

PBS Helpline Resources

The impact of the environment on behaviour

The environment impacts on all our behaviour as human beings. We constantly scan the environment to look for cues as to how to behave. At a very basic level, we are looking to the environment to see whether we are safe or not.

If our environment feels safe, we are able to be creative and productive. If it is unsafe, we focus on survival and protection.

In considering how to create the best environment, there are three areas to consider

- **Safety and security:** obviously we need to feel safe. Also think about how much personal space you need to feel safe. Consider trauma triggers – if there is something in the environment that reminds us of a bad experience, it might not feel so safe.
- **Physical comfort:** consider what light, noise, temperature, smells and texture make you feel good.
- **Psychological comfort:** consider familiarity, stimulus, choice, routine, and the number and type of people and interactions (what's expected of me? What's happening next? Who's around me? Do I trust them? Are they interacting in ways that work for me?)

Lastly, some people have additional and specific sensory needs. These could include touch and pressure, sound, smells, any of the senses. There might be things that we really need, or things that we have to avoid.

It is a really worthwhile exercise to go through these points and work with someone to identify what makes a positive environment for you or for them. Creating a positive environment increases quality of life, increasing positive emotion, activities, building relationship opportunities and creating opportunities for meaning and achievement, and has a positive impact on our behaviour.