



**TURN AUTISM AROUND**  
WITH DR. MARY BARBERA

Transcript for Podcast Episode: 015

## *Why is My Autism Approach Different and Better?*

Hosted by: Dr. Mary Barbera

You're listening to the Turn Autism Around podcast, episode number 15. In this podcast episode I am going to tell you 10 ways that I think my autism therapy approach is different, and in my opinion better than any other, and I'm going to give you ways where you can improve the programming for your client or your child.

Before we get to that, I'd like to give our listeners shout out to Pritika who left me a five-star rating and review on iTunes. She said, "I thoroughly enjoyed listening to the experience of Mary who is both a behavior analyst and an autism mom. An incredible podcast for anyone looking to turn autism around." Thank you Pritika for that great review. And if you haven't subscribed to Turn Autism Around on iTunes or anywhere else where you can listen to podcasts, I would love it if you would subscribe and also leave me a great rating and review and I might give you a shout out on a future podcast episode. So let's get to the 10 ways that I think my approach is different and how you can use my approach to turn autism around.

*Welcome to the Turn Autism Around podcast for both parents and professionals in the autism world who want to turn things around, be less stressed and lead happier lives. And now your host, autism mom, behavior analyst and bestselling author Dr. Mary Barbera.*

Welcome back to another episode of the Turn Autism Around podcast. I'm your host Dr. Mary Barbera and I'm thrilled that you're here listening, whether you're a parent or professional or another relative, caregiver, friend, whoever is listening, no matter what capacity you want to help a child with autism, I welcome you here.

Today's episode is going to include 10 ways my autism therapy approach is different than any other approach and I, I've been trying to articulate some of the differences in my approach. My online courses are of course filled with videos and step by step procedures and sometimes parents and professionals say, well I already have my child in an ABA program or we already do ABA quote unquote. And they don't see a need, or even they might be doing a verbal behavior approach, might be using the VB-MAPP assessment, and they don't realize that I have in-depth knowledge and a very different approach to any other approaches even um, what people call the verbal behavior approach.

My verbal behavior approach has a special uniqueness and we are seeing major success in the course participants. So I wanted to outline 10 ways where I think I use a different approach and then we're going to talk about ways you can implement some of these to make your approach with your clients or child better.

So number one, I wear many hats in the autism world and I've been trained in different camps by different professionals. As you know, I started out in the autism world two decades ago when my son Lucas was diagnosed with autism one day before his third birthday. If you are not familiar with my journey and my story, I would direct you to the very first episode of this podcast and you can get there by going to [marybarbera.com/one](http://marybarbera.com/one), and you will learn that I started off as a confused and overwhelmed parent. And then I moved into, I also was a registered nurse at that point with a master's degree from Penn and I was a nurse manager always working in the neurologic field. So I have a very different perspective already just being a nurse and a parent. And then I became a board certified behavior analyst, the author of the Verbal Behavior Approach and earned a Ph.D. in leadership. So with all of those different hats, I combine those in making a very different approach.

So some people question whether it's better to spend a thousand hours with one child working to really fine tune programming, or working for an hour with a thousand children. And I had actually the best of both worlds because I started out with just trying to get Lucas the best kind of therapy that I could. So I spent thousands of hours combing the Internet, going to conferences, going to workshops.

Even before I was a behavior analyst, I literally went to hundreds of workshops to learn how to help Lucas. I went to developmental approaches. I went to all kinds of different approaches. I went to medical conferences. I went anywhere they were speaking about autism, I would go. So I spent thousands of hours with Lucas trying to apply the strategies I learned at different conferences to help him. I also then, when I became a behavior analyst, I worked for seven years with the Pennsylvania Verbal Behavior Project and I helped thousands of kids for one hour or more. So I was able to apply the procedures that worked with Lucas with other kids, and I was able to write my book.

I also have been trained by a variety of, of teachers and professors and speakers, but my main behavioral approach training came from the best of the best, Dr. Jack Michael, who I consider the grandfather of the verbal behavior approach. Dr. Mark Sundberg, Dr. Vincent Carbone. Last episode, I featured my BCBA mentor, Dr. Rick Cobina, who had a great influence on my programming for Lucas and programming for others.

I also went on to become a keynote speaker around the world after the Verbal Behavior Approach was published and worked one to one really getting my, my procedures really fluent with very young children, uh, after I left the verbal behavior project in 2010.

So the number one way my program is different is because of my different perspectives that are all rolled into one. The second way my program is different is that I make my material

accessible; through this podcast, through my book, through my video blogs which are on Youtube and on my blog, on my website. So you can watch any of my Youtube clips. You probably already have stumbled upon them by going to [marybarbera.com/youtube](http://marybarbera.com/youtube). I have a public Facebook page, [marybarbera.com/facebook](http://marybarbera.com/facebook).

You can check out all my podcasts. You know, all of this information is accessible to both parents and professionals. I make it a point to speak in plain English and to really help both parents and professionals at the same time. I also have figured out through many hours and lots of investment of time and money to figure out how to put my courses online. And starting four years ago, in March of 2015, I started selling my online courses to both parents and professionals. I have about a 50/50 split. I give time to BCPAs, CEUs, to board certified behavior analysts and associate behavioral analysts. But all the information can also be consumed by parents and other caregivers. So I have a very different approach that can be, can be accessed very easily by parents and professionals. That's the second way.

The third way my approach is different is that I use a very common sense ABA approach. I said in a recent video blog that, uh, somebody read my book, a speech, and language therapy student read my book, and she... One of the main points that she pulled out of my book, which is a common theme throughout my courses throughout my online training is that if you see problem behavior, the demands are too high and/or reinforcement is too low. I want to make all the goals, the data collection, I want to make everything as low key as possible. We don't want to have these intense data collection systems that parents can't do. We want to have goals that are amenable to both parents and professionals and can be done in any setting. And I usually focus not on counting all the problem behaviors.

Like I was in the classroom one time and they were counting on a clicker every time the child kicked. Every time he attempted to bite, every time he fell to the floor, and they were literally clicking hundreds of times a day, all these problem behaviors. So if you have data collection systems that are set up to be collecting data on problem behaviors, it's going to consume your whole day. So I have data collection systems that are less time consuming where we can focus most of our time on teaching the child and getting the behaviors we do want. So it doesn't matter if the child is falling to the ground, attempting to kick, hitting themselves, hitting others. It all has to do with the function and it all has to do with the demands are usually too high, and reinforcement is too low. And we can turn that around, spend 95% of our time preventing problem behaviors and have a much smoother therapy program, therapy session, or even when the child is at home, we can have a much smoother weekend if we focus on all the positives and prevention of problem behaviors.

The number four way my program is different is, I say it all the time, my online course and community probably is sick of hearing me, but I take a step back. I look at the forest, I don't look at the trees. I'm very opposed to tit for tat programming. I did a video blog on tit for tat programming which you could just Google anytime I say anything. Now, this, of course, will be in the show notes, [marybarbera.com/15](http://marybarbera.com/15) which this is episode number 15. But anytime I say I did a video blog on that or I have strong feelings about that, you could just google "Mary

Barbera tit for tat programming", "Mary Barbera stemming", "Mary Barbera problem behaviors" and you will see pretty much free video blogs, podcasts, anything that I do will come up, but I am very opposed to people that really go into, okay they have three feature function class, um, mass targets mastered and this and that, meanwhile, the child is falling to the ground and, and that sort of thing. I'm always looking at functional skills and I have a big problem when we have problem behaviors, we have lack of requesting, and we're working on other skills that are not as important. I always want the parents to be as involved as possible, and I want to make data collection be smart and as easy as possible too.

The fifth way my program is different is that I focus on transfer procedures. I cover this a little bit in my interview with Dr. Rick Cobina last time at episode number 14 of this podcast, but it is hard to explain. Rick Cobina and I wrote an article that was published in 2005 called, Using Transfer Procedures to Teach Tacts to a Child with Autism, which was my son was the single subject design participant.

And it's a little complicated, but basically, we need to use the operants, which you may have heard me talk about mands and I, I just said tacts and intro-verbals and echoics. Those are basically when you hear somebody say, well, the child has, you know, 10 words or a hundred words, I don't just want to look at words. I want to look at how words are used. So is he requesting things? That would be a word; that would be a mand. So in a mand, the antecedent, what comes before the word says, cookie, they use manding for a cookie. What comes before the mand for a cookie would be a desire for a cookie; motivation for our cookie. So that's why the mand has in the antecedent or before condition some motivation. The consequence of manding is you actually get the item. That's why the mand is so powerful.

But once we know the operands, then we can transfer across operants. So the weaker operants can be boosted by the stronger operants. So in Rick Corbina and my article, we used a transfer procedure of a receptive to tact transfer. So Lucas was stronger at receptively identifying in say the four pictures are on the table. He was able to receptively identify, touch pen, or touch, you know, his teacher's name, which was, we'll say Susie. So he was able to touch Susie in a field of four, like almost like a multiple choice test versus, and then we were able to say, that's right, who's that? And he was able to transfer that to the tact. So you can read that article that we published in the Analysis of Verbal Behavior.

My, all my courses, all of what I do is based on that work with transfer procedures and those operants and transferring control between the operands. So now that might be a little confusing, but number six kind of goes with number five in terms of the ways that my program is different. But number six is that I developed early learner programs that have, that use those operants and combine those and what we call multiply controlled.

So my early learner programs doesn't rely on trying to train parents on the operands. It doesn't rely on trying to train new people on the operands right away. It's just, let's sit down with Johnny, let's take a shoe box, let's cut a slit in the shoe box and let's take pictures of different family members and different reinforcers. Then we hold up a picture of the dog, which is

named Spot. And we say Spot and we hand the child the picture of Spot. We may say the word "Spot" three times. If the child reaches for the picture of Spot and says Spot, then it that actually that trial is part mand because the child wants the picture to put in the box. It's part tact because the child sees it and he's labeling it. Its part echo because I just said Spot and he's echoing, and then I might tell him to put it in the box if he doesn't and that's part receptive. So we build early learner programs with multiple operants involved and the strongest operant is always the mand. And so we always have a mand component within our early learner programs. So shoe box, for instance, inset puzzles, like even um, inset type puzzles where you might have an animal puzzle and I'll take all the pieces and then I'll hold up the pig and I'll just say pig, pig, pig, handing the pig to the child. Every program is a language enrich program where we get kids talking, hopefully, or at least even if they're not talking, they're sitting, they're attending, they're following our directions and they want to be there and start learning from us.

Also one more thing in the natural environment. I always tell people, especially for kids that don't talk or only have a handful of words or have words very sporadically, is throughout the day in the natural environment at school and or at home, we want to break our language down into very simple one-word phrases.

So instead of saying, Johnny, let's go up the steps. It's time to take a bath, blah, blah, blah. We just simply say up up, up as we're climbing the steps. And just using these simple techniques, it's, it's actually called automatic reinforcement procedures, we oftentimes see language where we didn't have language before. I have parents who've taken my toddler learner course and they report that their child had zero words and then by the end of the 60 days they're speaking. By the end of a year, they're talking in sentences. So we have to start somewhere. And that's where I think my approach after years of working with the Verbal Behavior Project and then another seven, eight years of working with early learners and developing my own programming, I've been able to use my, my perspective to create the step by step procedures that are currently helping lots of parents and professionals.

The seventh way my program is different is I don't just do natural environment teaching. I do heavily focus on table time, and bring these multiply controlled programs like the shoe box and, and inset puzzles to the table. So everything is part mand, part tact, part echoic, part listen and responding, part matching, making learning fun.

We want the child to be running to us, running to the table to learn and we never force the child to stay. We don't want crying, we don't want any whining. We want the child to want to be with us. And if they're not running to the table or staying very nicely without any problem behaviors, then we haven't figured out the right demands and the right level of reinforcement yet. And that's something we constantly are fine-tuning within my online courses.

The eighth way my program is different is I focus heavily on assessment and that doesn't have to be in depth assessments. What I start out with is a one-page assessment which is a part of my three-step guide, which you can get at the show notes at [marybarbera.com/15](http://marybarbera.com/15). I start out

with that one-page assessment. I have everyone do three very short videos to get a baseline of where their child is at. We then move on to the VB-MAPP assessment usually, as well as Mark Sundberg's self-care checklist and intra-verbal subtest. For higher learners, higher language learners we might go to other assessments, but the majority of the children that benefit from my courses, we use the VB-MAPP assessment.

And the VB-MAPP assessment goes up to a language ability of a four-year-old, and so a lot of people say, well that's not good for a 12-year-old then, and that's not good for an eight-year-old. We don't use the VB-MAPP for older kids, but if they're are at the language level of a four-year-old or less, like my 22-year-old son, Lucas, is still within the VB-MAPP boundaries. We don't use the VB-MAPP for him anymore, but we use all these procedures that are throughout my courses to continue to keep Lucas's problem behaviors at a near zero. His ability to request, to learn new facts that he needs for his natural environment, and to help him reach his fullest potential.

The ninth way my program is different is that I encourage parents and professionals to really advocate together, to collaborate and with the same goal: to have each child reach his or her fullest potential. To be as safe as possible, as independent as possible and as happy as possible. And that's my goal. It's... my goal is not that they learn four features from 20 items, not at all. I want the child to be safe, as independent as possible, and as happy as possible. And that's it. And the final way that my program is different is that because of being a nurse manager, earning a Ph.D. in leadership, running Lucas's programs over the years, I know that everyone needs a positive to every negative. And I learned that from Dr. Glen Latham. And it has proven true, not just for the parents, not just for the kids, not just for the professionals. Everyone needs a positive to every negative. Your husband or spouse, your siblings, um, the siblings of the kids you work with, your mother, their aunts, everybody needs a positive. The store clerk. And so we all need to be a lot more positive so that people can be less stressed and lead happier lives.

So in summary, I'm not going to repeat the ten ways I think my program is different, but I do know that because of my different background, because of my multiple hats and because I've worked with thousands of kids and I spent thousands of hours programming for Lucas and making sure he reaches and stays at his fullest potential, I know my approach can lead to more transformation for you, for other parents and other professionals.

And I could go on and on and I won't, I just wanted to, even for myself, begin to articulate why my program and my approach is so different. You can help your child or clients by learning more about my approach at [marybarbera.com/workshop](http://marybarbera.com/workshop), and I hope that you found the 10 ways interesting and helpful in some way. A lot of these resources will be in the show notes at [marybarbera.com/15](http://marybarbera.com/15) and again, you can attend a free workshop to learn more about my online courses, and that's really where I'm going to be able to give you my approach and help you turn autism around. Even if you're doing well, even if you, your child or your clients all have an ABA program, verbal behavior approach program, there are still always steps you can take to make things a little bit better. I know I learn every day. Um, and I know that you will want to too. If

you've gotten to the end of this podcast, I know that you are totally into becoming more and more knowledgeable to help your clients and children reach their fullest potential.

So I want you to have a good week. Next week I'll hopefully, uh, be giving you more information to help you turn autism around, and have a good one. I'll see you then.

*Thanks for listening to the Turn Autism Around podcast with Dr. Mary Barbera. For more information, visit [marybarbera.com](http://marybarbera.com).*