

# Phobias and Conditioning



***This activity will help you to:***

- Understand and recall the process of classical conditioning*
- Analyse real-world behaviour using psychological concepts*
- Identify UCS, UCR, NS, CS and CR in conditioning situations*

## Conditioning of Phobias

According to the behaviourists, phobias are the result of a classically conditioned association between an anxiety-provoking UCS and a previously neutral stimulus.

In each of the situations below, a person seems to have acquired some degree of phobic behaviour. For each situation, suggest how. You need to identify the UCS, UCR, NS, CS and CR.

### Example 1

Marie is terrified of dogs. Whenever she sees a dog or hears a dog barking she becomes very anxious and shows obvious signs of stress. She avoids people's houses if she knows they have a dog and will no longer go to the park because people walk their dogs there. She thinks this goes back to an incident when she was six years old when she was bitten by a neighbour's dog.

### Example 2

Peter is eighteen months old. His mother recently took him for some vaccinations, during which he became very distressed. A few days later she wore a white skirt that she had recently bought. As soon as Peter saw her in it he started crying and could not be calmed down until she had changed into something else.

### Example 3

Mark hates hospitals and other medical situations. Just the smell of disinfectant makes him feel very uneasy and he finds it much easier to avoid hospitals and surgeries altogether. He thinks this started soon after his mother died after a long illness during which she was hospitalised for long periods.

### Example 4

*For this example, try to identify not only what started the phobic behaviour off, but also which factors might play a part in keeping it going.*

Surita is a successful young businesswoman, who runs a small accountancy firm. Recently, she has not been her usual self. She has become afraid of leaving the house, and feels acute anxiety when walking down the street, especially at night. Sometimes the anxiety is so bad that she has a panic attack. When she is inside, and especially at home, she does not feel so anxious, but this is making her reluctant to go out at all. Her friends and family are helping out by bringing round things she needs, and accompanying her when she goes out, if possible. She can do quite a lot of her work from home, but the anxiety is making her working life difficult, and is having a negative impact on her social life. The symptoms began shortly after she was robbed of her bag and phone whilst walking to her car after work.