

**Testimony of the
Baltimore County Autism and Verbal Behavior Interest Group
to the Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee**

March 13, 2006

Good evening. I represent of the Baltimore County Autism and Verbal Behavior Interest Group. We are a collection of families of children with autism whose services through Baltimore County Public Schools include Applied Behavior Analysis/Verbal Behavior (ABA/VB) programs. Some of our member families are present tonight.

Our mission is to ensure access through the Infants and Toddlers program and Baltimore County Public Schools to early and intensive intervention based on the principles of applied behavioral analysis, direct instruction, and other teaching procedures which are based on research and that have proven to be effective for teaching children with autism, as required by IDEA 2004 and the No Child Left Behind Act. We thank the Schools for their support of our ABA/VB programs and would like to say a few words about what those programs have meant to our kids.

When our children were first diagnosed with autism, each of our families searched all the resources we could find about treatment options. The research we found most compelling pointed us to ABA/VB. Peer reviewed research shows that ABA produces significant improvements in outcomes and achievement for autistic children. This research includes last November's 4-year outcome study from the Wisconsin Early Autism Project¹, which replicated longstanding results of Ivar Lovaas², and a study by the University of California Stanislaus³ which compared intensive ABA intervention favorably with other models.

The literature drew us to ABA/VB programs, but it is our own experience that has shown us its effectiveness. In surprisingly short times, we have seen the great improvements in our children's education and quality of life that the studies predict.

Acquiring language is the great turning point for a child affected by autism. In this area, the results we have seen have been dramatic. One of our families writes:

“We were given diagnoses for our identical sons in January 2004 at the age of 2.5. At that time, both boys were diagnosed with moderate to severe autism, with a 50-65% delay in most tested areas.

Michael at this time was completely non-verbal. He had poor play skills, little eye contact and obsessive compulsive behaviors. Michael began a Verbal Behavior program overseen by a certified Behavioral Consultant in March 2004. Michael completely adapted within weeks, and was speaking words within a month, labeling & requesting. His speech today, almost two years later, is spontaneous, full sentences. His play skills are typical. He asks and answers appropriate WH questions and is on grade level or above for academic skills. Michael has been fully included in a typical preschool setting at Woodbridge Elementary with the 1:1 assistance of a therapist trained in Verbal Behavior. On the two year anniversary of his diagnosis, he was honored in a school assembly for the Kiwanis Club Terrific Kids program.



Daniel at the time of diagnosis was mostly echolalic and had no conversation skills. He had many self stimulatory behaviors and had complete disinterest in the world around him. He began a verbal behavior program in March 2004. Through behavioral tactics, discrete trials and natural environment teaching, Daniel now uses his language skills to request items, label items and participate in home and community programs. When other tactics were failing in his special ed preschool class, ABA techniques were incorporated successfully to have Daniel participating in the classroom. Daniel began this journey as a child who wanted to be alone in his own world, and now he seeks out others and wants to be a part of the world around him.”

Another family tells how this therapy can reach even the hardest language cases:

“Anneliese had no response to over 12 months of conventional speech therapy and remained entirely non-verbal after her third birthday. Crying and tantrums served as her language. Then ABA/VB provided us strategies to effectively teach her sign language. In less than 8 weeks she learned her first 20 words. She continues to add new signs every few days and she uses her signs to request and label items everywhere she goes. Her behavior at home and at school are transformed now that she can tell us what she needs and wants.”

Improvements carrying over to school are a common theme:

"On his school progress report in April '05, Adam, now 5, had failed to advance on most of his IEP goals, was noncompliant in class, and the speech therapist who worked with him said that his speech was limited to echolalia and he had little language comprehension. Last month, after about 6 solid months of working at home and at school with a therapist overseen by a certified ABA consultant, Adam can write his name and the names of all family members, has made progress on most of his IEP goals, participates in class, is at his grade level in pre-academics like phonics, spelling, and coloring, and can carry on simple two-way conversations. His teacher says he is an entirely different child now."

These are just a few of our stories, and these results are not just anecdotal. Each of our children’s progress has been captured using a standardized tracking tool, the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (the ABLLS). We are happy to provide these data.

We encourage the Committee to:

- support Baltimore County Public Schools as they continue to provide ABA/VB as an avenue for educating our children, and
- to make ABA/VB therapists supervised by qualified consultants available to other families who believe it is the best option to meet the needs of their children with autism.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views.



NOTES:

- ¹ Sallows, Glen O. and Tamlynn D. Graupner (2005). Intensive behavioral treatment for children with autism: four-year outcome and predictors. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 110, 417-438.
- ² Lovaas, O. I. (1987). Behavioral treatment and normal educational and intellectual functioning in young autistic children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 55, 3-9.
- ³ Howard, Jane S., Coleen R. Sparkman, Howard G. Cohen, Gina Green and Harold Stanislaw (2005). A comparison of intensive behavior analytic and eclectic treatments for young children with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 26, 359-383.

