, their relationships with friends and family, and their health and well-being.

All responses to the surveys are confidential and no identifying information such as names is used in public reports, so I urge everyone who is contacted to respond and answer thoughtfully. Your feedback is reviewed carefully, both at RCOC and at the state level, and it's one of the most important ways that you can help to shape the future of RCOC and California's developmental services system.

OVERALL, ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS YOUR FAMILY CURRENTLY RECEIVES



DID YOU DISCUSS HOW TO HANDLE EMERGENCIES (SUCH AS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY OR A NATURAL DISASTER) AT YOUR CHILD'S LAST IPP/IFSP MEETING?



Person to Person

Being Healthy and Happy in the COVID-19 Era

By Sylvia Delgado, PAC Chair and Jyusse Corey, RCOC Peer Advocate

What's the first thing most of us think of when it comes to the New Year? Yup, you guessed it: New Year's resolutions!

While a lot of things have been out of our control during the pandemic, one of the best resolutions we can make for 2021 is to keep our minds and bodies in good shape. RCOC's *Healthy Life, Happy Life* program could be just the start you need – especially now that it's being offered virtually (see shaded box).

Sylvia has participated in the program since it began. Before then, she knew a lot of what she



Sylvia Delgado



Jyusse Corey

should be doing to be healthier, but the program taught her how to read nutrition labels and also how to be more physically active and prevent lots of diseases. With a little help from her ILS workers, she's been able to lose 50 pounds!

Sylvia has participated in the program since it began.

Changing our diets can be tough, but one of Sylvia's tips is not to call it that. Nobody

likes the word "diet" (especially because the first three letters spell out die!), so she thinks of it as a lifestyle change instead. That makes it easier to focus on her goals.

With a little help from her ILS workers, she's been able to lose 50 pounds!

We all want to feel good, and keeping our bodies and minds healthy is always important, whether we have to stay at home or we're able to be out and about. And, while some participants lose weight, overall wellness is really what *Healthy Life, Happy Life* is all about. So, why not give it a try? It can't hurt, and it might even help you keep your New Year's resolution!

Healthy Life, Happy Life Goes Virtual

Since it could still be a while before everyone we serve is able to attend in-person programs, RCOC has begun making its *Healthy Life, Happy Life* wellness program available virtually. The new format option includes 14 lessons presented in a PowerPoint format, along with embedded multimedia videos to enhance learning.

Like the in-person curriculum, the virtual edition is offered through day programs and independent and support living (ILS/SLS) service providers. Adults who are interested in participating can contact their service providers or reach out to their RCOC Service Coordinator to learn more.



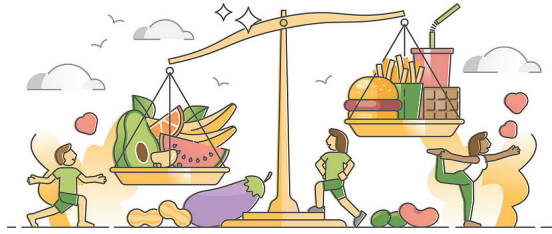
Practicing Mindfulness Can Boost Health and Wellness

When some people think about wellness, they think about exercising more, eating better, and losing weight. While those are probably healthy goals for most of us, wellness actually involves more than just physical health. It's also about how we feel, and there's a lot of research showing that practicing healthy habits not only can make us healthier physically, it can make us mentally healthier, too.

One of the often-overlooked healthy habits covered in RCOC's *Healthy Life, Happy Life* program is mindfulness. While some associate mindfulness with a religious practice of meditation, mindfulness and meditation don't have to be spiritual practices. They're actually known to be effective ways to cope with stress, and calm or focus a person's thinking, which can lead to better decision making in lots of different aspects of life.

Where food decisions are concerned, mindfulness can simply be about being more aware of what we put in our bodies. For example, a healthy mindfulness encourages us to think about whether a food or beverage is mostly empty calories with little nutritional value (like potato chips and soda) or something we need more of, like fruits and vegetables, and water.

Being mindful can also help us eat healthier sized portions. When we just open a box of snack food and eat continuously while watching TV, that's an example of "mindless"



snacking that often leads to overeating. When we eat our meals mindfully, though, we serve ourselves reasonable portion sizes, and focus on chewing and enjoying every bite. By focusing

on whatever we're eating, we can more easily pick up our body's signals about being full.

Similarly, mindfulness can also help us pause and figure out when we have the urge to eat, if it's because we're actually hungry, or maybe because we're just stressed out. And, it can help us consider healthier ways to deal with stress, like deep breathing or physical activity.

Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

These workshops are free for parents, and are being offered via videoconferencing (rather than in-person) due to the pandemic. They cover basic principles of positive behavior management, with a practical focus on helping parents of children with developmental disabilities change their own behaviors and those of their children. Parents are actively involved, and invited to discuss the specific behavioral challenges they are confronting. To gain the most value from the experience, parents are encouraged to attend all sessions in a series, though toilet training is the focus of the last session. Advance reservations are required. Contact your Service Coordinator or Tracy Vaughan at (714) 796-5223 or tvaughan@rcocdd.com for additional information, and to register.

Presented in Spanish by Footprints

When: Thursday evenings – March 18, March 25, April 1, April 8 and April 15

Time: 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Presented in English by Advanced Behavioral Health

When: Tuesday evenings – May 4, May 11, May 18, May 25 and June 1

Time: 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Presented in Spanish by Advanced Behavioral Health

When: Thursday evenings – Aug. 26, Sept. 2, Sept. 9, Sept. 16 and Sept. 23

Time: 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Note: Details of the October/November workshop, which will be presented in Vietnamese, will be shared in the next issue of Dialogue and online at RCOC's website (www.rcocdd.com).

Essential Workers

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experience. After interviewing and being selected for the program, he did internships in four departments at UCI Medical Center. Though not all interns gain employment after completing the program, Patient Financial Services was so impressed with Austin that they offered him a full-time job with benefits.

Amber Sasaki, Austin's RCOC Service Coordinator, was thrilled at his willingness to compete for a Project SEARCH internship. "He might have had his reservations," she said. "But he was willing to try. He put himself out there and look at where he is now!"

Earlier in life, Austin thought he might want to be a meteorologist, since he loves weather and did well in physics class. When that didn't work out, he struggled to find another line of work that would interest him and use his strong analytical thinking skills. He encourages others RCOC serves to be open to trying different types of work, even if it's not something they ever thought they might do.

"You'll find there are things you didn't know about that can make you happy," he said.

Robin Weingart

Over the course of just one day's shift, Robin Weingart and the team she works with at Alcon Laboratories clean and prepare around 3,000 packages of high-tech equipment that are then sent all over the world to doctors who use the devices to perform eye surgeries.

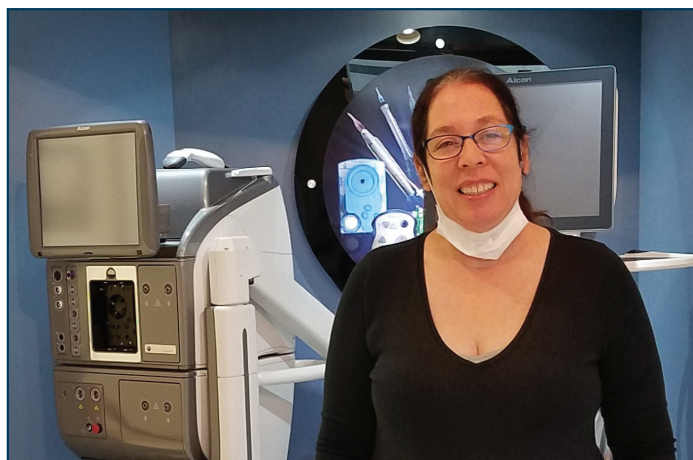
Working in a "clean room" where there can be no chance for outside contamination, she's used to stringent safety precautions. She and her coworkers are required to wash carefully before entering, wear special uniforms, and leave all their belongings outside in lockers. Robin, who has a mild intellectual disability, has been working full-time in the clean room at Alcon since 1999 and receives full benefits just like the company's employees without disabilities.

Robin is dedicated to mastering the skills to do a job correctly.

When asked what she likes most about her job, Robin replied: "My boss is very nice, other people are very nice, and coworkers help each other."

Robin is able to use the bus to get around, but since her shift starts so early in the morning, she currently uses taxis to get to and from work. Previously, she carpooled with one of her coworkers, but after that person retired, she had to find other transportation.

"Robin's very personable, gets along with her coworkers, and knows the job very well," said Beth Ann Pierce,



Robin Weingart

who has been Robin's RCOC Service Coordinator for the past 10 years.

RCOC service provider Vocational Visions helped Robin land the job back in 1999. Now, she needs only occasional support, with her job coach coming by every couple of weeks to check in with her during her lunch break.

A hard worker who is well-liked by coworkers and consistently gets good reviews from her supervisor, Robin is dedicated to mastering the skills to do a job correctly. She especially appreciates the respectful work environment at Alcon. "The people are very nice, and coworkers help each other," she said.

Robin's family is also proud of her achievements and her independence. She has lived in her own apartment for many years, with HUD financial assistance and independent living support from Project Independence.

When asked what advice she has for others who want to succeed in the workplace, she said: "Do what you're supposed to do. Be positive. Be kind to people. And, if you need help, just ask."

Austin Harvey

Austin Harvey, who works part-time as a courtesy clerk for Vons, was a natural for the grocery business. He learned from his parents, also grocery business veterans, who taught him to treat people with respect, always be nice to others, have a smile on your face, and do your job.

His parents, who are very supportive of Austin's independence, also helped him get the job four years ago, while he was still in his high school's transition program.

For Austin, who has autism, the social interaction is the best part of his job.

Since grocery stores are "essential" businesses, Austin has been able to continue working during the pandemic. He lives at home with his parents, and while he used to take the bus to and from work, he now gets a ride from his father, who is retired. He also hasn't had any problems with the required safety measures, such as face masks and hand washing, because

he recognizes how important hygiene is to preventing the spread of COVID-19.

For Austin, who has autism, the social interaction is the best part of his job. He enjoys seeing the people he works with and getting to know them. He also enjoys interacting with the store's friendly customers, many of whom are regulars and always ask how he's doing. Having learned all of the key tasks associated with his job, he now needs only occasional support from his Goodwill of Orange County job coach.

He also said his family is very helpful if he happens to have a bad day at work. "They let me vent," he laughed.

Tiffany Sanchez, Austin's RCOC Service Coordinator, isn't surprised by his job success. "People enjoy working with Austin," she said. "He's down to earth, generous, sweet, and always willing to help. He's also funny and has a great sense of humor!"



Austin Harvey

In addition to his work, Austin attends community college classes through North Orange County Continuing Education's Wilshire Center in Fullerton. His current classes, now being taught online due to the pandemic, include independent living which focuses on skills like saving and spending money wisely. He's also taking a cooking class, where he's learned to make a variety of delicious dishes, such as calzones.

While he doesn't like not being able to attend classes in person, he said "It's still been really cool to see people on Zoom."

Thank You Wish Tree Supporters and ABC7's Spark of Love

In spite of the pandemic, our Orange County community pulled together to brighten the holidays for hundreds of individuals and families RCOC serves. Our community fulfilled the gift wishes of 592 children and adults through RCOC's long-standing Wish Tree program. Supporters included: Brandman University, CASTO Chapter 2, Collins Aerospace, Community Support Services, Cortica Care, Girl Scouts Oso Valley Service Unit, GT Independence, Troutman Pepper, Fox Dealer Interactive, GSG Support Services, and 24 Hour Homecare, along with more than 130 individuals, including RCOC Board members and employees. In addition, ABC7's Spark of Love program donated 170 toys, which were distributed to low-income families served by RCOC's Early Start program.



Adan Garcia

See **Thank You Wish Tree Supporters and ABC7's Spark of Love** on back.

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Regional Center of Orange County Locations

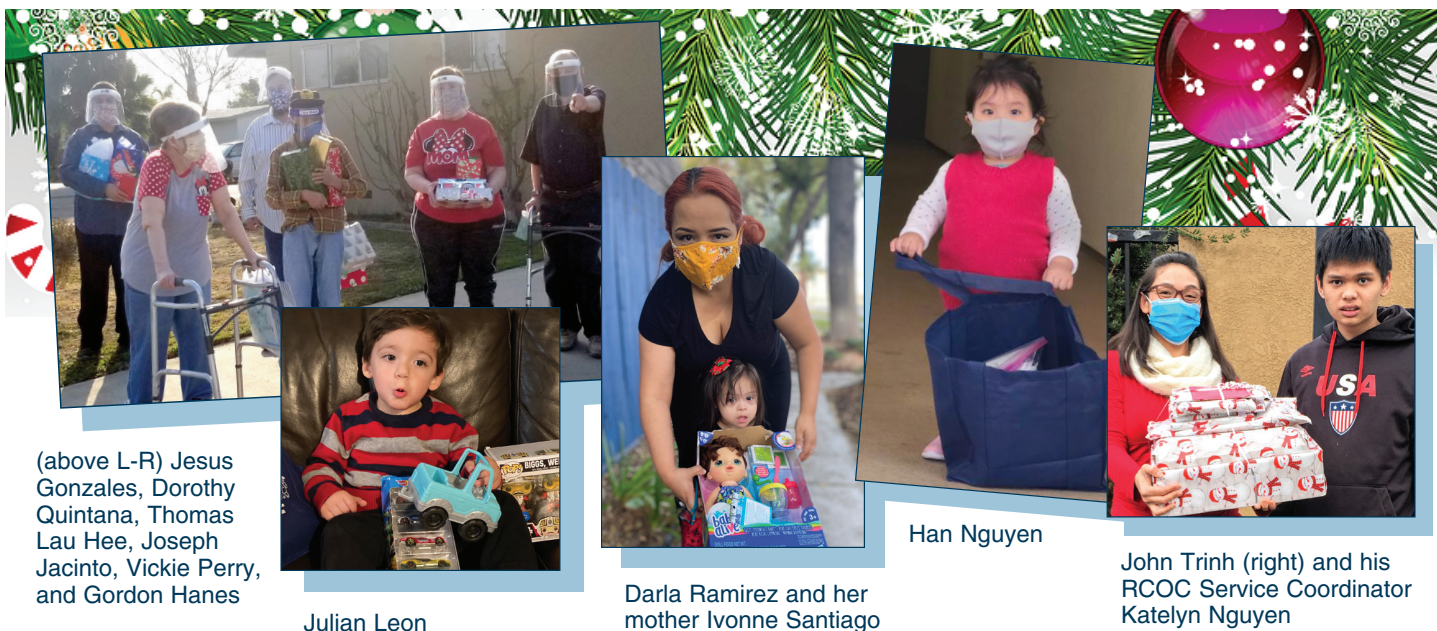
Santa Ana Office

1525 N. Tustin Avenue
24-hr Phone: (714) 796-5100

Cypress Office

10803 Hope Street, Suite A
24-hr Phone: (714) 796-2900

Thank You Wish Tree Supporters and ABC7's Spark of Love (continued from page 7)



(above L-R) Jesus Gonzales, Dorothy Quintana, Thomas Lau Hee, Joseph Jacinto, Vickie Perry, and Gordon Hanes

Julian Leon

Darla Ramirez and her mother Ivonne Santiago

Han Nguyen

John Trinh (right) and his RCOC Service Coordinator Katelyn Nguyen



Serving Orange County's Vietnamese Community

Regional Center of Orange County has prepared this insert especially for the individuals and families we serve who are most comfortable communicating in Vietnamese. In this insert, we would normally share details about a variety of events, programs and community activities for Orange County families. Unfortunately, most of those have either been canceled due to health concerns related to COVID-19, or decisions had not yet been made at the time of printing.

COVID-19 Resources and Information

RCOC has posted authoritative and up-to-date information on its website and social media pages regarding COVID-19; however, since some of these materials are presented in English only, Vietnamese speakers with questions or concerns are invited to reach out directly to their RCOC Service Coordinator who is always here to help.

How to Access Behavior Services

If a person who receives RCOC services has challenging behaviors that are affecting his or her ability to learn, hold a job, or interact with others, that person may be eligible to receive behavior services. For people with developmental disabilities, especially those on the autism spectrum, behavior services often involve a well-regarded type of therapy called Applied Behavior Analysis, or ABA.

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ABA employs a variety of techniques, such as positive reinforcement, to encourage appropriate behaviors and discourage behaviors that can make it difficult for a person to learn,



cope and interact with others. Often, parents and other family members also receive training from ABA professionals so they can reinforce the therapy in their home.

Several years ago, the State of California mandated that private health insurance and Medi-Cal cover behavior services such as ABA, so RCOC generally does not authorize or pay for these services any longer. However, a family's RCOC Service Coordinator can be very useful in

helping them to understand behavior services, questions to ask prospective service providers, and how to ensure that their insurance company or Medi-Cal (which operates as Cal-Optima in Orange County) covers the cost. If an insurance company refuses to cover behavior services, RCOC Service Coordinators can also help families understand and pursue the appeals process.

Several years ago, the State of California mandated that private health insurance and Medi-Cal cover behavior services such as ABA.

If you'd like to learn more about behavior services from RCOC, be sure to contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.

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Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Basics

Appplied Behavior Analysis, or ABA, is a type of therapy that helps many of the people RCOC serves learn appropriate behaviors for a wide range of circumstances – from school and classrooms, to the workplace, to personal interactions with friends and family, and more.

ABA was first developed in the 1960s and there is now a lot of good research behind the techniques used. As such, it's one of the most common therapies recommended for those on the autism spectrum and others who may have behavioral challenges. While a variety of techniques may be used, the basic principle of ABA is to encourage positive behaviors – generally with positive reinforcement, such as a toy, treat or other reward the person values – and discourage negative ones consequences such as being grounded or taking away computer time.

It's one of the most common therapies recommended for those on the autism spectrum.

While early forms of ABA relied heavily on very rigid methods that were performed for up to 40 hours per week, today's ABA is much more flexible and individualized – aiming to help the person learn appropriate behaviors in the context of normal, day-to-day activities.

It might, for example, be used to help a child learn a new skill such as toileting, how to use a spoon instead of fingers to eat, or social

skills for playing with peers. Students sometimes benefit from ABA that can help them avoid disruptive behaviors such as tantrums, learn complex skills such as reading, and pay better attention to their teachers in the classroom. Among adults, ABA might help a person learn to ride a bus, engage more effectively with coworkers, or have social conversations with friends, for example.

ABA requires consistency to be most effective.

Like most other forms of teaching, ABA requires consistency to be most effective. Since a behavior analyst can't be with the person 24 hours a day, parents and other family members are encouraged to partner with the behavior analyst and learn how to reinforce the therapy at home. Often, this begins with simply observing the ABA sessions. A parent may also be asked to practice ABA techniques under the supervision of the behavior analyst.

Parents are also encouraged to study their child carefully to determine which rewards will be most motivating, whether it's a favorite toy, a treat or something else. ABA also emphasizes the importance of immediate and specific reinforcement, so the child connects the reward with the desired behavior. That's because delayed or unclear reinforcement can sometimes inadvertently reinforce the wrong behavior.

Who Can Perform ABA?

Typically, a person receives ABA from a professional called a behavior analyst. Behavior analysts have earned either a Bachelor's degree or Master's degree in Applied Behavior Analysis, Education, or Psychology. They must also complete a certain number of hours of supervised work experience and pass a national certification exam.

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In California, behavior analysts are certified by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board which awards two designations: Board Certified Behavior Analyst® (BCBA®), a higher-level professional with at least a Master's degree, and Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst® (BCaBA®) which can be earned by those with a Bachelor's degree. Like most medical professionals, both must take continuing education classes to maintain their certification.





Serving Orange County's Hispanic Community

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