15-16 OCTOBER, 2021

ABA TODAY

VOICES AND CHOICES / VIRTUAL EVENT

Dr Lina Slim-Topdijan

Keynote Speaker | Day 1

2021

ABA TODAY CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Discover our incredible line up of local and international speakers. With 3 keynotes, 4 panel sessions and 9 stream presentations there is something for everyone. Connect, learn and share knowledge at ABA Today.

Dr Peter Gerhardt

Keynote Speaker | Day 2

Dr Adithyan Rajaraman

Keynote Speaker | Day 2

FRIDAY 15 & SATURDAY 16 OCTOBER 2021

Available live streamed & on demand

REGISTRATION:

abatoday.com.au

Australia's Premier Behavioural Conference

ABA Today is the premier event for the presentation and dissemination of best-practice and person-centred care. It's a forum for showcasing clinical advances and research findings, and for representing and sharing the lived experience of neurodivergent individuals and their families.

Delegates of ABA Today are commonly service providers, clinicians, academics, researchers, parents and carers, medical and allied health professionals, parents and carers, and individuals with lived experience of ABA and autism.

Voices & Choices Conference Theme

By giving voice and enabling choice we can all better understand the experiences and needs of individuals with autism. Voices and Choices seeks to showcase the ways in which evidence-based educational and behavioural supports can help autistic individuals with social inclusion and to participate meaningfully in school, home, and community activities. It is also about supporting parents and carers in the choices they make for an autistic loved one; ensuring parents and carers right to have a voice for their child.

Thank You to Our Sponsors

We sincerely thank the team behind our conference convenor, ABIA, and all our major, stream and panel sponsors for generously supporting our virtual conference.

Conference Convenor & Major Sponsors

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Professional Learning Day | Day 1

9:00am: Welcome & Housekeeping (Dr Erin Leif, ABIA Board Vice-President) – 10min

9:10am: Opening Address (Dr David Trembath, PhD Griffith University Queensland) – 20min

Title: Autism in Australia: The State of Science and Practice
Synopsis: In this Day 1 opening address, Dr. David Trembath will discuss recent research advancements related to support for autistic people, and how ABA sits within the wider autism landscape. David will provide his reflections on the current state of autism research and practice in Australia, and future directions for addressing research and practice gaps.

9:35am: Panel Discussion (Dr Camille Kolu, Cassi Breaux, and Chelsea Troutman) – 90min

Title: Integrating Trauma-Informed Practice and Applied Behaviour Analysis
Synopsis: Trauma can impact the lives and learning of children in many ways. Studies have shown that children who experience trauma may have difficulty regulating their emotions and behaviour, which places them at greater risk for problems at school and poorer educational outcomes. Later in life, these early traumatic experiences may increase risk of poverty, substance abuse, mental health issues, un- or under-employment, poor health, and early death. Thus, it is important for educators, allied health professionals, and BCBAs to have an understanding of trauma, the ways trauma influences learning and development, and evidence-based approaches for supporting children and young people who have experienced trauma.

In this interactive panel discussion, Dr Camille Kolu, Cassi Breaux, and Chelsea Troutman will provide an overview of trauma and how trauma might impact development and learning in autistic children. Our panellists will provide an overview of evidence-based models of supporting children who have experienced trauma, and will describe how they integrate the principles of trauma-informed practice into their work as BCBAs. The panel will conclude with a question and answer session. The panellists will also take questions from attendees.

11:05am: Morning Tea & Exhibitor Session – 30 min

11:35am: Keynote (Dr Lina Slim-Topdjian, BCBA) – 75 min

Title: Interprofessional Education & Collaborative Practices for Effective Autism Treatment
Synopsis: Interprofessional collaboration is noted to be an important component of effective service delivery for individuals with autism and related conditions. However, there is little guidance for practitioners about how to effectively engage in collaboration with professionals from other disciplines, particularly when professionals disagree. In this presentation, Dr Lina Slim will provide an overview of effective strategies for engaging in interprofessional collaboration. She will highlight the ways in which effective collaboration can enhance the lives of people with autism. The presentation will be followed by a Q&A session with Dr Slim.

12:50pm: Lunch & Exhibitor Session – 60 min

1:50pm: Panel (Russ Harris, Brian Middleton, and Dr Lynette Wong) – 90 min

Title: Enhancing the Impact of ABA with ACT: A Primer for Professionals and Parents
Synopsis: Acceptance and Commitment therapy (ACT) is a form of Clinical Behaviour Analysis that is used for treating anxiety, trauma, grief, addiction, and emotional challenges for individuals of all ages. ACT is based on the notion that uncomfortable or distressing private events (such as thoughts and feelings) are a normal part of the human experience, and, by using strategies based in mindfulness, we can learn to accept and lessen the impact of these private events, rather than attempting to eliminate them. ACT focuses on helping people identify their values (by answering the question, what does it mean to for you to live a full and meaningful life?) and then guides people to engage in behaviours that will change their lives for the better and bring them closer toward their values. Ultimately, the goal of ACT is to help people live a full and meaningful life, even in the face of anxiety, sadness, and all the other emotions that come with being human.

In this interactive panel discussion, Russ Harris (ACT specialist and best-selling author of the Happiness Trap), Brian Middleton (The Bearded Behaviorist and BCBA), and Dr Lynette Wong (General Practitioner) will provide an overview of how they use ACT in their professional practice and in their own lives! The panellists will share stories about how ACT can transform the professional practice of Applied Behaviour Analysis, and help autistic people and their families live a rich, full and meaningful life. The panellists will also take questions from attendees.

3:25pm: Panel (Dr David Trembath, Nadia Marussinszky, Susan Marden) – 90 min

Title: The Right to Effective Communication: Supporting Autistic People to Access Effective and Preferred Communication Systems
Synopsis: According to Article 21 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability, people with disabilities, including autistic people, have a right to effective communication. This means they have a right to be told things in a way they understand, and the right to an environment that allows them to communicate openly and honestly. They also have a right to access individualised communication supports, such as pictures, gestures, and speech devices, that meet their needs. However, the process of helping a person select an appropriate, safe, and effective means of communication can be challenging, because there are many unique factors to consider.

In this interactive panel discussion, David Trembath (Speech Pathologist and researcher), Nadia Marussinszky (Speech Pathologist and BCBA) and Susan Marden (Speech Pathologist and Director of One on One) will discuss important considerations for helping non-speaking autistic people and their families select and learn to use alternative methods of communication. The panellists will also describe current advancements in research and practice that highlight effective strategies for teaching communication, and ways to ensure the communication supports are acceptable and preferred by the user. The panellists will also take questions from attendees.

4:55: Day 1 Close (Wendy Kozica, ABIA Board President)

Main Conference Day | Day 2

9:00am: Welcome & Housekeeping (Dr Erin Leif, ABIA Board Vice-President) – 10min

9:10am: Opening Address (Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner) – 20min

Title: Human rights, supported decision-making and people with disability in Australia: where to next?
Synopsis: In this Day 2 opening address, Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, will discuss the importance of adopting a human rights model when supporting individuals on the autism spectrum, and the need to support autistic people to make their own decisions.

9:35am: Keynote (Dr Peter Gerhardt, BCBA-D, EPIC School, New Jersey) – 75 min

Title: Realising the Potential of Applied Behavior Analysis to Improve Outcomes in Adolescents and Young Adults with Autism.
Synopsis: Baer, Wolf and Risley (1968) stated that behavior analytic intervention is expected to result in strong, socially important, and generalisable behavior change which, in this case, should mean more positive adult outcomes in ASD. Unfortunately, despite a nearly three decade-long emphasis on evidence-based, behavior analytic intervention in ASD, adult outcomes remain poor “for almost any outcome you choose” (Roux et al 2015, pg 8). While there may be several reasons for continued poor outcomes (including the challenge of simply defining 'good outcome'), the potential of behavior analytic intervention to develop more positive adult outcomes has yet to be fully realised. Such outcomes, however, are well within the reach of our behavior analytic technology. But to do that, the contingencies governing our behavior will, most likely, need to shift. For example, we will need to shift from contingencies that reinforce the technical precision of our classroom-based interventions to contingencies the reinforce the somewhat less technical precision of community-based intervention (assuming the target has a fair degree of social validity). This presentation identifies a number of areas, internal and external to the field, where a 'contingency shift' may be necessary if the power of behavior analytic intervention to significantly improve outcomes for adults with autism is to be more fully realised.

10:55am: Breakout Stream Sessions – 45 min
Early Years Stream (Angelika Anderson, Associate Professor, University of Waikato. Co-Presenter: Monica Carr, Melbourne Graduate School of Education)
Title: Applied Behaviour Analysis for Autism: Evidence, Issues, and Implementation Barriers
This presentation will review the current evidence base of EIBI (Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention), and explore why, in spite of strong supporting evidence, the up-take of evidence-based procedures remains poor. The presentation will outline and discuss key issues that contribute to the controversy and division among researchers, clinicians, and within the autism community, including common misunderstandings and misconceptions about ABA. In order to promote the availability of evidence-based, effective, and affordable EIBI, it is important to reconcile these differences, develop mutual understanding between these communities, and work together on research focused on promoting implementation, and to influence policy.

School Stream (Binita Singh, Registered Psychologist & PhD Candidate, Monash University)

Title: Teaching reading comprehension skills to children with Autism using Reciprocal Teaching

The literature concerning the reading development of children with ASD has revealed a distinct profile - one of often intact word decoding, but deficient reading comprehension. Given the rising prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the push towards inclusion, teachers and other educationalists are being increasingly required to support the learning needs of students with ASD within a collaborative learning environment. This presentation highlights the benefit of utilising Reciprocal Teaching (RT) with students with and without autism, thus demonstrating its ability to promote inclusivity in mainstream classrooms.

Life Stream (Karen McKinnon, National Clinical Director, Autism Partnership)

Title: How ABA empowers voices and enables choices: prioritisation of curriculum which enhances autonomy

Across all ages and intervention stages, clinicians and parents can emphasise curriculum which empowers a child to make choices in life and to have a say in what is important to them. Very young learners can participate in intervention which enhances their ability to ask for what they want or need and to assert themselves with others. A progressive approach to ABA allows for the development of autonomy in autistic children, with an emphasis on the child's active participation in goal setting over time. This session explores curriculum examples which emphasis voices and choices of autistic children from the first day of intervention through the lifespan.

11:40am: Morning Tea & Exhibitor Session – 30 min

12:10pm: Keynote (Dr Adithyan Rajaraman, BCBA-D LBA, University of Maryland, Baltimore County) – 75 min

Title: Embedding Choice into Assessment and Treatment of Challenging Behaviour: The Enhanced Choice Model

Synopsis: Recent advances in functional behaviour assessment and function-based, skill-based positive behaviour support have emphasised the importance of listening to the voice of the person during all phases of the process. The importance of creating contexts in which the person is happy, relaxed, and engaged is also important. In this presentation, Dr Rajaraman will describe a new and innovative model for creating fun and engaging behaviour support contexts that promote choice and control on part of the person. The presentation will be followed by a Q&A session with Dr Rajaraman.

1:25pm: Lunch & Exhibitor Session – 45 min

2:10pm: Breakout Stream Sessions – 45 min

Early Years Stream (Nadia Marussinszky, Speech Pathologist & BCBA, Autism Partn Australia. Co-Presenters: Stephanie Nicholson, Speech & Language Pathologist Sophie Cirillo, Speech Pathologist)

Title: Emerging communication: how AAC helps individuals find their voice

While there is abundant research stating that using an AAC (alternative or augmentative communication) does not impede the development of communication (Smith, Barton-Hulsey, Nwosu, 2016), there is still some resistance among parents and professionals alike.

(Synopsis continued on next page).

This talk will cover the history of when and why AAC has been used in the past, summarise the evidence which discusses how AAC supports language development, and discuss how intervening with an AAC at an early stage of intervention can result in more flexible spoken communication. Skills that are good prognostic indicators that an individual might start speaking, and how to capitalise on these will also be covered.

School Stream (Annie Rose, Educator in schools - sexuality and relationships, LIFT Education. Co-Presenter: Amelia Osbon, BCBA, Autism Partnership)

Title: Sexual and relationship education for children on the ASD, using ABA principles

Every child has the right to receive sexuality education that is adaptive to their individual needs. Sex education can improve knowledge and attitudes toward sexual and reproductive health and behaviours, and can teach important self-preservation and safety skills. For autistic children, access to high quality sex education is limited. Autistic children and their families have little choice over when, where and how they access sex education programs. Thus, there is an urgent need to build the capacity of autism service providers to create and deliver safe and effective sex education programs, covering all aspects of sexual development.

Life Stream (Joanne Brearley, Founding Director, Jigsaw Autism Services Co-Presenter: Eliza Brearley, Female Autistic host, YouTuber, Planet Jassi)

Title: Planet Jassi - Keeping it authentic, A Mother and Daughters Voice

Planet Jassi started as a YouTube Autism Therapy Channel in 2018 by autism specialist Joanne Brearley to support her autistic daughter Eliza to achieve her dream of being an actor. Born with an intellectual disability and autism, Planet Jassi has supported Elisa by creating meaningful work and building her voice. Since it's interception, Planet Jassi has built itself into a brand that has allowed Elisa to grow in her strengths and talents while also supporting the autism community through her videos and live performances. In this presentation, participants can join Joanne and Eliza on the Planet Jassi journey, learning about its origins as a YouTube channel and an autism mum trying to help her daughter, to its development two years on into a recognised brand.

3:00pm: Breakout Stream Sessions – 45 min

Early Years Stream (Bethanee Lowe, Program Supervisor, Abacus Learning Centre. Co-Presenter: Jack Massey, Centre Manager & Program Supervisor)

Title: Choice and Flexibility: The Role of Autistic Individuals & Families in ABA Telehealth Services

In response to COVID-19, Abacus Learning Centre developed a practical model of telehealth ABA therapy delivery which emphasises the importance of choice for autistic individuals and their families. The telehealth model was developed in consultation with autistic children and families to ensure continuity of support throughout the pandemic and ongoing. This presentation will outline the strengths and challenges of telehealth ABA therapy delivery, explore child and family satisfaction and outcomes from flexible and adaptable telehealth ABA service delivery and discuss how this method of service delivery has applications beyond the COVID-19 pandemic for autistic individuals, their families, and their broader support community.

School Stream (Claire Birrell, BCBA & Early Childhood Clinical Consultant, Learning for life Autism Centre)

Title: Choosing the best school

This presentation aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the various aspects of school selection and associated processes, to allow parents to make informed school decisions with confidence. By empowering the people who know the children best to make informed decisions, we are helping to ensure that the children experience the most successful school transition possible.

3:00pm: Life Stream Family Panel (Monique Cain, The Sewell Family, and Samantha Durney and Lewis Clark) – 45 min

Title: Family Perspectives on Contemporary ABA-based Programs

Synopsis: A large body of research suggests that therapy programs based on the science of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) can be effective for teaching new skills and reducing behaviours of concern, and promoting independence. There is, however, less research exploring how autistic people and their families perceive their ABA therapy programs. It is important to elevate the voices of autistic people and their families and provide them with opportunities to share their lived experiences, both in research and in practice. In this interactive panel discussion, we will hear from three families who have participated in ABA therapy programs at different points in time. Our panelists will describe what this experience was like for them, how they benefited from ABA, and what they think we as practitioners can do to improve the delivery of ABA therapy programs in the future.

3:50pm: Final Panel Session (ABA professionals & families) – 60 min

Title: It's a wrap! What's next for ABA in Australia?

Synopsis: In this closing event, several of our presenters will join a panel to discuss their key learnings from the two-day conference, and to highlight some important future directions for research and practice in autism and ABA.

4:50pm Conference Close (Wendy Kozica, ABIA Board President) - 10mins

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