

The basis behind social learning theory is that people observe the behavior, attitudes and consequences of others and then use that information to form their own actions. The key concepts behind this process include four basic learning requirements. These four concrete stages of social learning within social learning theory include attention, retention and memory, initiation and motor behavior, and motivation.

Attention. For a lesson or experience to have an impact on an observer, the observer must be actively observing their surroundings. It helps if the observer identifies well with the model or feels positive feelings about them. In addition, it helps if the observer is invested in the process of observing or feels strong feelings about the experience that they are observing. Factors that might affect attention include complexity, distinctiveness and functional value.

Retention and memory. For any learned experience to make a lasting impact, the observer needs to be able to remember it later. Once the observer can recall the experience, it also helps if they go over the experience, either revisiting it cognitively in their mind or even acting it out physically. For example, a toddler may learn from an adult not to throw things and later they may be observed teaching one of their stuffed animals that it's not okay to throw.

Initiation and motor capability. In order to carry out the lesson learned, the observer needs to be able to actually reenact it. Learning the necessary skills is an important part of the process before a behavior can be modeled. When a person has effectively paid attention to modeled behavior and repeats or demonstrates it, they have achieved the necessary skills.

Motivation. Even if an observer has focused on a lesson, remembered all the details and learned the necessary skills to do it, they still need to have the motivation to make it happen. The source of motivation could include anything from external rewards and bribes, observations that similar behavior is rewarded, desire to be like the model who demonstrated the behavior or internal motivation to improve or learn. Other factors that impact motivation include personal characteristics, past experiences, promised incentives, positive reinforcement and punishments.