

Behavioural Treatments



This activity will help you to:

- Understand treatments for abnormality in the behavioural model
- Assess the effectiveness of behavioural treatments

The behavioural model assumes that psychological abnormality is the result of learning from the environment. Consequently, the model suggests that psychological abnormality can be treated by getting the person to **unlearn** the abnormal behaviour, and **learn** more adaptive ways of responding to things.

Systematic Desensitisation

This treatment uses the concept of **classical conditioning**. It is used mainly in the treatment of **phobias**. It is based on the idea of **reciprocal inhibition**, which is another way of saying that a person cannot be anxious and relaxed at the same time. This idea is that the person is put in a situation whereby they learn to produce a **relaxation response** to a situation where previously they produced an **anxiety response**.

The Procedure

Stage	What happens
Functional analysis	Working together the client and the psychologist draw up a hierarchy of fears . This is a list of situations in which the person would feel anxiety, arranged from the least anxiety to the most anxiety produced. For example, in the case of arachnophobia, at the bottom of the scale the client might put 'hearing the word spider' and at the top of the list, 'having a spider crawl across my face'. At this stage, the client decides which treatment goals they want to work towards.
Relaxation training	The client is taught different techniques for relaxing . These would probably include controlling breathing and muscular tension and might include other techniques, like positive self statements.
Graduated exposure	Over the course of 6 to 12 sessions, the client is gradually brought into contact with their phobic object . They start off with the psychologist putting them in situations low down their hierarchy of fears, and gradually work their way upward. At each level of exposure, they are encouraged to use their relaxation training until they are able to completely relax at that level. Once this happens, it is time to move on to the next level of exposure. The treatment is complete once the client has reached their own treatment goals.

What you need to do:

1. Working in pairs, take it in turns to be the therapist and the client. The client must choose something they are scared of, and, working with the therapist, come up with a list of situations that range from the least anxiety to the most anxiety. The client should decide on a treatment goal they would like to reach.
2. Make a short set of notes assessing the effectiveness of systematic desensitisation according to research studies. You will need to use your text for this, but **remember the rules for note taking**.

And if you've finished that...

Suggest how you could use the ideas of classical and operant conditioning (reinforcement and punishment) to treat anorexia nervosa. For example, you could suggest how systematic desensitisation might be used, and suggest ways of using reinforcement and punishment to modify the anorexic's behaviour. Write a paragraph explaining your suggestions.