

How to take ABC data.

What it is. ABC data is a three-column note you write each time a behavior happens: what came right before it (the **Antecedent**), what the person did (the **Behavior**), and what happened right after (the **Consequence**).

Why it matters. You cannot change a behavior you cannot describe. Ten honest ABC lines tell a team more than a month of "he has been having a hard time." Every behavior plan, every functional assessment and every good school meeting starts with this sheet.

THE METHOD

How to do it yourself: eight steps, one sheet.

1. **Pick one behavior and define it so a stranger could spot it.** Not "aggression" — "open- or closed-hand contact with another person, hard enough to hear." Not "meltdown" — "drops to the floor and screams for longer than ten seconds." Write the definition at the top of the sheet.
2. **Set the sheet up before the day starts.** Time, place, who was there, A, B, C, and a box for how long or how many. Print the one at the bottom of this page.
3. **When it happens, handle the moment first and write second.** Within five minutes, while it is fresh. Tomorrow's memory is a story, not data.
4. **Antecedent is the thirty seconds before.** Who was there, what was asked, what was taken away, what was going on (noise, hunger, a transition). Facts only. "He was frustrated" is a guess. "I said 'time for bath'" is a fact.
5. **Behavior is what you saw and heard.** Count it or time it. "Screamed, about two minutes." "Hit three times."

6. **Consequence is what happened in the thirty seconds after — especially what people did.** “I said ‘no hitting’ and picked him up” counts. “Nothing” is almost never true; write what actually happened, even if it was you giving in.
7. **Collect at least ten instances, or five days, before you look for a pattern.** Three lines is a bad week, not information.
8. **Then read down the columns, not across.** Does the same antecedent keep appearing? Does the same consequence? That repeat is your first clue to what the behavior is *for* — the next lesson, on function, takes it from there.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Mia, age six, and the floor.

Made-up example. The names and numbers below are invented to show the method.

Behavior, defined: *drops to the floor and screams for longer than ten seconds.*

Five entries from one week:

WHEN, WHERE	A – RIGHT BEFORE	B – WHAT HAPPENED	C – WHAT HAPPENED NEXT
Mon 7:40, hallway	Mom: “Shoes on, we’re leaving.”	Floor, screamed ~2 min	Mom put her shoes on for her
Mon 5:30, kitchen	Dad: “Bath time.”	Floor, screamed ~4 min	Dad: “Fine, five more minutes.” Bath was later
Tue 7:35, hallway	Mom: “Shoes.”	Floor, screamed ~1 min	Mom put her shoes on for her
Wed 12:10, kitchen	“Come sit at the table.”	Floor, screamed ~3 min	Lunch brought to the couch

Wed 7:00, bedroom	Dad: "Pajamas."	Floor, screamed ~2 min	Dad dressed her on the floor
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Read down the columns. Five of five start with an instruction. Five of five end with the task done for her or put off. The floor works. That is a hypothesis to bring to the team, not a verdict — but it is a far better starting point than "she has tantrums."

MISTAKES TO AVOID

Where good sheets go wrong.

- Writing feelings instead of facts ("he was being defiant"). Write what was said and done.
- Logging only the bad days. The quiet days tell you what was different.
- Stopping after three entries because a pattern "seems obvious."
- Defining the behavior as a label ("meltdown," "attitude") so two adults log two different things.
- Changing what you do mid-week without writing that down too. Change is fine; unrecorded change wrecks the sheet.

TRY IT

One question, then the answer.

Which of these belongs in the A column? (a) "He was frustrated." (b) "I said 'time for bath.'" (c) "He always does this at night."

▼ Show the answer, and why

(b). It is something a stranger in the room could have heard. (a) is a guess about a feeling, and (c) is a claim about a pattern, not one instance. The pattern is what you find *after* ten honest lines like (b).

SOMETHING TO KEEP

The ABC data sheet.

DRAGEN ACADEMY • ABC DATA SHEET
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BEHAVIOR, DEFINED SO A STRANGER COULD SPOT IT:	

DATE, TIME, WHERE, WHO	A – THE 30 SECONDS BEFORE (FACTS)	B – WHAT I SAW AND HEARD (HOW LONG / HOW MANY)	C – WHAT HAPPENED IN THE 30 SECONDS AFTER

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WHERE DRAGEN HELPS

Log it in one tap, see the graph.

The DRAGENfamily hub records what you see at home as it happens and draws the last two weeks as a graph. The paper sheet above works without it — the hub just means the sheet is never in the wrong bag.

SOURCE

Where this comes from.

Bijou, Peterson & Ault (1968) introduced ABC recording in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. The method as taught today: Cooper, Heron & Heward, *Applied Behavior Analysis* (3rd ed., 2020), the chapter on functional behavior assessment.

Examples on this page are made up. They contain no client, student or family information. This lesson teaches a method; it does not replace your child's care team, your BCBA, or your payer's written rules.