

The Effects of "Setting Events" on Behaviours that Challenge

What is a setting event?

The term “setting event” refers to something that influences the relationship between a situation and the likelihood that a behaviour will be shown. For example, having a headache increases the likelihood that Bobby will find a music lesson very difficult and lead to him throwing his musical instrument on the floor. This means that a setting event could lead to behaviours that challenge occurring in a situation that is not normally associated with behaviours that challenge (Bobby usually really likes music lessons).

A common type of setting event is pain and discomfort. For example, it has been shown that behaviours that challenge can become worse when demands are made on individuals. This relationship may be even stronger when particular setting events such as low mood, fatigue or illness are present.

Sometimes demands may be made at times when people are not experiencing low mood, fatigue or discomfort and this will not lead to behaviours that challenge. However, on other occasions if an individual is experiencing low mood, is tired or is experiencing discomfort then a task demand may trigger behaviours that challenge. The reason for this is that the motivation for escaping a task is usually higher when anyone is tired or in discomfort (do you want to clean the house when ill or tired?!)

Setting events do not just influence behaviour in demand situations. Anything that an individual could find unpleasant or difficult such as a noisy birthday party, or being on their own is more likely to be experienced as unpleasant if there is a setting event such as pain and discomfort present too.

This shows how some biological factors (such as health problems like reflux or ear infections) might interact with psychological factors (such as not liking jigsaw puzzles or being left alone) to raise the probability that a behaviour will occur.

NEXT: The mutual reinforcement process