

11 Practices We're Rejecting (and What We're Doing Instead)

A Practitioner's Guide to Closing the Practice-to-Research Gap in ABA

Every field grows through reflection, and ours is no different. Many of the practices we once accepted in behavior analysis were created with good intentions, but our understanding of people, context, and compassion has evolved.

The Rejected Conference was born from that evolution, a space for practitioners who are ready to do better, not by abandoning the science of behavior, but by expanding it. These ten shifts represent the movement from control to connection, from rigid programs to responsive support, and from compliance to collaboration.

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What We're Rejecting	What We're Doing Instead
Starting all clients on the same assessment and assuming language is always the first priority	Using the Phases of Service Delivery to determine where to start, aligning assessment with connection, regulation, and engagement before targeting language
Addressing "challenging behavior" as if there's a single maintaining variable	Recognizing most "challenging" behavior as stress responses, using comprehensive assessment and skill-based synthesis when appropriate
Toilet training that relies on punishment and rigid scheduling	Identifying why toileting isn't yet mastered, then shaping skills through individualized, low-stress routines
Prioritizing verbal operants as the foundation of language instruction	Centering social communication, active engagement, and relational language through frameworks like RFT
Teaching compliance as a measure of success	Building motivation, curiosity, and authentic participation through relationship-centered teaching
Using extinction as a go-to response for "problem behavior"	Supporting safety, communication, and co-regulation while compassionately fading unsafe contingencies
Treating data as the goal rather than the guide	Collecting contextual, meaningful data that supports decision-making and honors lived experience
Writing programs to "normalize" behavior	Emphasizing identity, autonomy, and strengths rather than conformity or masking
Teaching social or play skills through rigid "expected/unexpected" lessons	Creating enriched environments that promote authentic motivation to engage through play and shared interests
Treating ABA as a siloed discipline	Integrating neuroscience, education, and relational science to expand what "evidence-based" truly means
Defining expertise only by publication or position	Recognizing the expertise of practitioners through lived experience, reflection, and day-to-day application that informs research and drives innovation

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■ A Glimpse Into the Shift

These ideas represent how our collective understanding is evolving across assessment, behavior support, and social connection.

■ Where We Start Matters

Traditional models often begin with standardized assessments and early language programs. Practitioners are now assessing connection and regulation first, understanding that learning happens most effectively when people feel safe, seen, and supported.

■ How We Understand Behavior

Behavior is viewed as communication and regulation, not just a function to be controlled. This shift moves our interventions toward collaboration and compassion, grounded in both neuroscience and lived experience.

■ What Social Success Looks Like

Social growth is no longer measured by compliance or “expected” behaviors. Instead, it’s about creating opportunities for authentic connection, shared joy, and meaningful play that reflects each person’s interests and sensory experiences.

Want to Go Deeper?

Join the **Rejected Conference**, where 20+ practitioner presenters are redefining what compassionate, evidence-based ABA can look like.

Learn how to apply these shifts in practice and earn CEUs while connecting with professionals who are doing better—together.



Early Bird Pricing through **November 15th**

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These shifts reflect the ongoing refinement of our field and a shared commitment to meaningful progress. Each represents a move toward a more compassionate, evidence-aligned, and human-centered practice of behavior analysis. True expertise develops through experience, by listening, reflecting, and applying knowledge within real contexts. Practitioners shape the direction of our science through everyday choices: what we teach, how we listen, and how we define growth.

By sharing our lessons, questions, and willingness to evolve, we contribute to collective progress and continue building a field that reflects the values we hold.

