

# Behaviour analysis holds out hope for autistic children

Bangalore, December 10, 2010, Deccan Herald News Service:

***Harvindan was three-and-a-half when he was diagnosed with autism. He had compliance and behavioural issues. Having tried conventional therapies for almost three years, his parents decided to try Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) after they heard about its effectiveness.***

Today, after 18 months of ABA, his parents say there is a definite improvement in Harvindan's eye contact and receptive language.

A neurological disorder, autism robs the child of the ability to socially interact, read emotions or imitate others to learn. Experts say the prevalence of autism was one in 10,000 during the 1988 census.

Today, the official version says one in 500, but people working in the field say the figures are underreported.

So, how does ABA help in this milieu? "ABA is a science of behaviour modification. We start with what the child wants, what motivates him and accordingly shape his learning. Since there is lack of adequate resources, Association for Behaviour Analysis (ABA)-India, a branch of ABA International, was formed by professionals and supported by parents," says Smita Awasthi, president of ABA-India.

Awasthi is one of the only two certified behaviour analysts in the country. Not surprising, since the course is not only unavailable in the country, but the online course itself costs Rs six to seven lakh.

"Many therapists want to become certified behaviour analysts, but the costs are prohibitive. It is a stringent practice and even after acquiring a certificate, you need to be up-to-date, maintain certain hours and get certification once in three years," says Awasthi.

ABA-India, therefore, is now in talks with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to include ABA as a recognised subject of teaching. However, the ministry might only recognise it as a therapy for now, but Awasthi says: "ABA is not a therapy. It is a subject, a science, where we work with these children, record observations closely and analyse the data to see the child's progress."

While the ministry is undecided, ABA-India is going ahead with its plan to certify special educators based on their records and video recordings showing how they are applying ABA to help their students.

"We are even ready to bring down specialists to train the faculty, who in turn will train the special educators, if a few private universities collaborate," she suggested.

So, how quick is the progress? Although, progress depends on a case-to-case basis, on an average progress is seen from one week to nine months across behaviour, Awasthi says.

## **Two-day international conference**

To create more awareness about ABA, a two-day ABA International Conference is being organised in Bangalore at Taj Vivaanta from December 11. The conference is not for academicians alone, even laypeople can attend it. The meet will include case studies presented by parents.