

Task Analysis

This module is all about a task analysis. In behavioral analysis, in ABA therapy, professionals talk about this all the time. Everything we do, we have a TA for it, a task analysis. Why? Because it is so useful, so helpful, and really pretty easy. So we're going to look at the definition. I have several picture examples to look at, and then we'll talk about some tips to make it even more powerful for you and more successful for your kiddos.

So what is a task analysis? I'm going to read this lengthy definition. "A task analysis involves breaking a complex skill into a smaller, teachable units. The product of which is a series of sequentially ordered steps or tasks." So it is very much like a to-do list but a little more specific in that is that they're in order. They're a sequence that builds up to something that completes a task. So think of trying to teach something really challenging like tying your shoes, teaching how to make a complex meal. Well, the recipe breaks things down into little steps for us. Sometimes not little enough for me. But we need those really small steps that when we do all the steps in order, we get a finished product. A recipe is the best example I can think of because your finished product is your meal, is whatever you've just cooked. So it's more than a to-do list in that they are in order and at the end, you've accomplished something, a task, a job, maybe an item like a meal.

So you break down any routine or activity to the most simple steps you can think of. Put those in order, list them out, and then either use pictures or words. So it's actually doing this. When you teach elementary school, one thing that we use a lot as a writing prompt is how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. So fourth grade, in the State of Texas is the big writing grade, and so fourth graders then either make the sandwich and practice it at home or at school and think about well, first you get out the bread, then you get out the peanut butter, and then you get out the jelly. You have to take the bread into two pieces. And on and on and on. You really have to think about these things that we might do really easily, things that are second nature like brushing your teeth. As a grown up, you don't think about all the steps that go into that, but when you're struggling to get your kid to comply and brush their teeth, you need to think about that. What are all those steps. So break down that routine, break down that activity into the tiniest steps you possibly can, and make sure they're in order.

We have to teach each step. Sometimes our kiddos aren't doing the skill, the routine activity because one of those steps just isn't working for them. They don't know how. They're not doing it correctly. You need to make sure they can do each step, and if it's something we're struggling with, we need to be reinforcing every step. Using this for routines like your getting out the door in the morning for school routine, you're going to need to reinforce each step probably. We can't wait until the end or we wouldn't have needed this task analysis to begin with. We need to find a way to reinforce each step. Some praise, high five, a token in a token economy, whatever works.

Then try it out on yourself to make sure you didn't miss any steps. So if you write out all the steps of brushing your teeth, have it out in front of you when you brush your teeth that night. Go, "Ope. I forgot that they need to spit the toothpaste out so they don't swallow it or something like that.

So these are all pictures that I found on the internet. You can Google task analysis or visual schedule. I'll repeat that again in this presentation. Visual schedule is kind of more of your colloquial term for it, but a visual task analysis, I go potty by myself. Well, don't forget to pull your pants back up. That sort of thing.

Making sure every step that your kiddo needs. Washing hands, there's a lot of steps to washing your hands. You might even add in how long they need to rub their hands together, that sort of thing.

You can cut and lift the flaps. You can cover each task. This one is obviously for a classroom, but it's the same idea. What are the activities we're going to do today at home? If you've watched the guest Q&A with Tamika Meadows, which is the module right before this one, this should sound very familiar. These are the things that she was talking about. Putting some structure in your day, having a schedule, and this is a way to make it visual. Having that routine laid out. Here are all the things we're going to do today. Here's what a lift the flap would look like after you've printed it out and cut those flaps. So you have your schedule for the day and you can lift them as you go, you can cover them as you complete things, however you want to use it. It's kind of a fun and easy way to make it a little fancier if you're into that Pinterest-type lifestyle.

Here's one that has been used through our older client. Thinking about how do I open the door if I get home from school, from work by myself. Well, first I have to find the key. You can follow the steps. Well, is it in your pocket? Is it in your bag? How do you open the door? Some clients that we work with need a little more help with all the steps to these things that seem so simple to those of us who do this on a regular basis and who know how to do it. So we need to break it down into those component skills and make sure that our kiddos know all those little skills. How to make your bed, there's a lot of steps to making the bed, but you don't think about it.

So if you're trying to teach your kiddo to do more chores, which I hope you are, and getting them to be more independent and do more around the house. If they're really fighting you on one skill, it might be a lack of ability. They don't know all the steps. There's too many steps. It's overwhelming. It might not always be a behavioral thing where you think they're being defiant. Maybe there's an issue with this skill you're asking them to do. That activity has way too many steps, and you don't realize that until you break it down into a list. So if that's the case, you might just have them do steps one through four, and reward that for a while. Great, you've been successful. We're jumping on to five, six, and seven. Breaking it down into those smaller pieces and rewarding the smaller pieces instead of having that power struggle and fighting over the fact that they're just not making their bed when you ask them to.

This is the brushing teeth one. Again, all of these that I'm sharing I didn't make. I found them because that was easier and less response effort for me to share with you. So if you're starting from scratch, just Google it, just look for some images online. This is where I think that for most of us in the Parenting with ABA Community can really use it is routines. Bed time routines, morning routines, these things that we do them every single day. Why are we still struggling with them? Why are we still having problem behaviors when every day we do it the exact same way. We offer rewards. I don't know why we're still having problem behaviors, but what we can do is help our kiddos be more successful. Breaking it down into the simplest steps possible and then rewarding every single step, reinforcement, reinforcement, reinforcement to really make these things happen more independently. Again, you can make your own. You can find them online.

So my first tip, I'll say it again, search for pre-made visual schedules on Google Images. So visual schedule going potty is exactly the words I typed in to get that first one. There's a ton of them. You can look on Pinterest if you're into that. There's a ton of resources on visual schedules on routines and that sort of thing. Use clip art or Google Images. Do not spend money on this. Do not spend a ton of time on this. You can draw the pictures yourself or have your child draw them. If your kiddo is a reader and likes

to read, well don't even use pictures. It's unnecessary. Do what works for you. Does not need to be fancy. Functional, not fancy.

I made bedtime routine cards not too long ago, and I had my daughter color them and then I laminated them because yes, I own a laminator in my home because we're just crazy like that. And she hated them. I spent a lot of time and effort on this, and she hated them. And instead of these little bedtime cards where we get to go through our routine. Are we reading books tonight? Are we going to sing how many songs? Let's plan it out with this visual schedule. It became an antecedent or a trigger for more problem behavior, and she threw the cards out of the bedroom. So we don't use those anymore. We have found a successful behavior reinforcement plan and we got that under control. Increasing reinforcement for the desired of things at bedtime worked. So don't waste your time. Don't waste your effort like I did making things fancy. Make it functional, and the easiest way to get your kiddo to buy in is let them help you make it. We're having a hard time with mornings. We work on this at four o'clock in the afternoon, not in the morning.

Mornings have really stunk lately. Let's try something new to make it better and more fun. Let's figure out all the steps we have to do, and maybe you make a list. It's really long, and so you think, "Okay. What can we accomplish the night before," and we can take some of the steps off the list and help our kiddos out that way too and realize maybe we are putting too many demands on them or maybe it's really not that many but we need to be reinforcing more frequently along the way to get them to do all the steps in the routine.

So some opportunities to use the TA or task analysis-morning, evening routine, after school routine, any sort of at-home activity schedule. If you on Saturdays tend to have more problem behavior because things are kind of out of wack. You don't have a schedule. Well, in the morning, you probably have a plan for the day, but your kiddo doesn't know it. So you can sit down together and make that list, that task analysis. Here's the things we're going to do today and here's the order we're going to do them in. Using it to build structure in any environment is super helpful. Working on any sort of independent skills, taking care of yourself, getting dressed, going to the bathroom, showering correctly, washing every part of you, washing your hair, these sorts of things.

Kitchen skills, making a sandwich, cleaning up the dishes, how to unload or load the dishwasher. Any sort of chores, laundry, things that take more than one step, break it down into more simple steps and reinforce. Having that reinforcement for each step along the way, we know how powerful positive reinforcement is. So at first you're like, "I have to reinforce every eight steps on our morning routine. It's not that much. It doesn't take that long. I don't have time to stop and reinforce everything." Well, if you add in a little time at the beginning, put the effort to reinforce every single step, then we can fade that out. Start with some success. Get your kiddo successful in that task analysis where they're doing the steps and getting the reinforcement consistently to where you can reinforce every second step, every third step, every fourth step on the schedule until hopefully we can get where we want to be, which is we can give a little praise and run out the door to the car. Thanks for getting ready on time and we're gone and it's not a big deal. But getting to that point is going to take some time and effort on our part as parents.

Use it when you need it. Every single one of these modules, that's what I say. Use it when you need it. We do not need lists ruling our life. You don't need a task analysis for everything under the sun, but when you notice these patterns that we're always struggling at dinnertime, we're always struggling in the mornings, we're always struggling over brushing teeth, making the bed, whatever it is, break it

down. Break it down into those component skills in order. A list, visual schedule, a task analysis, and reinforce, reinforce. Hang it up. Make it a visual. Check off each step. You can lift the flap, move the piece, cover it up with a post-it, make it a magnet. There's all kinds of different ways you can do this. Be as creative or uncreative as you want. Make it functional. Then reward for each step completely independently, and the big reward is for when it's done. When you do all of those steps, you get something really big and wonderful and awesome.

The task analysis is used for every skill you can possibly image my behavioral analysts. From our own behavior, what is a task analysis for all the things I need to do before I can work with a client to how do I teach a kid to brush their teeth. Task analysis is your go-to visual schedule. If you have it visual and you have it hanging up too, you can just point to each step and get rid of some of that nagging and that lecturing on your part. If we get rid of that verbal, there's not an opportunity for your kid to argue back with you. They can try to argue with it, the visual schedule on the wall all they want, but it's not going to respond. So getting out some of that verbal also is helpful, especially times that are harder for you and for your family and for your children. So making it visual, hanging it up, using it as a visual cue and making sure you're reinforcing for each step. Functional, not fancy. Just make it so it works for you. Use it while you need it and then move on. When you encounter another problem down the road, "Oh, why are we struggling with this new thing? Oh, lets break it down into the smaller steps and see. See what we can do about it."

Less verbal, more visual. The more you can just point to it, the more you can check off step one's done and then you just point to step two. Not a whole long thing. All right, you did step one. Let's check it off. Step two, what do you need to do? Get out that toothpaste. Where's your toothpaste? Just let your kiddo do it. Just point to it, and let them be a little more independent. Get by in front of your kiddo. Make the list together, illustrate the list, color the list. Let them choose the reinforcers. Tie it to an existing reward system you already have or have had before so it's familiar and easy. Ask your kiddo what they want to earn, get some buy in from them. I forgot to, in my terrible example with the bedtime cards, and make it more successful. Don't waste your time. Functional, not fancy.

Then fade it. These are so natural in our lives. A to-do list. A chore list. These are things that we have as adults. These are not this extra support that our kiddos need and it's a big deal. No, this is something totally normal and used for self management. So we're teaching it to them now as kids with us directing everything and being in charge of it, but then fade it to a to-do list, to a chore list. You have older kiddos. Well, they should know what they need to do for school for their homework, and you just help provide the reinforcement for them once they've shown you that they've done it. So this is super naturally occurring, but we need to really be fed up on those problem times, those problem routines, those problem activities. Increase that reinforcement for the component skills. Put in the effort up front, and prevent all those problems and get them to be more successful and more independent, and it'll totally be worth it in the long run.

Your takeaways, list out the most basic, simple steps. If you list out your steps and you still think, "Oh, well that one actually takes two more steps, back to the drawing board." Those need to be lined out separately. Teach each step. Make sure your kiddo knows how to do every single one of those things by themselves. They know where to access the laundry detergent if they're older and you're trying to get them to do the laundry. They know how to turn on the machine. Double check. Just review it with them. Have them explain to you how they're going to do it, and reinforce each step. We know the power of positive reinforcement so don't forget about it.

Use it when you need it. Make a list for those things that you find yourself saying 100 times a day, and use visuals to stop the nagging.