

# Phobias: Learning Theory



**This activity will help you to:**

- Research relevant psychological evidence
- Use evidence to test hypotheses
- Assess the learning theory of phobias

The learning theory suggests that phobias are acquired through classical and operant conditioning and social learning. In the box below, briefly explain whether you think that learning theory is a good explanation of phobias.

Learning theory generates a number of hypotheses about phobias. Each of these can be tested against the evidence in order to evaluate the theory. Some hypotheses of the learning theory of phobias are:

- It should be possible to artificially induce a phobia using conditioning.
- Cases of phobia should be traceable to a particular experience or set of experiences.
- People will tend to develop phobias about situations or things that are likely to be hurt them or be associated with harm.
- It should be possible to get rid of phobias using conditioning techniques.

Using the available resources, search out some relevant research evidence and write a brief commentary (3-4 sentences) evaluating each hypothesis. Once you have finished this, write a short paragraph in which you give an overall assessment of the learning theory of phobias.

## **Extension Task (You should attempt this if you are aiming for a B or an A)**

Above, we assumed that if a phobia can be unlearned through conditioning, it follows that it was learned originally through conditioning.

Find out what is meant by the **treatment-aetiology fallacy**, and write a short paragraph explaining whether your conclusion regarding hypothesis 4 still stands.