

How psychological perspectives relate to child development and behaviour:

The behavioural approach

Approach and theorists

Behavioural theory:

Pavlov, Skinner and Watson

Key words:

- Reward
- Punishment
- Reinforcement

Key aspects of the approach or theory relating to children's development and behaviour

- The behavioural approach focuses on behaviour that can be observed and quantified.
- It is a more scientific approach to psychology than the humanist approach.
- Human behaviour can be explained in terms of the environmental factors that influence it.
- Behavioural theories of development explain behaviour as a reaction to rewards, punishment and reinforcement.
- The two most influential theories are classical conditioning and operant conditioning.
- Pavlov's theory of classical conditioning demonstrates how we can condition an individual to repeat an action without them realising.
- John Watson believed that all human psychology was a response to stimulus and could be explained by classical conditioning.
- Language and emotional development could be simply explained through this process.
- B.F. Skinner developed the theory of operant conditioning where the consequence of a subject's response decides whether or not this response is repeated.
- Operant conditioning results in behaviour that is reinforced or rewarded being repeated and behaviour which is punished being eliminated or demonstrated less frequently.

Application of the approach for childcare practitioners and educators in schools and settings

Watson emphasised the importance of nurture and realised the significance of the environment in child development and the importance of a positive and nurturing environment for a child's healthy emotional development.

This has influenced practice in schools and settings as a positive environment can make a child feel secure, stimulated and promote positive behaviour.

Behaviourists believe that experience helps the child learn what is good behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour. If they are rewarded and praised for good behaviour, a child is more likely to want to do the same again and experience the same positive reaction. Children learn through association and reinforcement. Development is a reaction to rewards such as star charts and stickers, and to punishments and reinforcement through praise and encouragement.