

Health Trends



Mental Health and Behavior Science



While **applied behavior analysis (ABA)** may not be the first thing that comes to mind during Mental Health Month, mental health has been at the core of “**ABA**” for a long time.

Mental Health Month is recognized every May. This tradition was founded back in 1949 by Mental Health America (6). Around the same time the behaviorist, B.F. Skinner, “*began trumpeting the potential of behavior analysis to change the world for the better*” (2).

Years later, in 1968, the **Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis (JABA)** was established, building upon Skinner’s work along with other notable contributors to behaviorism, psychology, mental health and science.

The first volume of JABA included articles on improving the use of reinforcement in hospital settings (1), phobias (4), and increasing social responses with individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia (3).

Some of the funding for these early JABA articles was provided by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health (3). Behavior science journals like JABA, The Analysis of Verbal Behavior, Behavior Analysis in Practice, and the Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions (to name a few) have continued to address socially significant behaviors related to mental health.

It has been **75 years since the first Mental Health Month** and a lot has changed. Our language has evolved to be more inclusive and less stigmatizing (6), and our society has become more comfortable discussing mental health.

Please direct any questions or concerns regarding the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network “Health Trends” newsletter to communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov

For additional information and resources about support for yourself or how to support someone who may be experiencing a mental health condition (or possible symptoms of a mental health condition), visit one of the following:

[Right Help. Right Now.](#)

<https://dbhds.virginia.gov/?s=right+help+right+now>

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)

<https://dbhds.virginia.gov/find-help/>

[Mental Health America](#)

<https://mhanational.org/>

Behavioral Science from A to Z

Behavior science researchers and practitioners continue to contribute to mental health research and treatment with empirical work across various topics.

A 2022 article by Heward and colleagues described over 350 applications of behavioral science from A to Z. The following are a few topics relevant to mental health that you may be surprised to learn about:

Behavior Science Applied to 350 Domains of Socially Significant Behavior (2).

- Alzheimer’s disease (Bourgeois, 1990; LeBlanc et al., 2006).
- Anxiety (Flood & Wilder, 2004; Rounds et al., 2007).
- Binge eating (Kjelsås et al., 2004; Lee & Miltenberger, 1997).
- Bipolar disorder (Bradshaw & Szabadi, 1978; Whitton et al., 2015).
- Brain injury, traumatic (Tasky et al., 2008; Wehman et al., 1989).
- Bullying (Bradshaw, 2013; Ross et al., 2009).
- Death and dying (Maccallum & Bonanno, 2016; Papa et al., 2013).
- Depression (Cuijpers et al., 2007; Polenick & Flora, 2013).
- Fear (Shabani & Fisher, 2006; Tyner et al., 2016).
- Gambling (Dickerson, 1979; Dixon et al., 2015).
- Happiness (Green et al., 1997; Moore et al., 2007).
- Hoarding (Donaldson et al., 2014).
- Hopelessness (Rezende et al., 2021).
- Obesity (Carr & Epstein, 2020; Hustyi et al., 2011).
- Psychogenic [psychosomatic] conditions (Grosz & Zimmerman, 1965; Watson & Sterling, 1998).
- Psychopharmacology instruction (Zinn et al., 2015).
- Schizophrenia (Salzinger & Pisoni, 1958; Wilder et al., 2001).
- Stress (Koegel et al., 1992; Osborne et al., 2008).
- Substance use (Greenfield et al., 1996; Roll et al., 2009).
- Suicide (Bryan & Bryan, 2021; Dombrovski et al., 2011).
- Weather-related behavior (Ardila Sánchez et al., 2019; Gelino & Reed, 2020).

MindShift App



MindShift, created by Anxiety Canada, a nonprofit committed to promoting anxiety awareness and facilitating access to effective resources and treatment, offers a comprehensive range of tools. The app equips users with valuable resources to explore and acquire practical tips for managing common concerns such as general worry, social anxiety, perfectionism, panic, and phobias. It’s free. Has breathing and meditation exercises. Available on Apple and Android (App of the Month is not endorsed by DBHDS Office of Integrated Health-Health Supports Network. User accepts full responsibility for utilization of app).

References

1. Avllon, T., & Azrin, N.H. (1968). Reinforcer sampling: A technique for increasing the behavior of mental patients. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1, 13-20. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.1968.1-13>.
2. Heward, W.L., Critchfield, T.S., Reed, D.D., Detrich, R., & Kimball, J.W. (2022). ABA from A to Z: Behavior science applied to 350 domains of socially significant behavior. *Perspectives on Behavior Science*, 45, 327–359.
3. Kale, R.J., Kave, J.H., Whelan, P.A., & Hopkins, B.L. (1968). The effects of reinforcement on the modification, maintenance, and generalization of social responses of mental patients. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1, 307-314.
4. Leitenberg, H., Agras, W.S., Thompson, L.E., & Wright, D.E. (1968). Feedback in behavior modification: An experimental analysis in two phobic cases. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1, 131-137.
5. Lindsley, O.R. (1968). A reliable wrist counter for recording behavior rates. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1, 77-78.
6. Mental Health America (2024). May is mental health month 2024 outreach toolkit: Where to start.

Health Trends



May is National Skin Cancer Prevention and Awareness Month

Skin cancer is America's most common and preventable type of cancer. Over 5 million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed every year in the United States.

Skin Cancer Awareness month is a time to bring attention and focus to the facts about skin protection and early detection.

It can happen to anyone at any age on any part of the body. Skin cancer is the type of cancer you can see. The 2026 "BIG SEE" champion encourages everyone to get to know their skin by...

- Doing a head-to-toe check each month.
- Contacting a dermatologist if any new, changing or unusual spots are noted on the skin.

Skin cancer can be challenging to identify. Skin cancer is unique and may appear visually different due to variations in the individual's skin tone, and the skin cancer type, size, and location on the body.

Types of Skin Cancers:

- Actinic keratosis is a precancerous skin growth characterized by rough, scaly, or crusty patches.
- Amelanotic melanoma lacks pigment and appears as a skin-tone or pink lesion.
- Basal cell carcinoma is the most common form of skin cancer, and may appear as a shiny, pearly bump, a reddish patch, or a sore that heals and returns.
- Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that is often pigmented tan, brown, black, or even blue.
- Merkel cell carcinoma appears as a fast-growing, painless, firm, red or violet-colored lump.
- Squamous cell carcinoma appears as persistent, scaly red patches, open sores, or elevated growths, often on the face, ears, and hands.

Early detection can save lives. Getting the skin examined by a dermatologist is the most vital step in identifying and treating skin cancer.

To learn more about skin cancer follow this link to The Skin Cancer Foundation: <https://www.skincancer.org/>

Make sure to read the ABA Snippet "Don't Fry Day" which reviews ways to keep everyone protected in the sun to reduce the chances of developing skin cancer.

Reference

[The Skin Cancer Foundation. \(2026\). What you need to know about skin cancer. A 501\(c\)\(3\) nonprofit organization \[EIN: 13-2948778\] \[Internet\]](https://www.skincancer.org/)



ABA Snippets ...

Don't Fry Day

May 25, 2026, is Don't Fry Day, designated by the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention to remind everyone to protect their skin while enjoying time outdoors (2).

The EPA recommends the 'Slip!, Slop!, Slap!, and Wrap!' steps:

- Slip on a shirt
- Slop on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher
- Slap on a hat
- And wrap on sunglasses (2).

For individuals with developmental disabilities, following these steps may be challenging due to sensory sensitivities or negative learning histories. Behavior science strategies can increase tolerance for health and safety routines, including sunscreen use.

The Essential for Living handbook provides protocols for teaching tolerance through gradual desensitization (1). If someone refuses sunscreen, you can build tolerance after obtaining assent. Start with touching a tiny amount of sunscreen with a fingertip and then wiping it off while providing reinforcement. Next, they can rub sunscreen between their fingers, then tolerate a dab on the back of the hand. Gradually increase the amount and duration of contact as tolerance improves.

Although the process takes time, it is a gentle and effective way to help someone participate in essential health and safety routines and can help ensure we all "don't fry" this summer.

You may contact DBHDS about these efforts via the following:

Courtney.Pernick@dbhds.virginia.gov

References

1. McGreevy, P., Fry, T., & Cornwall, C. (2014). Essential for living: A communication, behavior, and functional skills curriculum, assessment and professional practitioner's handbook. Patrick McGreevy.
2. [United States Environmental Protection Agency. \(2025, May 2\). Don't Fry Day.](https://www.epa.gov/dont-fry-day)

Skin Skinner App



Skin Skinner is a personal skin scanner on your phone. It is an application based on artificial intelligence technologies and the experience of dermatologists. It helps to identify skin cancer, 6 types of acne and more. Check your moles for risk, analyze neoplasms, and papilloma's. Take a clear photo of the skin area, wait a minute while AI analyzes the photo and get a result. Skin Scanner does not replace or cancel a visit to a dermatologist. The application is just a mobile assistant for the skin self-control. Some in app purchases might apply. (App of the Month is not endorsed by DBHDS Office of Integrated Health. User accepts full responsibility for utilization of app).

