

## Parent's engagement in ABA therapy and their impact in the reduction of behaviours that challenge

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### Executive summary

The parent-child relationship is a never-ending journey of learning and experimenting. This is even more true when you are a parent of a child with special needs. Accordingly, to Perry and Salish's studies made in 2008, parents play a pivotal role in their child's therapy, (Odonnell, 2017).

In the Early Years' service, we have the advantage of working alongside the parents, giving them knowledge of ABA principles and different strategies, and how to apply them during the sessions. Providing a space, where parents can learn and understand their children, empowering the parents to generalise the learned tools to other environments and observe a change in their children's lives.

In this case study, I will try to demonstrate one example of the impact that a mother's full engagement has on her child's behaviours that challenge.

### Introduction

The pupil who is aged 4, started at the Early Years' service, in the middle of November 2020. At the time, due the COVID-19 pandemic, the sessions were running with one family and the tutor, so the pupils and families would not mix between themselves. The dynamic of this family is multifaceted, with the pupil coming with different family members for each session, with mum being the only constant. During the first sessions, the pupil showed frequent and long behaviours that challenge, falling under several antecedents, such as, told no's, something can have, interruptions and transitions. The pupil would engage in behaviours that challenge straight away, not tolerating any attempt to prompt an alternative way of communicating

his needs. The family members that attend the service have different styles of delivering education, but in common they had the same struggle; how to manage the pupil's behaviour in an effective way.

This case study would like to explore this question: Do the parents direct involvement in ABA therapy have an impact in the decrease of behaviours that challenge?

### Method

Our main objective was to find a successful way in how to work with this specific family dynamic, as sometimes there were four adults trying to lead the session. Throughout the sessions, we managed to explain to the family that it would be beneficial for the pupil, to have one adult leading the session with the rest of the family observing and giving support if needed. The family agreed on the child's mother leading the session.

During our sessions, and in our parents' discussion sessions, our goal is to deliver ABA knowledge and empower parents in how to manage their children's needs. We also make sure that the parents are involved, when we set up the targets for the pupils, as parents tend to feel more empowered and in control of their environment, when they participate in the program intervention (Bennett, 2012).

Initially, the mother would let the tutor or the other family members lead the session. We worked alongside her, supporting her with how to prompt verbal communication from the pupil. We also focused on the importance of following through with demands, transitions and interrupts, showing her several strategies that would help to prevent behaviours that challenge.

To increase the pupil's verbal communication, we supported the parent in how to hold back the requested item and echo the correct way to request it. We also showed her how to differentially reinforce depending on the level of prompt required. Moreover, we showed how to use visuals, such as the Now and Next board, or the Let Me Talk App, for transitions and interruptions.

We sought for mum to understand the ABA concepts used, so that she would feel confident to lead the sessions or ask for support if she needed it.

## Results

Since this pupil and his family started in the Early Years' Service, we have observed significant progress and a decrease in the frequency and duration of his behaviours that challenge.

We observed throughout the sessions that the mother felt more confident to put into practice all the strategies given to help reduce the behaviours that challenge. Although the principles of ABA can be complex, giving parents clear and brief information, can clarify their child's needs (Helton & Alber-Morgan, 2018).

As we can observe in the manding graph (Figure 1), the frequency that the pupil would echo vocal prompts was initially low, with him instead engaging in behaviours that challenge and/or refusal to echo the request.

The parent was consistent in holding out the desired item, as well as using any opportunity to work on communication. Every time that the pupil echoed the vocal, she was able to reinforce appropriately, according to the concept of differential reinforcement.

By the end of the term, the parent was more confident leading the sessions and the pupil was echoing back or requesting more at item level, instead of showing behaviours that challenge or not echoing back.

Parents who are trained in ABA techniques have reported lower levels of stress and higher satisfaction levels when compared to other early intervention programs (Dillenburger, Keenan, Doherty, Byrne, & Gallagher, 2010).

We can also observe in the frequency of behaviours challenge graph, (Figure 2), that there is a general decrease of the behaviours that challenge throughout the sessions. The pupil went from 21 behaviours that challenge, to have only 2 during one session. To have a parent actively engaged during the sessions, as well equipped with basic knowledge of ABA concepts, showed an impact on the frequency of the behaviours that challenge. 'Parent training programs have a positive effect on parenting behaviour and impacting the behaviour of their children' (Bennett, 2012).

During our sessions, we managed to support mum with fading out visuals, and how to redirect when the pupil showed behaviours that challenge, thus the parent is now confident to run transitions or interruptions by herself. The duration of the behaviours that challenge graph (Figure 3) shows that the intensity decreased, and even when there is behaviour that challenged, it is quickly managed by the mother, resulting in less behaviours of longer durations.

'Parental involvement is considered to be a key element in the success of early intervention programs' (Bennett, 2012).

## Discussion

This case study is just a small contribution, to show how essential the parent's active engagement in ABA therapy is. The more engaged they are, the more positive impact they will have in their children's lives. It is also beneficial for the parents to have ABA knowledge so that they can generalise what they have learned, to different environments (Bennett, 2012).

There is a lot of studies that support the idea of the parents' pivotal role in actively engaging in early intervention programs. However, there is a lack of studies showing what would be the difference and impact in the children's lives without the parents' involvement in the therapy.

Our Early Years' Service gives us a unique advantage, of a possible comparative study, contributing to studies and discussions around parents' role and importance of early intervention programmes.

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Figure 1 – Manding graph

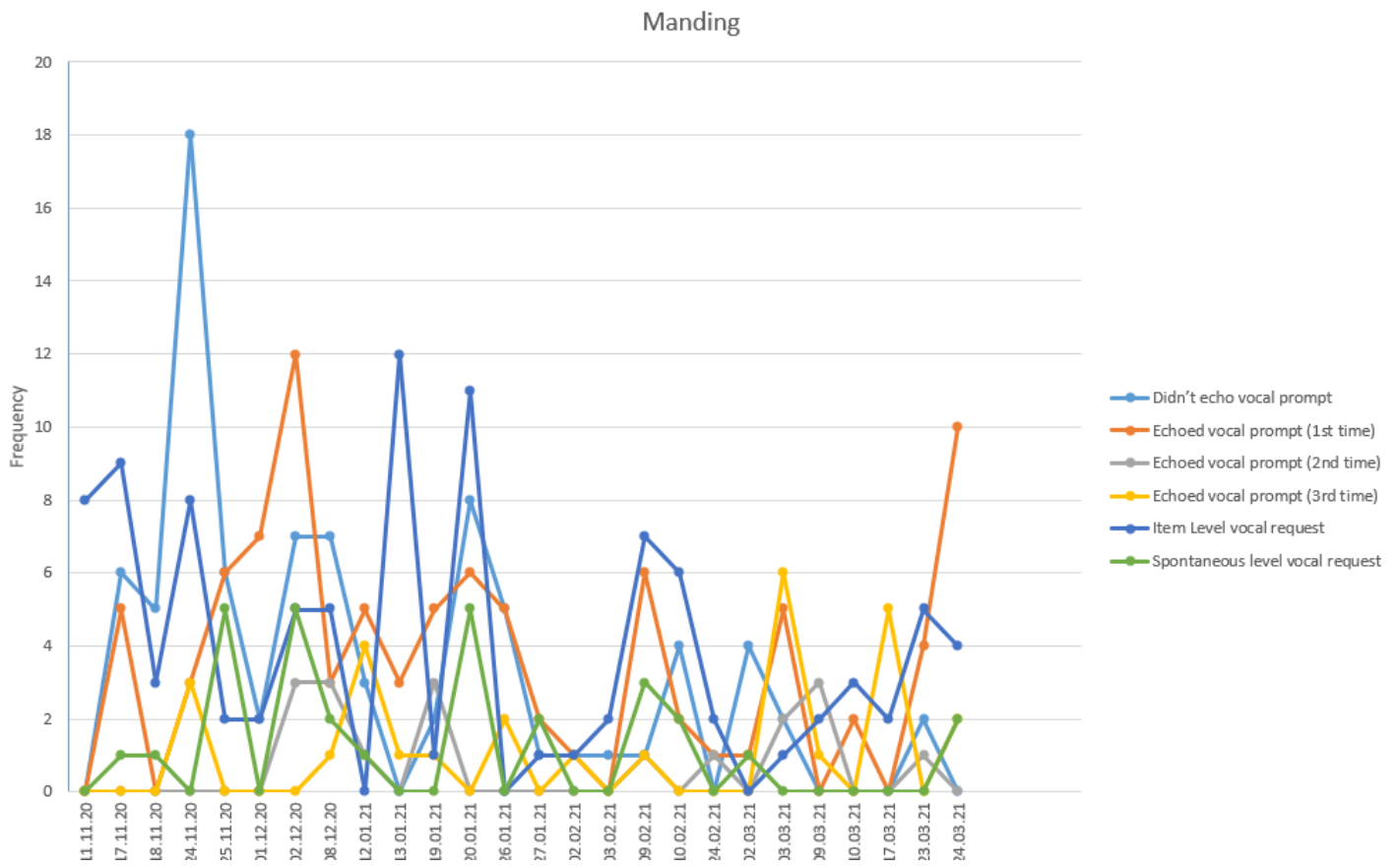
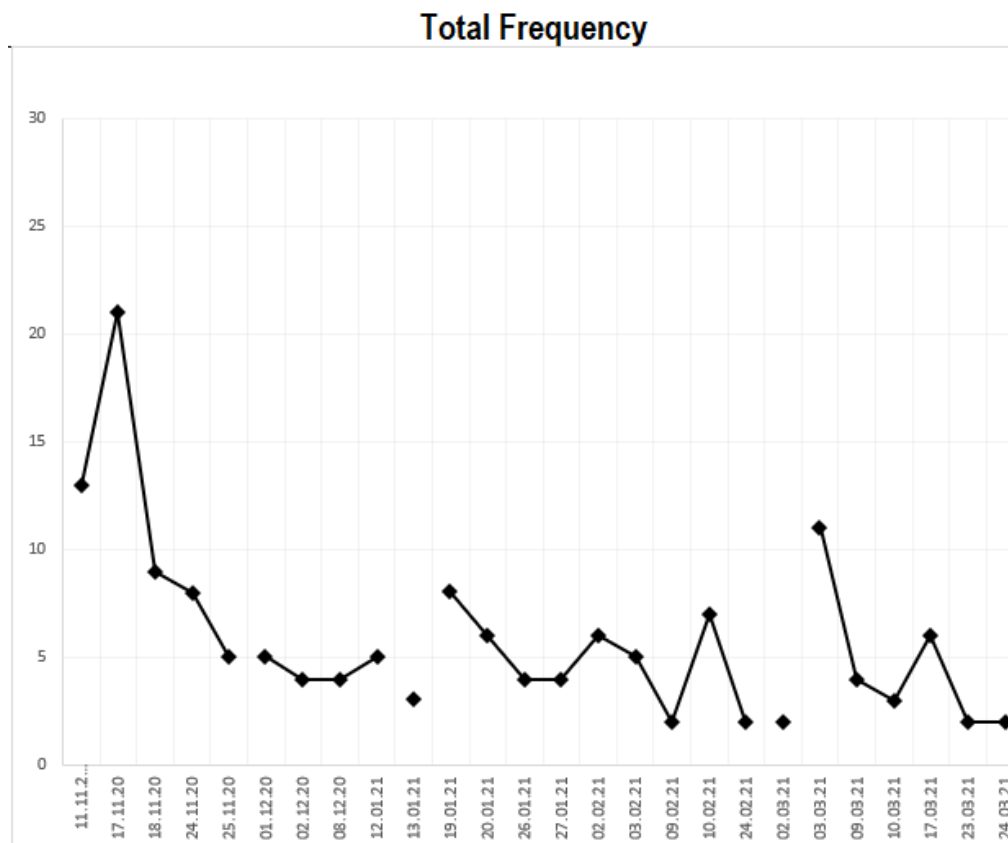
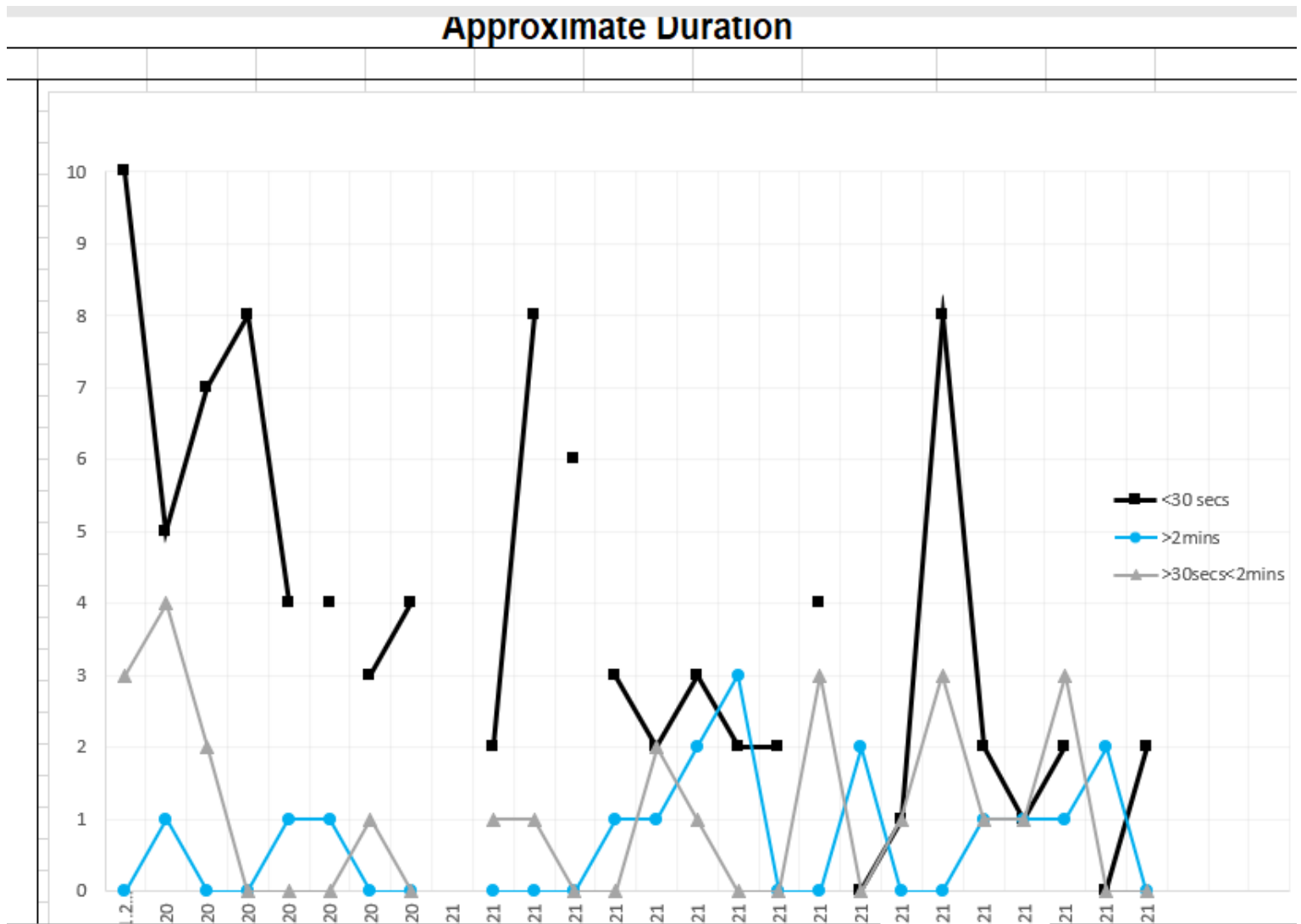


Figure 2 – Frequency of the behaviours that challenge



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Figure 3 – Duration of the behaviours that challenge



## References

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