

# Counselling of Clients with Behavioral Disorders using Behavioural Approach

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## Abstract

Behavioral therapy is a type of psychotherapy that focuses on identifying and changing unwanted behaviors. It's based on the idea that all behaviors are learned and can therefore be unlearned. Behavioral therapists use a variety of techniques to help people change their behavior. Unwanted behaviour is defined as an undesired response to something or someone in the environment. Using this approach, a counsellor would identify the unwanted behaviour with a client and together they would work to change or adapt the behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

Classical conditioning involves forming associations between stimuli. Previously neutral stimuli are paired with a stimulus that naturally and automatically evokes a response. After repeated pairings, an association is formed and the previously neutral stimulus will come to evoke the response on its own.<sup>2</sup>

Operant conditioning, sometimes referred to as instrumental conditioning, is a method of learning that employs rewards and punishments for behavior. Operant conditioning is a type of learning in which behavior is modified by its consequences. Behaviors that are followed by positive consequences are more likely to be repeated, while behaviors that are followed by negative consequences are less likely to be repeated.<sup>7</sup>

Behavioral therapy rests on a core set of assumptions like *Learned Behaviors, Focus on Present, Client Responsibility, Observable Behavior, Learning Principles and Tailored Approach*.

**Keywords:** Behavioral Therapy; Psychotherapy; Classical Conditioning; Operant Conditioning; Aversion Therapy; Flooding; Systematic desensitization.

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## INTRODUCTION

Behavioral therapy is a type of psychotherapy that focuses on identifying and changing unwanted behaviors. It's based on the idea that all behaviors are learned and can therefore be unlearned. Behavioral therapists use a variety of techniques to help people change their behavior. Unwanted behaviour is defined as an undesired



response to something or someone in the environment. Using this approach, a counsellor would identify the unwanted behaviour with a client and together they would work to change or adapt the behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

### Assumptions of Behavioral Therapy

Behavioral therapy rests on a core set of assumptions about how we learn and behave:

- **Learned Behaviors:** Behavioral therapy views all behavior, both helpful and unhelpful, as learned. We learn through interacting with our environment, and these learned patterns can be modified through new learning experiences.<sup>1</sup>
- **Focus on Present:** While past experiences may have shaped current behaviors, the main focus is on identifying and changing current behavioral patterns. Understanding the roots of a behavior can be helpful, but it's not essential for changing it.
- **Client Responsibility:** Behavioral therapy empowers clients. It assumes they have the ability to take control of their behaviors and make positive changes. The therapist acts as a guide and facilitator in this process.<sup>2</sup>
- **Observable Behavior:** The core focus is on observable behaviors, not just thoughts or feelings. This allows for more objective assessment and measurement of therapeutic progress.
- **Learning Principles:** Behavioral therapy draws on established principles of learning, like operant conditioning, to develop techniques for reinforcing desired behaviors and weakening unwanted ones.
- **Tailored Approach:** There's no one-size-fits-all approach. Treatment plans are designed based on the specific needs and goals of each individual client.

### Techniques of Behavioural Approach

The four techniques of behavioural approach are as follows:

1. Classical conditioning
2. Operant conditioning

## **CLASSICAL CONDITIONING**

Classical conditioning involves forming associations between stimuli. Previously neutral

stimuli are paired with a stimulus that naturally and automatically evokes a response. After repeated pairings, an association is formed and the previously neutral stimulus will come to evoke the response on its own.<sup>2</sup>

Ivan Pavlov illustrated classical conditioning through experiments with dogs. Placing food in a dog's mouth leads to salivation, which is respondent behavior. When food is repeatedly presented with some originally neutral stimulus, such as the sound of a bell, the dog will eventually salivate to the sound of the bell alone.

Classical conditioning is one way to alter behavior. Several different techniques and strategies are used in this approach to therapy.

### Aversion Therapy

Aversion therapy is a type of behavioral therapy that aims to help people reduce or eliminate unwanted behaviors by pairing them with unpleasant stimuli. The idea is that by repeatedly associating the behavior with something negative, the person will eventually develop an aversion to the behavior itself and be less likely to engage in it. For example, someone with an alcohol use disorder might take Antabuse (disulfiram), a drug that causes severe symptoms (such as headaches, nausea, anxiety, and vomiting) when combined with alcohol.<sup>3</sup>

There are a number of different ways to apply aversion therapy. Some common methods include:

- **Electrical aversion:** This involves pairing the unwanted behavior with a mild electric shock. This method has been used to treat a variety of behaviors, including alcoholism, smoking, and self-harm.
- **Chemical aversion:** This involves pairing the unwanted behavior with a nauseating substance, such as disulfiram (Antabuse), which causes unpleasant side effects when combined with alcohol.
- **Imaginal aversion:** This involves having the person imagine themselves engaging in the unwanted behavior and then experiencing a negative consequence. This method can be used for behaviors that cannot be safely paired with a real-life aversive stimulus.<sup>4</sup>

### Merits of Aversion Therapy:

- **Can be effective for some behaviors:** Aversion therapy has shown success in reducing undesired behaviors, particularly those

related to substance abuse like alcoholism. For instance, pairing the taste of alcohol with nausea-inducing medication can create an aversion to drinking.

- **Relatively quick:** Compared to some therapies, aversion therapy can produce results faster.
- **Can be used alongside other therapies:** Aversion therapy can be combined with other behavioral therapies or medications for a more comprehensive treatment approach.<sup>4</sup>

#### Limitations of Aversion Therapy:

- **Ethical concerns:** The use of electric shocks or other strong unpleasant stimuli can be seen as unethical, especially if not completely voluntary.
- **Limited effectiveness:** Aversion therapy may not be effective for all behaviors and can have diminishing returns over time.
- **Risk of negative side effects:** Aversion therapy can cause anxiety, shame, or even PTSD if not administered carefully.
- **Doesn't address underlying causes:** Aversion therapy focuses on changing the behavior itself, but it doesn't necessarily address the root cause of the issue.

## **FLOODING**

Flooding therapy is a type of exposure therapy used to treat phobias and anxiety disorders. It involves exposing the patient to their feared stimuli in a safe and controlled environment, but at a much more intense level than they would normally experience. The goal is to help the patient learn that their fears are unfounded and that they can cope with the anxiety that they experience.

Flooding therapy can be a very effective treatment for phobias and anxiety disorders. However, it is important to note that it is not for everyone. It is an intensive form of therapy that can be very anxiety provoking. It is important to work with a qualified therapist to determine if flooding therapy is right for you.<sup>5</sup>

#### Benefits of flooding therapy:

- It can be a very effective treatment for phobias and anxiety disorders.
- It can help patients to learn to cope with anxiety in a healthy way.

- It can help patients to live a more normal and fulfilling life.

#### Risks of flooding therapy:

- It can be very anxiety provoking.
- It may not be suitable for everyone.
- There is a risk of flooding therapy triggering a panic attack.

## **SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION**

Systematic desensitization is a type of exposure therapy that can help people overcome phobias and anxieties. It works by gradually exposing the person to their fear in a safe and controlled environment, while they learn relaxation techniques to cope with their anxiety.

#### *There are three phases of the Systemic Desensitization:*

1. **Relaxation Training:** The individual learns deep muscle relaxation techniques and breathing exercises to control anxiety and physical reactions to stress. This step is very important because of reciprocal inhibition, where, once the response is inhibited because it is incompatible with another. In the case of phobias, fears involve tension, and tension is incompatible with relaxation.
2. **Establishment of Anxiety Hierarchy:** The individual and therapist collaboratively create a list of fear inducing situations related to the specific phobia, ranking them from least anxiety provoking to most. The list is crucial as it provides a structure for the therapy.<sup>5</sup>
3. **Gradual Exposure:** Starting with the least anxiety inducing situation, the individual is exposed to each item while employing relaxation techniques. They move up the hierarchy only when they can remain relaxed at the current level. Over time, this exposure in a relaxed state diminishes the anxiety response to the feared stimulus. The client repeatedly imagines (or is confronted by) this situation until it fails to evoke any anxiety, indicating that the therapy has succeeded.

#### Merits of Systematic Desensitization:

- **Effective for Specific Phobias:** SD is highly successful in treating phobias like fear of heights, spiders, or public speaking. It helps people gradually confront their fears in a safe environment, reducing anxiety and

avoidance behaviors.

- **Teaches Relaxation Techniques:** Learning relaxation techniques like deep breathing or muscle relaxation is a valuable skill for managing anxiety in general. SD incorporates these techniques, giving patients tools to cope with stressful situations beyond the specific phobia.
- **Evidence Based Approach:** Systematic desensitization is a well researched and proven therapy with a strong track record of effectiveness.<sup>6</sup>

#### Limitations of Systematic Desensitization:

- **Time Commitment:** SD can be a slow process, requiring regular sessions with a therapist over weeks or months. This might not be ideal for everyone.
- **Not for All Disorders:** While great for phobias, SD isn't effective for complex mental health conditions like depression or schizophrenia.
- **Focuses on Symptoms:** SD addresses the outward signs of anxiety, but may not delve into the underlying causes of the phobia.
- **Can be Uncomfortable:** Facing feared situations can be anxiety provoking, even in a controlled setting. This temporary discomfort is part of the process, but some may find it difficult.<sup>6</sup>

#### Operant Conditioning

Operant conditioning, sometimes referred to as instrumental conditioning, is a method of learning that employs rewards and punishments for behavior. Operant conditioning is a type of learning in which behavior is modified by its consequences. Behaviors that are followed by positive consequences are more likely to be repeated, while behaviors that are followed by negative consequences are less likely to be repeated.<sup>7</sup>

#### Contingency Management

Contingency management (CM) is a technique used to modify behavior by using rewards and sometimes consequences. It's based on the idea that people are more likely to repeat behaviors that have positive outcomes and less likely to repeat those with negative outcomes. The core principle of CM is rewarding desired behaviors. These rewards can be tangible things like vouchers or praise.

CM is used in various settings, most commonly

to address substance abuse. It can also be used to improve medication adherence, or promote positive behaviors in children.<sup>7</sup>

#### Response Cost

The term "response cost" is used in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy. It refers to a technique used to decrease undesirable behaviors.

*Here's how it works:*

- ❖ **Target behavior identified:** First, a specific unwanted behavior is identified that you want to reduce.
- ❖ **Reinforcer removal:** When the target behavior occurs, a preferred item, privilege, or token is taken away. This acts as a punishment and discourages the behavior.
- ❖ **Positive reinforcement:** Response cost is often used alongside positive reinforcement for desired behaviors. This way, the individual learns the connection between their actions and the consequences.

### BEHAVIOR MODELING

This technique involves learning through observation and modeling the behavior of others. Rather than relying simply on reinforcement or punishment, modeling allows individuals to learn new skills or acceptable behaviors by watching someone else perform those desired skills.<sup>8</sup>

It is relatively simple and is designed to assist clients in learning new behavior patterns. It is based on the principle of observational learning. Two things that are needed in modeling are: Ideal Model and Modeled behaviour or Desired Behaviour by the model (to be learned by the client).

In modelling the clients are told to repeat the behaviour what was taught them through modeling. It is assumed that the client must be able to demonstrate an imitative response/behaviour learned through simply observation. It is important that after each copied behaviour, corrective and positive feedback should be given performed in different situations and context.<sup>8</sup>

#### Merits / Advantages of Modelling

- ❖ It is cost effective because demonstration of a skill requires minimal cost of resources.
- ❖ This is an interactive approach where the trainer direct and learner witnesses a demonstration. Further, the trainer can

visit with each participant to evaluate their attempts at the skill and correct.

- ❖ Learning in this technique focuses largely on learner attempting the skill. The learner gets the opportunity to interact with their peers, collaborate and discuss their learning with the instructor in real life situations. This allows for the learner to determine the course of the session as it leaves a great deal of space for participation and questions.<sup>9</sup>

### Limitations of Modelling

- ❖ In this method, there lacks a scope for creativity as the training provides the learner with one model for which to perform a skill. Rather than allowing the learner to complete a task using their own creativity you limit the learner by allowing completion by following one set of prescribed tasks.
- ❖ In order to get the positive results, the trainer should be expert in using techniques for behaviour modification. The trainer has the opportunity to teach the learner a skill by demonstrating it themselves so must be competent in the skill they are attempting to train to avoid teaching it incorrectly. If the training is for a very specific skill the trainer may need to be outsourced to find an expert and this becomes expensive.<sup>9</sup>

### Token Economy

This strategy relies on reinforcement to modify behavior. Parents and teachers often use token economies, allowing kids to earn tokens for engaging in preferred behaviors and lose tokens for undesirable behaviors. These tokens can then be traded for rewards such as candy, toys, or extra time playing with a favorite toy.<sup>10</sup>

A token economy is a system that uses positive reinforcement to modify behavior. It's a core technique in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy.

#### *Here's how it works:*

- **Desired behaviors are identified:** This could be anything from completing tasks to social interaction.
- **Tokens are awarded:** When someone exhibits the desired behavior, they receive a token (like a chip or sticker).
- **Tokens are exchanged for rewards:** Tokens can be saved and later exchanged for preferred

activities, privileges, or even tangible items.<sup>11</sup>

This system capitalizes on operant conditioning, where behavior is influenced by its consequences. Earning tokens becomes a positive consequence that strengthens the desired behavior.<sup>12</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Behavioral therapy is a type of psychotherapy that focuses on identifying and changing unwanted behaviors. It's based on the idea that all behaviors are learned and can therefore be unlearned. Behavioral therapists use a variety of techniques to help people change their behavior unwanted behaviour is defined as an undesired response to something or someone in the environment. Using this approach, a counsellor would identify the unwanted behaviour with a client and together they would work to change or adapt the behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

*Conflict of Interest:* NIL

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