



# VIRTUAL STRATEGIES TOOLKIT

Evidence-Based Practices for Individuals with ASD and other Developmental Disabilities

## ABC DATA

### Definition

Antecedent Behavior Consequence data (i.e. ABC Data) is an assessment tool that involves directly observing and recording factors surrounding a target behavior for the purpose of analyzing patterns and hypothesizing a possible function(s) maintaining the behavior.

### Video Demonstration Strategy

[Video](#)

### How to Use

First, be sure to review any records that could provide meaningful information about the student and the target behavior. Be sure to also consider any contributing factors, known as setting events, that could make the target behavior more likely to occur. When collecting ABC data, the observer will record what occurs during the antecedent condition immediately prior to the target behavior, the behavior itself, and what happens in the consequent condition immediately following the behavior. All of the ABC data should be objective facts provided in observable and measurable terms.

ABC data can be done in narrative form or via checklists. This data collection helps in developing effective interventions aimed at reducing or eliminating the problematic behavior and increasing a behavior that more appropriately meets the same function(s). The amount of data needed to identify a pattern and hypothesize the function(s) of the behavior varies, but should be a minimum of 3 instances of the behavior with the same or similar consequences across at least 2 different days. The goal of ABC data is to find a pattern and determine what your team believes to be the maintaining function(s) as quickly as possible, so that you can move into developing interventions to match the identified function(s).

ABC data can be collected by anyone trained in how to collect it accurately; this may include teachers, paraprofessionals, school psychologists, or others. In order to collect enough data to determine a pattern in an efficient manner, it helps to observe at the time(s) of day, types of activities, or environments when the target behavior is most likely to occur.



## Steps in Collecting ABC Data

**NOTE:** Records reviews (MDT, IFSP / IEP / 504, grades, attendance, any available medical / psychological / developmental history records, previous behavioral data, etc.) need to occur either before or simultaneously with the collection of the ABC data.

1. *Identify the target behavior.* Operationally define the problematic / contextually inappropriate behavior so that multiple observers could independently collect accurate data with at least 90% agreement. Be objective, clear, and concise. Describe the behavior in observable and measurable terms. ([See examples in the 'Additional Resources' section of this document](#))
2. *Take note of the observation period.* Record the date, time, setting, activity, and observer.
3. *Collect antecedent data.* ([See ABC Data Sheet templates and examples in the 'Downloads' section of this document](#)) Write narrative data or use a pre-made checklist to record what happens immediately before the target behavior.
  - a. Include any additional information about possible setting events that could be making the behavior more likely to occur. ([See examples in the 'Additional Resources' section of this document](#))
4. *Collect behavior data.* Write narrative data or use a pre-made checklist to record what the target behavior looked like in observable and measurable terms.
5. *Collect consequent data.* Write narrative data or use a pre-made checklist to record what happens immediately after the target behavior.
6. *Take additional notes, as needed.* If there is any other information gathered from the observation or reported about the student that you believe to be beneficial in further understanding the target behavior, make sure to include it in objective terms.
7. *Analyze the data.* Review the data after a minimum of 3 instances of the target behavior with the same or similar consequence across at least 2 different days to determine if a pattern is clear enough to hypothesize the function(s) or if additional ABC data is needed.
  - a. Common functions of behavior include to:
    - i. **get/obtain:** activities, attention, settings, people, objects, sensory stimuli  
  
and/or to
    - ii. **escape/avoid:** tasks/demands, activities, attention, settings, people, objects, sensory stimuli
8. *Write a summary statement.* Summarize the typical antecedents, behavior(s), and consequences and state what you believe to be the hypothesized function of the behavior. ([See example in the 'Additional Resources' section of this document](#))
9. *Determine interventions.* 1) Decide what proactive strategies could be used to address the common antecedents. 2) Decide what replacement behavior needs to be taught that could be a better way to meet the same function as the target behavior, as well as other missing skills that



could be taught to improve the student’s behavior. 3) Decide how to reinforce the replacement behavior and how to limit reinforcement (when safe to do so) of the target behavior.

10. *Implement the interventions.* Implement the strategies chosen in step 9. Monitor progress and make revisions as needed. ([See the Individualized Behavior Rating Scale Tool \(IBRST\) template and example in the ‘Additional Resources’ section of this document](#))

## When to Use

ABC data should always be a part of a functional behavior assessment (FBA), and may also be used anytime there is more information needed around an interfering or contextually inappropriate behavior. Data of what is happening immediately before the target behavior (antecedent data) can help the team determine possible motivation or triggers for the behavior. The team can then develop proactive ways to address the behavior by reducing the motivation to engage in the problematic behavior and prompting the replacement behavior. Data of what happens immediately after the target behavior (consequence data) can help the team determine why the behavior is likely happening (i.e. the hypothesized function). The team can then develop reactive strategies around how they will reinforce the replacement behavior(s) and how they will minimize reinforcement to the problematic / target behavior. The team also needs to determine how the replacement behavior and any other missing skills will be directly taught and practiced with the student.

## Variations

**ABC Narrative Data Collection-** This involves anecdotal reports via written words, phrases, or sentences. This should always be objective and written in observable and measurable terms.

**ABC Checklist Data Collection-** This involves creating or using a pre-made checklist of common antecedent events, behaviors, and consequent events. This does not provide as robust of data as narrative collection, but may be a helpful option for observers who are newer at collecting ABC data.

## Downloads

(You will need to choose ‘File’ > ‘Make a Copy’ to edit)

[ABC Narrative Data Sheet Template](#)  
- [EXAMPLE](#)

[ABC Checklist Data Sheet Template](#)  
- [EXAMPLE](#)

## Additional Resources



(These examples and lists are not exhaustive, but can be used to start team discussions around these topics.)

1. Describe the target behavior(s) in specific observable and measurable terms so that it is clear enough that 2 independent observers would collect occurrences with at least 90% accuracy.

**Example 1-** [Operational Definitions of Common Target Behaviors](#)

**Example 2-** [Operational Definitions of Common Target Behaviors](#)

- 2.
3. [Setting Events Checklist](#)
4. [Summary Statement Template](#)
5. [Individualized Behavior Rating Scale Tool \(IBRST\)](#)  
**Example-** [IBRST Data Sheet](#)

## Research

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