4.2 Characteristics of Phobias: Behavioural, Emotional and Cognitive

AQA 7182 · about 50 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Explain what is meant by 'disproportionate' fear in the emotional features of phobias, using an example of a person with a dog phobia who experiences high anxiety around small, calm dogs.

(Total for Question 1 is 3 marks)

2 State two named examples of phobias given in the AQA specification and give one brief behavioural sign for each example you name. Context: characteristics of phobias topic.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Describe two contrasting behavioural responses seen in phobias: avoidance and endurance, using agoraphobia as the context.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Outline the emotional characteristics of phobias, emphasising persistent and excessive fear and anxiety that is disproportionate to the danger posed, with social anxiety as the named example.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Outline one cognitive characteristic of phobias: irrational beliefs or cognitive distortions, with reference to social anxiety (social phobia).

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

6 Vignette: Priya refuses to board a city bus. She says her heart races, her hands shake and she feels she must get off or she will choke. She now walks long distances to avoid buses and has not used public transport for months.

Identify the single behavioural characteristic of phobias best illustrated by Priya, and justify your choice using evidence from the vignette.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

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7 Vignette: Noah is due to give a short presentation at work. He is convinced he will stumble over his words and that everyone will think he is incompetent. During the meeting he monitors colleagues' faces for signs they are judging him and replays perceived negative expressions afterward.

Identify the cognitive characteristic illustrated by Noah and justify your choice with reference to the vignette.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 Vignette: Callum has a dog phobia. He believes any dog will bite him and scans parks for dogs, interpreting even distant dogs as threatening. He sometimes freezes and cannot move when a dog approaches. Using this vignette, identify two different characteristics of phobias (one cognitive and one behavioural), and explain briefly how the vignette shows each.

(a) Identify and explain the cognitive characteristic shown by Callum, with supporting evidence from the vignette. **(3)**

(b) Identify and explain the behavioural characteristic shown by Callum, with supporting evidence from the vignette. **(3)**

(Total for Question 8 is 6 marks)

9 Extended question (10 marks): Vignette: Yusuf avoids going to the supermarket because he feels overwhelming fear in crowds. He believes that if he goes he will make a scene and everyone will notice. When he is forced to go he scans shoppers and interprets neutral faces as hostile, and sometimes freezes at the entrance.

Explain three different characteristics of phobias shown in Yusuf. For each characteristic: identify it, explain what it means, and apply it to Yusuf's vignette. One mark is available for correctly identifying the likely phobia type at the end.

(Total for Question 9 is 10 marks)

Mark scheme · 4.2 Characteristics of Phobias: Behavioural, Emotional and Cognitive

Question 1

states that disproportionate fear means the emotional response is much greater than the objective threat posed by the stimulus oe — **M1**

applies to the example, e.g. a person fearful of small calm dogs despite little real danger oe — **A1**

explains the consequence, e.g. disproportionate fear leads to avoidance or distress that is not matched by the actual risk oe — **A1**

Answer: Disproportionate fear means the emotional response is much larger than the objective threat. For example, someone may feel extreme anxiety around small, calm dogs even though the real risk is minimal, causing undue avoidance and distress.

Question 2

names a phobia and gives a correct behavioural sign, e.g. specific phobia - panic or avoidance around the object oe — **B1**

names a second phobia and gives a correct behavioural sign, e.g. social anxiety - avoiding social situations or visible anxiety when socialising oe — **B1**

Answer: Examples: specific phobia (eg spider phobia) - avoidance or panic when near the object; social anxiety (social phobia) - avoiding social events or showing visible anxiety while speaking.

Question 3

describes avoidance: actively avoiding the feared situation, e.g. staying at home to avoid crowded places in agoraphobia oe — **M1**

explains the effect of avoidance, e.g. reduced daily functioning and possible negative impact on work and social life oe — **A1**

describes endurance: staying in the feared situation but experiencing high anxiety or distress, e.g. going to the shops but feeling panicky and distressed oe — **M1**

explains the effect of endurance, e.g. continued exposure without escape maintains high anxiety and impairs concentration or coping oe — **A1**

Answer: Avoidance involves actively avoiding feared situations, for example someone with agoraphobia may stay at home to avoid crowds, reducing daily functioning. Endurance involves remaining in the situation despite intense anxiety, for example going shopping but feeling panicky and distressed throughout.

Question 4

identifies persistent and excessive fear and anxiety as core emotional characteristics oe — **M1**

states that the fear is disproportionate to the actual danger posed by the stimulus, e.g. mild risk in social situations yet extreme anxiety in social phobia oe — **A1**

gives an example related to social anxiety, e.g. intense worry before social events, fear of negative evaluation oe — **M1**

explains why this matters, e.g. such emotional responses interfere with everyday life and are distressing beyond what the situation warrants oe — **A1**

Answer: Emotional characteristics include persistent and excessive fear and anxiety that are disproportionate to the actual danger. In social anxiety someone may experience intense worry and fear of negative evaluation before and during social events, which is out of proportion to the likely risk and interferes with daily life.

Question 5

identifies irrational beliefs or cognitive distortions as a cognitive characteristic, e.g. believing one will be judged harshly or perform badly oe — **M1**

applies to social anxiety, e.g. a person may believe 'everyone will notice I am nervous' or 'I will say something stupid' oe — **A1**

explains why this matters, e.g. these beliefs increase anxiety and encourage avoidance of social situations oe — **A1**

Answer: Irrational beliefs or cognitive distortions include thoughts such as 'I will embarrass myself' or 'everyone will notice my anxiety'. In social anxiety these beliefs increase fear, maintain anxiety and promote avoidance of social situations.

Question 6

identifies avoidance as the primary behavioural characteristic shown cao — **B1**

justifies with evidence that Priya actively avoids buses and walks long distances to prevent exposure oe — **M1**

adds secondary behavioural evidence that she avoids public transport for months, showing a persistent pattern of avoidance oe — **A1**

links the physiological reactions (heart racing, shaking) to panic behaviours often accompanying avoidance in phobias oe — **A1**

Answer: Avoidance. Priya walks long distances to avoid buses and has not used public transport for months; her heart racing and shaking when on a bus show panic that leads to persistent avoidance.

Question 7

identifies irrational beliefs/cognitive distortions (eg catastrophising, negative expectations) cao	**B1**
justifies by citing Noah's belief he will stumble and be seen as incompetent oe	**M1**
links selective attention to threat, citing Noah monitoring colleagues' faces for judgment during the meeting oe	**A1**
notes post-event rumination where he replays perceived negative expressions, reinforcing the cognitive bias oe	**A1**

Answer: Irrational beliefs and selective attention to threat. Noah expects he will be seen as incompetent and watches colleagues for signs of judgement, then replays perceived negative expressions afterward, showing cognitive distortions and focused attention on threat cues.

Question 8

(a) identifies the cognitive characteristic: selective attention to threat or irrational belief that any dog will bite cao	**M1**
(a) explains using vignette evidence, e.g. Callum scans parks for dogs and interprets distant dogs as threatening oe	**A1**
(a) explains consequence, e.g. this bias maintains anxiety by focusing on threat cues and ignoring safe evidence oe	**A1**

(a) Answer: Cognitive: selective attention/irrational belief. Callum scans parks for dogs and interprets distant dogs as threatening, believing any dog will bite, which maintains his anxiety by focusing on threat cues.

(b) identifies the behavioural characteristic: panic/freeze response or avoidance behaviour (freeze is primary here) cao	**M1**
(b) explains with vignette evidence, e.g. he sometimes freezes and cannot move when a dog approaches oe	**A1**
(b) explains effect, e.g. freezing is an observable panic-type behavioural reaction that indicates high fear and may lead to avoidance of parks oe	**A1**

(b) Answer: Behavioural: panic-type freeze response. Callum sometimes freezes and cannot move when a dog approaches, an observable panic reaction that can lead to avoidance of parks.

Question 9

identifies characteristic 1 (cognitive or emotional or behavioural) cao	**B1**
explains characteristic 1, eg definition of selective attention, irrational belief, panic, avoidance, or disproportionate fear oe	**A1**
applies characteristic 1 to Yusuf with specific vignette evidence oe	**A1**
identifies characteristic 2 cao	**B1**
explains characteristic 2 with a clear definition oe	**A1**
applies characteristic 2 to Yusuf with vignette evidence oe	**A1**
identifies characteristic 3 cao	**B1**
explains characteristic 3 with a clear definition oe	**A1**
applies characteristic 3 to Yusuf with vignette evidence oe	**A1**
identifies the likely phobia type correctly, eg agoraphobia or social anxiety depending on justification, cao	**B1**