

## VB – further information

### What is Verbal Behaviour (VB)?

Verbal Behaviour (VB) is a method of teaching children with autism based on the principles of ABA. Its foundations are rooted in the groundbreaking work of the psychologist and behaviourist B.F. Skinner, and has been developed over the last 50 years by leading autism experts. As the name suggests, the VB system concentrates heavily on teaching the child functional communication first, then speech and language, then the social skills that come with language.

VB understands that children with autism behave and learn in very different ways from other children. A large element of VB involves understanding what will motivate a particular child to learn, often using the child's own special interests or hobbies. We use VB at Rainbow School because we believe that it is proven to be the most effective system of teaching children with autism. It is an entirely child-centred form of education, as each pupil has a personalised program which is carefully measured and adjusted along the way using the [VB-MAPP](#).

VB can be used to teach all the skills a child with autism needs in order to live as independent a life as possible, from talking and toileting right through to reading, writing and maths. Unlike “normally-functioning children” children on the autism spectrum do not simply pick things up by copying others. Under VB, each skill is broken down into manageable chunks, and taught and retaught until the pupil has mastered each element of the skill.

### Origins of VB

VB or Verbal Behaviour is based on 20 years research and has its foundations in the groundbreaking work on language and behaviour in the 1950s of the eminent psychologist and behaviourist B.F. Skinner. The VB method of education is used extensively in schools in the US, Canada and Scandinavia, but in the UK its availability is limited to those pupils at Rainbow School and a few other VB schools scattered around the country.

There is particular emphasis in VB on language and speech. Skinner believed that language is a behaviour which can be learned like any other. In other words, children can learn to talk in the same way that they learn to walk, or crawl or reach – through trial and error, practise, encouragement, motivation and reinforcement (rewards) for getting it right. A baby learns that when it cries, the “reinforcer” is that mummy comes running in with milk. So it learns through behavioural training to cry again when it is hungry.

### VB in Practice

Some of the first things VB focuses on are what are called “mands” and “facts”. Mands are like demands: words the child learns to use when they want to ask for something –

e.g. “drink”, “toast” and “computer”. Tacts are naming words, so the child learns to identify a picture of a car by saying “car”.

Mand training starts by using the items that are most motivating to a particular child – say “Thomas” if he/she wants to play with a Thomas the Tank engine toy, or the child is encouraged to say “push” for a big push on the swing. Or a favourite toy might be put in a box, so the mand needed is “open” before the child can get to the toy. Mand training unlocks in the child’s mind the idea that different sounds elicit different outcomes for them. This is key to developing speech and language. Those who have difficulty forming words will be encouraged to mand using signs or picture exchange (PECs).

The VB method of learning breaks down any task a child with autism needs to learn into tiny steps, works out what will motivate or reinforce the child to learn, and then measures the achievement along the way so that the child’s individual programme can be adjusted according to what is and isn’t working.

### Our expertise

Staff at BeyondAutism all have extensive in-house VB training. The vast majority have an honours degree in Psychology, as a minimum. Many staff have additional Masters Degrees in Education or in Behaviour Analysis. Tutors begin as trainee tutors for one year. During this first year they receive theoretical and practical training in teaching pupils with autism using VB methods. All staff continue to receive on-going training to keep abreast of advances in both education and verbal behaviour. ABA Supervisors have BCaBA (Board Certified Assistant Behaviour Analyst) qualifications, working towards BCBA (Board Certified Behaviour Analyst) qualifications, as held by our ABA consultants. In addition there is one qualified teacher for every seven pupils.

### Our vision

Our vision at BeyondAutism is to bring the benefits of VB to many other children and young people with autism. Our students not only learn to use language (words or signs) but learn to use them functionally, giving them the ability to extend their new skills to other environments and situations.

We strive to make Verbal Behaviour accessible to all. We want to demystify the approach so that more people can benefit from it. Verbal Behaviour has a sound evidence base to show that it can significantly improve the lives of people with autism, and help them to reach their full potential. We believe it is a natural and flexible approach to teaching communication that can be applied both at school and at home. We work with children and young people on a one to one basis guided by their individual needs and motivation. Through highly personalised curricula pupils acquire language skills, which are the springboard for all future learning.