

“ The Comprehensive autism ”  
solution company



Special Learning


## Introducing Special-Learning.com

Special Learning, Inc. ([www.special-learning.com](http://www.special-learning.com)) is an internet-based company that exists to offer every parent of a child diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder a genuine chance to help their son or daughter attain an abundant and fulfilling life using Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Therapy. The site provides extensive information, resources and tools for anyone who works with children with autism.

**Special Learning** is dedicated to becoming the global leader for autism solutions by leveraging internet-centric and mobile technologies to meet the unique needs of individuals with autism, as well as their parents, families, providers and teachers. Special Learning provides the global autism community with best-practice tools, education and training in how to help children with autism move up the skills spectrum intuitively, successfully and affordably. The company's mission is to become *THE* destination for autism information, resources and tools worldwide.

Autism is quickly becoming one of the most prevalent disorders affecting children and is rapidly approaching epidemic proportions in the United States, yet there is a critical shortage of accurate and reliable information and therapy available to families affected by ASD. Parents with recently diagnosed children face a bewildering array of choices in determining the best course of action to ensure that their children are diagnosed early and get access to the ideal treatment for their condition.

One approach to intervention stands out above the rest as the most widely recognized for its evidence-based methodologies. More than four decades of research proves that it can significantly improve the quality of life for children with ASD, and in many cases, with proper intensive application, permit them to mainstream into the typical classroom. That approach is therapy based on the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis, or ABA.



Nevertheless, the rapidly increasing number of diagnosed children is already exceeding the supply of qualified providers trained in effectively teaching critical life skills to children with ASD. Even if a parent *can* find such professionals to help their child with a rigorous ABA-compliant program, it is likely to cost as much as \$75,000 per year, which is well outside the financial reach of most families.

Special Learning provides parents, providers and schools with cost effective options to augment a child's professional ABA curriculum with evidence-based ABA solutions to significantly reduce the cost of the program. This is done in two ways: By providing an extensive collection of free information including articles, videos, and blogs from autism care experts, resource directories and forums; by offering an exclusive selection of ABA-compliant tools and training materials that include web applications, mobile applications, physical ABA materials, eLearning programs and eBooks; and integrated suites of ABA products that teach parents and teachers how to use intervention techniques similar to the ones professional behaviorists use.

Special Learning also has its own non-profit foundation, whose goal is to insure that families with a genuine need for ABA-based solutions have access to them. Funding comes from cash contributions made by Special Learning, Inc. as well as from charitable donations (both in cash and in-kind products and services) from foundations, corporations and individuals, as well as partner organizations that contribute their own ABA products and services. Special Learning ABA Education Fund mission is to ensure the broadest deployment of ABA products and services and to increase awareness about the effectiveness about this form of therapy for individuals with autism.


## Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders

In Autism Spectrum Disorders, a child's social, communication and learning skills are compromised due to developmental disabilities caused by neurological disorders that affect the normal functioning of the brain. The effects on a child diagnosed with **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** may vary from mild to severe intensity. Perhaps the most crucial fact to know is that **Autism** is a disorder that can be managed, not a disease that can be cured. It is not in any way contagious and while some cases have been linked to genetic factors, the causes of autism are still a matter of intense study.

Autism is quickly becoming one of the most prevalent disorders affecting children. As recently as 2001, the National Institute of Health estimated that 1 in 250 children were affected by Autism. But according to a 2009 article in the journal *Pediatrics*, Autism has increased to an alarming rate of 1 in 91 children (1 in 56 for boys). Various researches estimate growth of 10 to 17% annually, which means this condition is reaching epidemic proportions.

**Autism** diagnosis in a child can be very hard to accept and comprehend for the rest of the family members. Feelings of desperation and helplessness are not uncommon. The first instinct, especially for parents, is to find ways to help their child by any means possible. It may seem too great a challenge in the beginning, but with proper knowledge, tools and interventions, children diagnosed with **ASD** can live complete and productive lives.

**Children with autism** will usually begin showing symptoms within the first three years of life and some signs can be occasionally be detected within the first year. Autism is classified as a range or *spectrum* of disorders, so each child's condition is unique. There are currently five classifications within the spectrum based on the appearance of specific symptoms and their level of severity.



Some children with ASD manifest extreme cognitive impairment while others display slight delays in social and communication skills. Children with high functioning autism, including Asperger syndrome, sometimes exhibit higher than average intelligence.

Some individuals diagnosed with ASD may be more socially introverted, while others will enjoy socializing; however all will have some degree of difficulty in communication and social skills. In helping a special needs child, the goal is always to improve skills, and to decrease problem behaviors such as tantrums, aggression and self-injury.

There is no single **treatment approach for autism that works for every individual in every case**. However, rigorous and appropriate application of applied behavior analysis (ABA) has resulted in success rates as high as 70%, particularly with individuals on the lower end of the spectrum; even among those demonstrating more severe symptoms, ABA has been extremely effective in increasing social and cognitive skills, and reducing behavioral issues. Unlike other disabilities, rigorous study of ASD is still in its early stages and the disorder's complexity is not yet fully understood. With the single exception of Rett Syndrome, where a specific rare genetic mutation has been identified, even the cause of Autism still remains partially unanswered. Studies with identical twins shows that if one twin has ASD the other twin has at least an 80 percent chance of having it also, but there appear to be other factors involved as well and nothing is known with any certainty.


However, there is a non-medical approach that has been scientifically proven to be effective in improving the quality of life for most children diagnosed with ASD. **Applied Behavioral Analysis** or ABA therapy is the only evidence-based treatment that has gained credibility. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999) This approach makes use of a system of rewards and prompts to encourage and develop the proper responses from a child with ASD.

## About Applied Behavioral Analysis Therapy

Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy is a treatment protocol for Autism Spectrum Disorder which has proven success in mainstreaming many autistic children into the public school system with minimal assistance. Motivational programs have been developed by ABA therapists that help children to increase cognitive and behavioral function as well as to promote independence in learning and everyday tasks, so ABA therapy is effective in improving almost all aspects of an autistic child's life.

ABA therapy breaks a child's behavior down into very specific, objective and measurable units so that behavioral data can be collected and observed in order to assess the child's behaviors, identify the skills the child needs to develop, provide the appropriate treatment, and record the effectiveness of the therapy over time. This evidence-based approach makes ABA therapy's results clearly demonstrable. According to a 1999 Surgeon General's report: "Thirty years of research demonstrated the efficacy of applied behavioral methods in reducing inappropriate behavior and in increasing communication, learning, and appropriate social behavior." <sup>1</sup>

Applied Behavioral Analysis training uses positive reinforcement to teach children desired behaviors. When a child demonstrates the correct behavior in response to an environmental trigger such as a sound or a request from a parent or teacher, the child is rewarded with a *reinforcer* appropriate to the behavior and the particular child. A reinforcer could be anything from a special treat to a chance to play with a favorite toy, or even just a smile and a hug from the person performing the intervention. The child's typical environment is studied carefully to determine what triggers cause the child to behave undesirably. Over the course of therapy, a consultant will work to either remove triggers that lead to undesirable behaviors or to change the child's response to those triggers.



It is important to note that Autism Spectrum Disorder is exactly that –a disorder–and not a disease. There is no cure for autism and once a

child is diagnosed as being autistic the condition is permanent. ABA therapy seeks to improve a child’s ability to cope with the condition, not to overcome or cure it. Efficacy of the therapy will depend on how severe the child’s autistic condition is and how early therapy is begun.

However, many children under four years of age who have undergone therapy based on Applied Behavior Analysis will experience measurably improved social and verbal skills, and in some cases even a significant increase in IQ. ABA therapy is considered to be the most effective evidence-based therapeutic approach to children with autism.

Professional therapy based on Applied Behavior Analysis is quite costly. Some consultants charge as much as \$120 per hour for their services, not including the costs of environmental modifications or other materials. While ABA services can be expensive, there are a number of ways to make interventions based on ABA available to a broad range of families. In addition to a child’s school environment and ABA centers, interventions can be implemented at home and in play areas by parents and teachers. When parents and family members learn how to perform ABA-based interventions costs can be decreased while the intensity of training for the child is increased. This will usually improve the child’s progress but is not a substitute to the services of a qualified consultant or technician.

Special Learning, Inc. exists to increase the availability of ABA therapy through enhanced access to resources and tools, as well as online, eBook and physical training for parents, family members and teachers.

## Products Offered by Special-Learning.com


In addition to an extensive library of free information and resources, Special-Learning.com offers a variety of products and services – all of them completely compliant with ADA standards – designed to help parents of children with ASD to take control over their child's learning and development.

One example is Special Learning's Basic Communications Application for the iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad. This clever app makes it easy for non-verbal children to let parents, teachers and caregivers what they want quickly and easily. At the same time it helps the child learn what words mean and what they sound like in an entertaining and interesting way, holding the child's interest and keeping him or her busy for long periods of time. As an ABA compliant application, it also helps children develop skills and records helpful data for behavior analysts to use in developing a customized therapy plan.

Essentially, the Communication App is what medical and mental health professional call an *Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)* device, but with four crucially important differences:

1. **It's cool.** Because it runs on an iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch, children will be proud to use it anywhere without feelings of embarrassment.
2. **It's fun to use.** The app's interface is colorful, intuitive and loaded with hundreds of real images of food, toys, clothing and other items (rather than abstract symbols or stick figures) to capture children's interest.



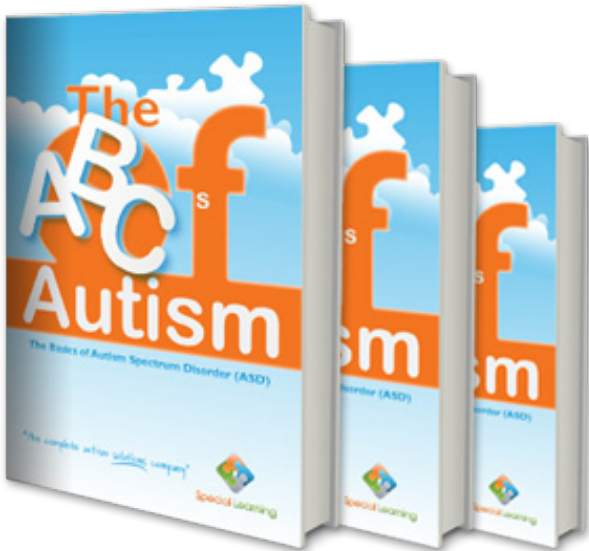
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3. **It *doesn't cost thousands of dollars*.** Many AAC devices use proprietary hardware and require annual license renewals, making them extremely expensive. Special Learning's Communications App was designed first and foremost to be an easily affordable investment for the average parent of a non-verbal child.
  4. **It's *ABA-compliant*.** In addition to allowing non-verbal children to communicate with family members and teachers, Special Learning's Communications App also uses ABA concepts to help children learn. For example, because every word is represented by multiple pictures, a child learns to *generalize* that the *word*

*"train"* doesn't *only refer* to something *that* is red and made of plastic. The application also collects observational data according to ABA standards so a qualified behaviorist can focus the child's communication skills curriculum to his or her specific deficiencies.

Another of Special Learning's premier products is its eLearning program, ABA curriculum and detailed lesson plans; which teach parents and others involved in the care of the child the basics of implementing ABA-based interventions in the home and school setting. By implementing the techniques taught in this program, parents and others can quickly learn how to do many of the things professional behavior techs do to modify behavior and improve communication and social skills and enhance cognitive skills in diagnosed children.

The site also offers a series of eBooks that are enormously informative, yet very easy to read. Parents, teachers and providers can learn about a variety of autism-related topics, confident that what they are reading is both evidence-based and reviewed by Board Certified Behavior Analysts for accuracy. The eBook series begins with handbooks that provide an overview of Applied Behavior Analysis therapy and disorders in the autism spectrum, and then advance to detailed guides that drill down into each of the disorders, therapeutic principles and teaching strategies.

In addition to its own products, the ABA experts at Special Learning have identified a number of third party products that represent best-in-class ABA-compliant tools that will further enhance parents' and providers' ability to offer highly effective ABA Therapy to children with ASD.






## SBSA Group : The Reason You Can Trust Special Learning

Special Learning is not like most autism resource websites. Sure, we have articles and eBooks and many other features that a lot of the other sites have, but there is one key reason you should make Special Learning your one place to go for information, tools and referrals if you have or work with a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder... one reason why you can trust the information you find will be accurate, the tools we offer really work, and the methodologies used by the people in our referral system to be the best available.

That reason is SBSA Group, a highly qualified detachment of specialists hand-picked from the team at Step By Step Academy on the outskirts of Columbus, Ohio. Step By Step Academy is one of the nation's leading non-profit treatment centers for providing intensive intervention to children and young people with autism spectrum disorder. By policy, all of the methodologies and techniques used at Step By Step Academy conform to the standards of Applied Behavior Analysis or ABA, which is the only therapeutic approach recognized as effective by both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Surgeon General of the United States. Rigorously high standards, a long track record of results and a reputation for innovation and advancement of the practice of ABA-based intervention have earned Step By Step Academy its standing as one of the very best in its class.

SBSA Group is comprised of Step By Step Academy staff members who work closely with Step By Step's founder (and Special Learning's co-founder) Michelle LaMarche, BCBA, to help make the facility one of the finest in the world. As the review team for Special Learning, they perform the same task: Making [www.Special-Learning.com](http://www.Special-Learning.com) the finest resource for autism related information, tools, resources




and products. Together SBSA Group represents more than 50 years of combined expertise in the field of autism intervention and research based on Applied Behavior Analysis and some of the finest practitioners in the field.

Before any eBook, product or teaching tool is offered on Special Learning's website, it is carefully reviewed by SBSA Group for accuracy and for compliance with ABA standards. SBSA Group searches the world for best-in-class teaching tools and tests them thoroughly at Step By Step Academy for effectiveness, durability and quality. In some cases products are actually developed by the SBSA team and represent entirely new ways for parents, teachers and service providers to practice ABA-based intervention in the home, classroom or clinical setting.

### **Christine Austin, Director of Clinical Operations**

Christine Austin has been the Director of Clinical Operations at Step By Step Academy, Inc. since 2009. Before that, she served as Training and Behavior Plan Supervisor, Outreach and Training Coordinator, Program Supervisor/Outreach Support Technician and Behavior Technician. During this time, she also moonlighted at Piece by Piece Consulting Services, a private consulting services firm specializing in behavioral treatment methods utilizing Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) principles for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders as a Behavior Consultant. At Step By Step, she is responsible for the hiring and training of all senior clinical staff members. In addition, she trains Clinic Directors on how to develop and monitor treatment and behavior plans, and teaches Clinical Assistants the principles of ABA and monitoring procedures.

Christine regularly presents at professional conferences on topics related to autism and behavioral support.




Her areas of expertise include ABA, training, Individual Education Plans (IEPs), treatment planning and behavior modification and behavior management. Additionally, she has developed autism training programs for professionals and families on a variety of topics, including ABA Principles and Procedures, The Picture Exchange Communication System, Token Economy Systems, The Maintenance and Generalization of Acquired Skills and Decreasing Challenging Behaviors.

She has a BA in Psychology and a minor in Sociology from The Ohio State University. She is a Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA) through the University of North Texas and is currently enrolled in the M.S. in ABA & Autism program at The Sage Colleges. She will graduate in the spring of 2012.

### **Cynthia Ring, Research Associate**

Cynthia Ring is a research associate with the Step By Step Academy, where previously she held the positions of Transition Specialist, Compliance Officer and Behavior Technician. Her current responsibilities include designing research studies, protocols and evaluation tools, data collection and analysis and writing and editing grants and reports. Prior to this, she worked as a college intern for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections Bureau of Mental Health Services, where she was involved with program development and benchmarking sex offender programming and regulations among states.

Cynthia's academic interests include incarcerated persons with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues, sex offender recidivism and functions of violence and aggression. Her published work has appeared in the Journal of Feminist Family Therapy. A member of the National Honor Society in Psychology (Psi Chi),



Cynthia is a licensed social worker and certified in AIDS education. She holds an MSW in Social Work Administration from Ohio State University and a BS in Psychology from Wright State University. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in Psychology with a specialization in Criminology and Criminal Justice through the University of the Rockies in Colorado.

### **Gabriel Valley, Clinical Assistant**

Gabe Valley is a clinical and executive assistant to the Clinical Director at Step by Step Academy, where he previously served as a Behavior Technician. Additionally, he is an Independent Provider for the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services. Gabe has published and presented at conferences on the topic of “Treating Food Refusal and Selectivity in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.”

Gabe holds a BA in Interdepartmental Studies, Social Work from Wittenberg University. He is a certified trainer in Nonviolent Crisis Prevention and Intervention, a Certified Staff Trainer and has obtained advanced certification in Applied Physical Training.

### **Michael Wagner, Ph.D., Psychologist**

Michael Wagner, Ph.D., has been serving children in his capacity as a licensed psychologist for 19 years. In addition to his private practice, he currently serves as Psychologist at the Step by Step Academy Inc. Dr. Wagner oversees the Psychodiagnostic Assessment Clinic at SBSA, which provides comprehensive psychological evaluations for children with autism spectrum disorders. Dr. Wagner has assisted children and adolescents with special needs in a variety of contexts, including outpatient mental health centers, juvenile corrections, inpatient psychiatric facilities, public and private schools, and independent practice.



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