

Models of Abnormality



A model is a sort of simplified theory. It consists of a small number of concepts or ideas that are used to provide an outline explanation of a psychological process.

This activity will help you to:

- Understand what a model of abnormality is
- Apply concepts from a model to explain psychological problems
- Understand how the psychologist's choice of model influences their choice of treatment for abnormality

Two Models of Abnormality

Model	Main Emphasis	Basic Ideas
Biological	Abnormality is seen as the result of a biological malfunction . Because the brain is not working properly, the person may have abnormal experiences, and behave in abnormal ways.	Abnormality could result from a malfunction in the brain . For example, the balance of different chemicals in the brain might be wrong, or possibly the brain itself could be damaged . These problems may arise from outside influences (e.g. the person has been put under abnormal levels of stress , or perhaps have been poisoned by a toxic chemical) or may be inherited through genetics.
Behavioural	Abnormality is seen as the result of learning from the environment . Because the person has been put in an abnormal environment, they learn to behave in abnormal ways.	Abnormality could result from a set of learning experiences brought about by the person's environment. For example, they might have had a traumatic experience that they now associate with certain situations (classical conditioning). Alternately, they might have learned to behave abnormally through operant conditioning (e.g. they have been reinforced for behaving abnormally) or perhaps they have learned the behaviour through social learning and are imitating models they have seen.

What you need to do:

Read the short case study below, and then write a short explanation of the person's behaviour. In your explanation...

You must:

- Use the main ideas of the **behavioural model** to suggest the causes of the person's behaviour.

You should:

- Suggest how a psychologist might go about treating the person's abnormal behaviour.

You could:

- Write another explanation, this time using the concepts of the **biological model**.

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.