Definitions and Concepts for AQA Psychology A-level

# Option 3: Aggression

---

**Aggression:** Any physical or verbal behaviour intended to cause harm, injury, or distress to another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment.

**Aggressive cue:** A stimulus, such as a weapon, that can trigger an aggressive response, particularly when someone is already frustrated or angry.

**Aggressive script:** A mental representation of how to behave in a situation, which may be learned through repeated exposure to aggressive behaviour.

**Amygdala:** A brain structure involved in processing emotions, threat and provocation, which may contribute to aggressive responses.

**Appeasement behaviour:** Behaviour shown by a weaker animal to signal submission to a dominant animal, potentially preventing further aggression.

**Berkowitz's negative affect theory:** An explanation suggesting that negative emotions, such as frustration, pain and anger, can create a readiness for aggression, particularly when aggressive cues are present.

**Catharsis:** The release of an aggressive drive through aggressive behaviour, which the original frustration-aggression hypothesis proposed could reduce the drive.

**Cognitive priming:** An explanation for aggression suggesting that repeated exposure to violent media makes aggressive thoughts and scripted responses more accessible in memory, increasing the likelihood of aggression when an appropriate stimulus occurs.

**Deindividuation:** When a person feels anonymous and less personally responsible for their behaviour because they are part of a group, potentially reducing self-awareness and increasing antisocial or aggressive behaviour.

**Deprivation model:** **Sykes' (1958)** situational explanation of institutional aggression in prisons, proposing that aggression arises from the stress and frustration caused by the "pains of imprisonment" (e.g., deprivation of liberty, goods and services, autonomy, security, and heterosexual relationships).

This work by PMT Education is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

**Desensitisation:** A process in which repeated exposure to violence reduces emotional responses to aggression, making it seem less shocking and potentially reducing empathy towards victims.

**Direct guarding:** An evolutionary mate-retention strategy involving male vigilance over a partner's behaviour (e.g., tracking their location, reading messages, restricting social contact) to prevent infidelity or cuckoldry.

**Disinhibition:** The removal or weakening of normal restraints on behaviour. In aggression, exposure to media that portrays aggression as acceptable or rewarded may make individuals more likely to behave aggressively.

**Dispositional explanation:** An explanation of institutional aggression suggesting that aggression is influenced by characteristics individuals bring into an institution, such as personality, previous experiences and criminal history.

**Displacement of aggression:** Redirecting aggression away from its original source of frustration towards another target, often because the original source is unavailable or too powerful to confront.

**Ethological explanation:** An explanation of aggression suggesting that it is an innate behaviour that evolved because it can improve survival and reproductive success, for example by helping individuals obtain resources, defend territory and establish dominance.

**Fixed action patterns (FAPs):** An innate, stereotyped sequence of behaviour triggered by a specific stimulus after an innate releasing mechanism has been activated.

**Frustration:** The experience that occurs when an individual's goal-directed behaviour is blocked, potentially producing negative emotions and a readiness for aggression.

**Frustration-aggression hypothesis:** The theory proposed by **Dollard et al. (1939)**, suggesting that frustration produces an aggressive drive and that aggression results from frustration.

**Genetic explanation of aggression:** An explanation suggesting that inherited genetic differences can influence vulnerability to aggression, although environmental factors also contribute.

**Hormonal explanation of aggression:** An explanation suggesting that hormones, particularly testosterone, can influence the likelihood of aggression, especially in situations involving threat or competition.

**Importation model:** An explanation of institutional aggression suggesting that prisoners bring individual characteristics, attitudes and experiences into prison that influence their behaviour.

**Innate releasing mechanisms (IRMs):** Inborn mechanisms that recognise a specific stimulus, known as a releaser, and activate an innate behavioural response.

**Institutional aggression:** Aggression that occurs within an institution, such as a prison, between individuals or groups.

**Limbic system:** A group of interconnected brain structures involved in emotion and emotional processing. Structures such as the amygdala may contribute to aggressive behaviour.

**MAOA gene:** A gene that codes for the MAOA enzyme, which breaks down neurotransmitters including serotonin. Certain variants have been associated with an increased vulnerability to impulsive aggression.

**Mate-retention strategies:** Behaviours used to maintain a relationship and reduce the risk of a partner's infidelity, including direct guarding and negative inducements.

**Mediational processes:** Cognitive processes involved in learning through observation, including attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation.

**Negative inducements:** Mate-retention strategies involving threats, intimidation or punishment intended to discourage a partner from being unfaithful.

**Neural explanation of aggression:** An explanation suggesting that brain structures and neurotransmitters influence aggressive behaviour, including the roles of the amygdala, orbitofrontal cortex and serotonin.

**Paternity uncertainty:** The possibility that a male cannot be completely certain that a child is genetically his, which evolutionary explanations suggest may influence sexual jealousy and mate-retention behaviour.

**Ritualistic aggression:** Predictable aggressive displays between animals that often involve signals of dominance or submission and may prevent serious injury.

**Serotonin:** A neurotransmitter involved in regulating mood, emotion and impulse control. Reduced serotonin functioning has been associated with poorer impulse control and increased vulnerability to impulsive aggression.

**Situational explanation:** An explanation of institutional aggression suggesting that aggression arises partly from features of the environment, such as deprivation, frustration, poor management and lack of security.

**Social Learning Theory (SLT):** An explanation suggesting that aggression is learned by observing and imitating role models, particularly when their behaviour is rewarded.

**Testosterone:** An androgen hormone associated with dominance and competition that may influence the likelihood of aggression, depending on factors such as the situation and other hormones.

**Vicarious reinforcement:** Learning that a behaviour is likely to be effective by observing another person being rewarded for it, making imitation of that behaviour more likely.


CC BY NC ND