

Careers in Applied Behavior Analysis:

Board Certified Behavior Analyst™



Understanding and treating serious behavior problems is the primary domain of a new career in the human services: Applied Behavior Analysis. Board Certified Behavior Analysts™ work in homes and hospitals, clinics and classrooms and any other setting where reducing problem behavior and improving human performance is important.

Behavior analysts usually work as part of a team of professionals and provide expertise in the analysis of behavior problems to determine why they occur so that effective treatments can be developed. This process starts with an extensive and detailed baseline and functional assessment which looks at possible factors in the environment that may contribute to the occurrence of the behavior. Behavior analysts will then develop intervention plans based on these findings and train others to implement the treatment. Finally, the behavior analyst will evaluate the treatment to determine if it has been

successful.

Behavior analysts often work as consultants to agencies such as child welfare organizations and residential treatment programs where their goal is to optimize the potential of the children or adults who receive their services. This may involve carefully analyzing the living environment to determine skills that the person can acquire to increase their independence and improve their access to the community. Then, the behavior analyst will develop a task analysis and effective training program to assist the person in acquiring the skill.

Motivation is often an important problem in understanding behavior and the behavior analyst is trained to tackle this complex problem head on. Through interviews with parents, caregivers, teachers, and therapists the behavior analyst may be able to determine how best to motivate the client to facilitate behavior change.

In most cases the behavior analyst will directly observe the behavior to be analyzed and make specific recommendations for environmental changes to enhance motivation.

Behavior analysts typically supervise Board Certified *Associate* Behavior Analysts™ who have a bachelor's degree with coursework in applied behavior analysis and extensive supervised experience in a particular area of practice.

Most behavior analysts specialize in a particular area such as autism, developmental disabilities, mental health, geriatrics, or head trauma. Those specializing in autism, for example, work directly with autistic children one-on-one,

training in functional language and the treatment of deviant behaviors. In mental health the behavior analyst might work with a team of physicians to increase medication compliance or with rehabilitation specialists to improve work performance.

Postsecondary training and education at the Master's or PhD level are required for a career in behavior analysis. Degrees may be completed in special education, rehabilitation, psychology, social work, or behavior analysis; most states will now require that behavior analysts be Board Certified [www.BACB.com]

Profile of ABA Professional-- Mary Kate Lettera



Many parents find that as their children grow they begin to develop language or behavior problems so severe that treatment by a professional is required. “I help parents understand their children’s challenging behaviors and develop behavior plans to intervene effectively,” says Mary Kate Lettera who is a Certified Behavior Analyst™ working as a consultant in Leon County, Florida.

Lettera first became interested in the field of behavior analysis when she took a course at Florida State University called Applied Behavior Analysis. She later completed Directed Individual Studies courses working with children with

autism and decided then that this was the career she would pursue. “I graduated in 2000 from Florida State University and decided to go on for a Masters in Psychology with an emphasis on Applied Behavior Analysis and I have been thrilled with my decision,” says Lettera. As a graduate student she worked with both children and adult clients and now consults with parents and teachers on a variety of disruptive, aggressive and self-injurious behavior problems that can occur at home, in school, or in the community. “My job is to find out why they engage in these behaviors, then write behavior plans and train parents, speech and occupational therapists as well as teachers in their effective implementation,” says Lettera who graduated in 2002 from the FSU Panama City Master’s program in Psychology with a Speciality in Applied Behavior Analysis.

“I really enjoy what I do, every day is something different, a new behavior emerges that we haven’t seen before or I get a client who really needs some help with a difficult behavior,” says Lettera. “It is very gratifying to help parents solve behavior problems that make their children more fun to be around.” Behavior analysts must be caring, compassionate people who are curious about the causes of behavior and able to research the literature to find effective treatments says Lettera.

One essential quality all behavior analysts must have is a desire to help others reach their full potential and training in behavior analysis is an effective way to meet that objective.

Skills Required

Board Certified Behavior Analysts™ must be able to work in a variety of settings comfortably dealing with people with behavior disorders. They must be good observers, detail-oriented, compassionate, and possess excellent written and communication skills.

Where/How to Get Training

Schooling

College or university coursework in applied behavior analysis, educational and developmental psychology, research methods, counseling and clinical psychology are good preparation for graduate work in applied behavior analysis. Students should also complete coursework in conditioning and learning, computer science, mathematics, neuroscience, and statistics. Master's and Doctoral programs in behavior analysis can be found at: apps.abainternational.org/

Financial Aid

Most approved graduate programs [see www.BACB.com] have some financial aid for students. This may range from out-of-state tuition waivers to scholarships, fellowships, and work-related positions in treatment settings.

Future Job Opportunities

Job opportunities for Board Certified Behavior Analysts™ are abundant at this time. Demand is great with about four openings for each job applicant and currently salaries are comparable to other professionals in the human services.

Recently reported ranges for new Master's graduates are from \$40-60,000.

Jobs in this Field

Job Titles	Place of Work	Kind of work	Average salary
Certified Behavior Analyst	Consulting firm	Works with parents, teachers, and program administrators to analyze behavior, write and implement behavior plans and train others to implement the plan	\$45,000

Work Environment

Work environments include schools, clinics, rehabilitation or residential facilities or workshops, client homes, and treatment agencies.

Resources--How to Find out More:

Books

Principles of Everyday Behavior Analysis

By L. Keith Miller

Handbook of Applied Behavior Analysis

By John Austin and James Carr

Online

- fabaworld.org/ [Florida Association for Behavior Analysis]
- apps.abainternational.org/ [Association for Behavior Analysis International]
- BACB.com [Behavior Analyst Certification Board]
- behavior.org/ [Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies]

General

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