



## Abstract

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### **A Behavior Analysis of Theory of Mind: Theoretical and Applied Implications, Part 1 and Part 2**

The term Theory of Mind has come to refer to a collection of responses that involve one's ability to predict another person's behavior based on understanding that person's perspective. One of the most studied topics in the field of psychology for the past 30 years, Theory of Mind is considered not only an important developmental milestone in childhood, but also a theoretical system to explain additional social and cognitive processes in both typical and atypical children and adults. Despite the importance of the topic, behavior analysis has yet to provide a satisfactory account of Theory of Mind (i.e., of the variables that control the types of behavior commonly held to denote Theory of Mind). In this presentation I set out to provide the beginning of such an account. In the first part, I will argue that Theory of Mind is not an "entity" that is either present or absent, but rather, is a developmental verbal process that begins in early childhood with the establishment of tacting public and private events during social interactions. In addition, I will provide an analysis of the controlling variables of the component verbal skills that are said to denote Theory of Mind. In the second part of the talk, I will illustrate a hierarchical sequence of instructional activities derived from such an analysis to establish perspective taking in children with autism, a syndrome with known deficits in these skills. The application of a teaching technology derived from a conceptual and experimental analysis both validates and extends the basic approach.

#### **Level:**

Advanced Learning

#### **Objectives:**

To describe the verbal controlling variables involved in Theory of Mind Tasks  
To provide a behavioral interpretation of perspective taking  
To delineate a program of instruction to establish component Theory of Mind skills