

Social Learning Theory

The ***Social Learning Theory*** posits that individuals learn behaviors from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling. This theory, first introduced by Albert Bandura in 1971, bridges behavioral and cognitive learning theories by taking into account how imitable behaviors are affected by cognitive constructs, such as attention, retention, and motivation.

Uniquely, the social learning theory explains how behaviors are learned in the context of *reciprocal determinism*, or the interaction between observed behaviors, cognitive factors, and external environments. These interactions affect self-efficacy by either encouraging or discouraging the performance of a particular behavior.

For example, a person who watches a public service announcement that encourages HIV testing may model the observed behavior because they are sufficiently attentive, motivated, and able to replicate the observed behavior. By getting tested, this person influences the environment by making HIV testing more salient, or by influencing others to model this behavior.

The social learning theory serves as the basis for many other evidence-based health education and health promotion theories, including the Social Cognitive Theory.