

Washington Union High School

**Applied Behavior Analysis Therapist**

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ROP Medical Career

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## Senior Project: ABA Therapist

Throughout my life I have always wanted to know, what made someone distinguishable from someone else. I have especially been interested in those who are mentally disabled, because I have always have thought that there wasn't a difference from people that are not mentally ill. I never met someone who was autistic until this year, in one of my classes and I decided to take the chance and help this person and also to get a feel of what it would be like to be an ABA therapist. I've decided to research what an ABA therapist does on a typical work day. The reason that I wanted to research this career more closely was because I have always been interested in working with kids, and especially interested in those who are autistic or who suffer of some type of mental disorder. This career would make my dream of working with children that suffer with a mental disorder in perspective this career would make exactly that possible. I had never met someone that had that sort of disability and I am very passionate when working with kids, therefore I believe I would be equally as passionate with those who are autistic. The reason why I would like to become an ABA therapist is because I believe that children with any type of disability should not be treated differently. I also believe that working with them will boost their self-confidence. Boosting these kids self-esteem would be the most beneficial to me because I think having confidence in yourself is an important trait and it's also something I'm also working on, therefore, I would want to become an ABA therapist. (ABA Therapist Job Description)

I believe that doing something that you love is really important, and also to work in an environment where you feel comfortable with a job of your dreams as well. The reason

why I am so interested in learning about autism is because, I read a book named "Life Animated" it was about a autistic child and by the age three kids typically start to talk not completely but you're able to hear. So when his parents didn't hear him talk they started taking him a speech pathologist. Later on in the book they took him to see a ABA therapist and they founded out that he was autistic. When the family found out they were a little scared because they didn't know how to deal with it. When I had finished the book I wanted to learn more about it and this is why I hope to pursue the career of an ABA Therapist. The book really had an impact on me because I never really knew about this disability and when I learned about it was very interesting. In autism the kids who are autistic usually fall under different categories, called spectrum and that is when autistic kids fall in different ranges which can be symptoms, skills, or disabilities (Autism Speaks). For the boy in the book he seemed to memorize every word in the movie. There are different jobs for every type of person for me I believe working with kids who are autistic is where I would feel more comfortable because I think it would be very interesting.

Many don't really know what an ABA therapist is and it is actually quite simple, they are those who work with children and adults with autism and other developmental issues, they work in clinical offices and in patients homes (Autism Speaks). Applied behavioral analysis is the use of techniques and principles that explain how learning takes place (Autism Speaks). Since the 1960's ABA therapists have been applying their techniques with children who have autism or related disorders, also they will work with adults who are autistic (Autism Speaks). ABA therapy benefits the people that are autistic because it helps them live a happy and productive life. Many have questions about what exactly is

autism and how they get that disorder. Well there is no specific reason, but it is said that it's a combination of autism risk genes, and environmental factors influencing early brain development. (Autism Therapist) Autism is a serious developmental disorder that impairs the ability to communicate and interact. Some symptoms that will show up are: behavioral cognitive, anxiety, and change in voice these are just a few as it's different in every case (Autism Speaks). Also there are different types of autism and they refer to them as the spectrum. The spectrum is what they use because each have exceptional abilities in visual, music and academic skills. It has been shown that autistic patients have a 40% capacity to above intellectual abilities( The Center for Autism and Related Disorders). Typically an applied behavior analysis only works with kids who are autistic as their primary duty is to help them out with parents or teachers to make a plan that will work with them starting from an early age. They usually work with kids who have different types of autism. They work in all different types of environment; Schools, clinics, rehabilitation facilities or workshop, client homes, and Treatment agencies. There are different characteristic you need to possess also , the principal one being you need to be patient because these kids have different learning capabilities (Applied Behavior Analysis). Secondly you need to be a good communicator. Communication comes in hand because as an applied behavior analyst you're usually going to be working with a team and you're going to need to cooperate (AutismSpeaks).

Another aspect of ABA therapists and that they must do on a day-to-day basis besides working with the children are writing reports to implement plans to better teach support programs. Also they support professionals, teachers, and parents on how to better

their plans and procedures. Working with the parents will probably be the most difficult part about this job and that is because some don't really know what it is. We are the ones who have to explain it to them and it can be frustrating. They won't ever completely know how to respond to all of this especially because it's their kids it's just a complicated situation. But the good thing is that there are ABA therapists who help the kids along the way little by little, they teach them everything they need to know. Applied behavior analysts have techniques to improve their development, communication, social relationships, self-care, and employment (Autism Speaks). The therapist works from day-to-day, there is an "intensive" program where they work with them 25 to 40 hours per week and it's mostly for ages 1 to 3. The programs will help them from different types of situations like talking with their peers or with parents and even when looking for employment. The ABA program is really important for adults with autism because it helps them with independent living and employment (ABA Therapist: Job Description & Career Requirements).

The education requirements for an ABA are, a master's degree in psychology, special education or any related field (ABA Therapist: Job Description & Career Requirements). Also you will need to have a license that allows you to work with them. Many companies require experience working with clients with disabilities and autistic clients. Many of the facilities sometimes look for differences in a bachelor's degree in psychology or a certificate. Some really good colleges to study this would be Fresno State if you pursued a major in psychology for a master's, they have an exceptional program for ABA Therapists. And also California State University Stanislaus also has an amazing master's program for ABA therapists, there are of course many more, but I've

chosen these two because they are closer to where I live. There are also different types of aba therapists, the one I have chosen is applied behavioral analyst and they have a much stronger intervention with the autistic children. There is of course much board certification, you need to at least have a master's degree or a BCBA or doctorate (ABA Therapist: Job Description & Career Requirements). Certified Autism Specialist have a masters degree; they can be from any field of autism but also must demonstrate that they are willing to working in the field of autism. Lastly there is autism certification, they should at least have a certificate that shows that they are willing to work with these children. The difference between all these therapist even though they all work with autistic children is in that they all have different jobs aba therapists provides the therapy for the child, board certified behavior is one who is trained to provide and specialize the behavior analyst (Programs in the field).

History behind autism is that it was found in the early 1900s during that time scientist thought it was a Neuropsychology disease many thought it was an early stage of schizophrenia. During 1944, a German man named Hans Asperger founded an ,older version of autism now known has asperger disease but he also recognized that some kids were extraordinarily smart smart just that they had trouble socializing with their peers (The History of Autism). According to the Greek braking down the word it means a person is removed from and social interaction. Eugen Bleuler a Swiss scientist started conducting research and he thought it was an early symptom of schizophrenia. As the years where expanding so was the research during the 60's to the 70's they would conduct research using an electric chair, LSD anything that would change their behavior techniques.

Currently the only form of treatment for autism is autism therapy, behavioral therapy, and language therapy (Applied Behavioral Analysis). Although autism was founded in the early 1900's they didn't know how to treat it until the 70's when applied behavior analysis therapy was introduced by a psychologist named Robert Kengal from UCLA. Originally aba therapy was called discrete trial training, the name now is more commonly known as aba therapy now its has been around for 44 years and it is still used because of its great behavior reward it has shown so much difference for autistic.ABA therapy has different techniques such as; pivotal response training, picture exchange communication system, behavior mapping, differential reinforcement, advanced play skills, functional analysis, sensory strategies and many more techniques that help them ( What is the history of ABA Therapy). I believe that I would be calls of having these working techniques and I personally feel that teaching these children with visual teaching would help them because personally I learn better when material is taught to me visually.

There are different type of therapist and also work with kids who are autistic there is ABA therapist, Board Certified Behavior Analyst, Certified Autism Specialist, Autism Certificate. Applied Behavior Analyst therapist is the process of studying behavior in order to put into place appropriate behavioral intervention (Certified Autism Specialist).ABA is a really great intensive behavioral interventions. Typically ABA therapist work one-on-one with the child. Board Certified Behavior Analyst must have a master, and they work with autism students but is not an Autism specific credential. Certified Autism Specialist can be from any field of working with kids who are autistic because your from any field of study like teaching, physical therapist, psychologist, or administrator must have a CAS to show that

they are committed to the field of autism. Autism Certificate or for those who are in the field of autism they require no degree but must obtain a certificate to show that they are willing and committed to the field of autism (Certified Autism Specialist).

The salary of an aba therapist all starts off with the level of education the higher the education the higher salary you would get for example if you have a bachelor degree your annual salary would be 47,281 dollars according to the (Applied Behavior Analysis). If you have a graduate degree according to the (Applied Behavior Analysis) your annual salary based off your education would be 55,402 dollars. Also the higher the education you will be able to move around in different career options. The next aspect that is taken into consideration is the experience. Experience is very important when it comes to any job and its salary because the more experience you have the better salary you will receive also you will have more opportunities. For an ABA therapist the starting annual salary would be 32,000 to 43,000. If you been the the career for more that 5-10 years the annual salary would be 45,000 to 55,000. If you have been there for more that 10 or more the annual salary is 50,000 to 60,000. Another factor is the location it all varies in location and where you decide too for example the area where they have a higher salary would be New York, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San antonio. The area where it's the least annual salary would be Greensville and San Diego (Applied Behavior Analysis Salary Information) If you are really interested in the career in is suggested that you receive a bachelor degree and you will be closer to what you want to achieve.

Some background information about my mentor is her name is Amanda Adams and she is founder of California Autism Center here in fresno California. She started her



education of autism at City University in Oklahoma where she received her M.A in psychology. In 2000 she became a verified behavioral analysis. Before she moved here to Fresno she worked in a number of facilities with large schools as well. There was an opening at Fresno state for where she was an associate professor in psychology and was a program coordinator the ABA Master for six years. She traveled the country and found new opportunities to help kids with autism. She was even happier to call central valley her home, also even more that she was motivated that there is a place for children who are autistic. The reason why she was motivated to develop a center for creating a place for autistic children (California Autism Center).

Some of the things that the California Autism Center does for the children is that they work one on one with the children with behavior therapist. The treatment consist of 25-30 hours of service. They even offer intervention during the summer and after school. The therapist also work with the children's schools and teacher to teach them how to understand them and how to help them. Also they have social group that met once or twice a week and it really helps boost their self-esteem and helps to interact with others. The center also has seminar for families to show them who to deal with them because one doesn't really know how to be with them because it's a new thing that joined their family and they don't really know how to respond to it (California Autism Center).

In conclusion there are so many things I loved learning about this whole new career that I hope one day to pursue. I really enjoyed learning about autism and the career ABA therapist I really like what they do because it's kind of like teaching but you will be helping out autistic children. For example they show them social skills most of autistic children are

really smart but for them it's hard to socialize. Personally I feel like I would really be able to connect with them because I would boost their self-confidence and it's also something I'm working on. So I hope one day I'm able to work with them because these past months in one of my classes I met someone who was autistic and it was different because I've met someone with autism so I decide to take a chance and help him out was different because I never really helped someone out especially with a disability. Learning about the history was interesting because I got to read what they thought about it during the early stages of discovery. I felt really good about it because I believe that it would really help me out if I decide to be in this career.

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