

## GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY DIPLOMA ECDE SHORT NOTES

### TOPIC: ATTITUDE

#### Notes on Attitudes: Meaning, Nature, Components and Types of Attitudes

##### Meaning and Nature:

Attitudes are fundamental determinants of our perceptions of, and actions toward all aspects of our social environment. Attitudes involve a complex organisation of evaluative beliefs, feelings and tendencies toward certain actions.

How much we like or dislike something determines our behaviour towards that thing. We tend to approach, seek out or be associated with things we like; we avoid, shun or reject things we do not like.

*Attitude will have three components:*

- 1. Cognitive:** It involves the knowledge or information about a person or object, etc., and his belief about it.
- 2. Affective:** Refers to feeling aspect, i.e. how he feels about it
- 3. Conative:** Refers to action tendency, i.e. how he behaves with it

##### **Types of Attitudes:**

Attitudes are of three types:

###### ***a. Positive:***

A favourable attitude—liking people, objects, situation, etc.

###### ***b. Negative:***

An unfavourable attitude—does not like people/ objects, etc.

###### ***c. Neutral:***

Neither favourable nor unfavourable.

### **8 Factors Responsible for Development of Attitudes**

The factors which lead to development of attitudes are:

- a. Family
- b. Peers

- c. Conditioning
- d. Social adjustment functions
- e. Direct instruction
- f. Modelling
- g. Satisfaction of wants and
- h. Prejudices!

***a. Family:***

Family is the most powerful source for formation of attitudes. The parents, siblings provide information about various things.

Attitudes developed by an individual, whether positive or negative are the result of family influence, are very powerful and difficult to undo.

***b. Peers:***

As the individual develops, he comes in contact with outer world and peers in first place. Peers include same age friends, neighbours, classmates, etc. The child tries to internalise the attitudes of these people.

***c. Conditioning:***

When we are conditioned or adjusted to a certain set up of people, situation, etc., we will be influenced by that. Hence, our associations lead to develop attitudes. Many times the kind of reinforcement we get from environment also leads to develop attitudes.

On the other hand, negative reinforcement like punishment, teasing, criticizing, troubling may lead to develop negative attitude.

Examples: when a patient's life is saved by a particular hospital at critical moments, he will develop a favourable attitude about that hospital (classical conditioning). Similarly, in instrumental conditioning, reward consequences of any behaviour will shape our attitude. For example, if you express an attitude to a

friend, who then reinforce your behaviour in the form of smiling, your attitude is likely to be strengthened, otherwise gets weakened.

***d. Social adjustment functions:***

This is otherwise called balance theory. Every society has majority of people who prefer to lead a harmonious life. They try to avoid unnecessary friction of conflicts with people. Naturally, they are inclined to develop positive attitudes towards most of the people and issues. Our attitudes may facilitate and maintain our relationships with members of positively valued groups. Usually we want to go with significant others to us, and rebel against those unwanted.

***e. Direct instruction:***

Sometimes direct instruction can influence attitude formation. For example, somebody gives information about a hair dye or usefulness of some fruit, we develop an attitude about that product, may be positive or negative.

***f. Modelling:***

This has been influential in developing attitudes toward a wide range of issues from alcohol to various kinds of dress, shoes, etc.

***g. Satisfaction of wants:***

Individual develops favourable attitudes towards those people and objects which satisfy his wants and unfavourable attitudes towards those who do not satisfy.

***h. Prejudices:***

Prejudices are preconceived ideas or judgments where one develops some attitudes on other people, objects, etc., without proper information. For example, disliking a doctor or a nurse without knowing their abilities, just because of their caste, religion, region, nationality, etc

**Theories of attitude formation and change.**

1. Functionalist theory. Daniel Katz proposed a functionalist theory of attitudes. He takes the view that attitudes are determined by the functions they serve for us.

People hold given attitudes because these attitudes help them achieve their basic goals.

2. Learning theory (which stresses attitude formation). There are several means by which we learn attitudes.

a. *Classical conditioning*. EX: A father angrily denounces the latest increase in income taxes. A mother happily announces the election of a candidate she worked for. These parents are expressing opinions, but they are also displaying nonverbal behavior that expresses their emotions. For a child watching the parents, the association between the topic and the nonverbal behavior will become obvious if repeated often enough. And the nonverbal behavior will trigger emotional responses in the child: the child feels upset and disturbed when listening to the father and happy when listening to the mother.

This is an example of classical conditioning: when two stimuli are repeatedly associated, the child learns to respond to them with a similar emotional reaction. In this case, the stimuli are the attitude topic and the parental emotion. Through repeated association, a formerly neutral stimulus (the attitude topic - taxes or politicians) begins to elicit an emotional reaction (the response) that was previously solicited only by another stimulus (the parental emotion). Whenever tax increases are mentioned, the child feels an unpleasant emotion; when the elected official is mentioned, the child feels a pleasant emotion.

EX: Pavlov's dogs. Bell was rung when dogs received food. Food made dogs salivate. Then whenever a bell was rung, dogs salivated even when food was not present.

EX: When you were a child, parents may have cheered for N.D. football. You may not have even known what N.D. football was, but you liked your parents happy attitude. Now N.D. football evokes that same response in you.

EX: Men with bow ties. Meet a bad man who wears bow ties, and you may come to hate all bow ties.

COMMENT: This explains why behaviors can persist even after reinforcement is withdrawn. Also helps explain self-reinforcement.

b. *Instrumental, or operant, conditioning.* Behaviors or attitudes that are followed by positive consequences are reinforced and are more likely to be repeated than are behaviors and attitudes that are followed by negative consequences.

EX: People agree with your opinion.

c. *Observational learning.* Children watch the behavior of people around them and imitate what they see. EX: If a young girl hears her mother denounce all elected officials as crooks, she may repeat that opinion in class the next day. Whether she continues to repeat that opinion depends on the responses of her classmates, teacher, and parents. That is, observations determine the responses we learn, but reinforcement determines the responses we express.

3. *Cognitive dissonance theory* - stresses attitude change - and that behaviors can determine attitudes.

A. Defn: *Cognition* = individuals perception of own attitudes, beliefs, behaviors. *Cognitive dissonance* = feelings of tension that arise when one is simultaneously aware of two inconsistent cognitions. For example, when we act contrary to our attitudes; or, when we make a decision favoring one alternative despite reasons favoring another.

4. Bem's Self-perception theory. Says we infer our attitudes from our behavior.

There is no tension, rather, behavior just serves an informative purpose. We calmly observe our behavior, and draw reasonable inferences from it, just as we do when observing other people.