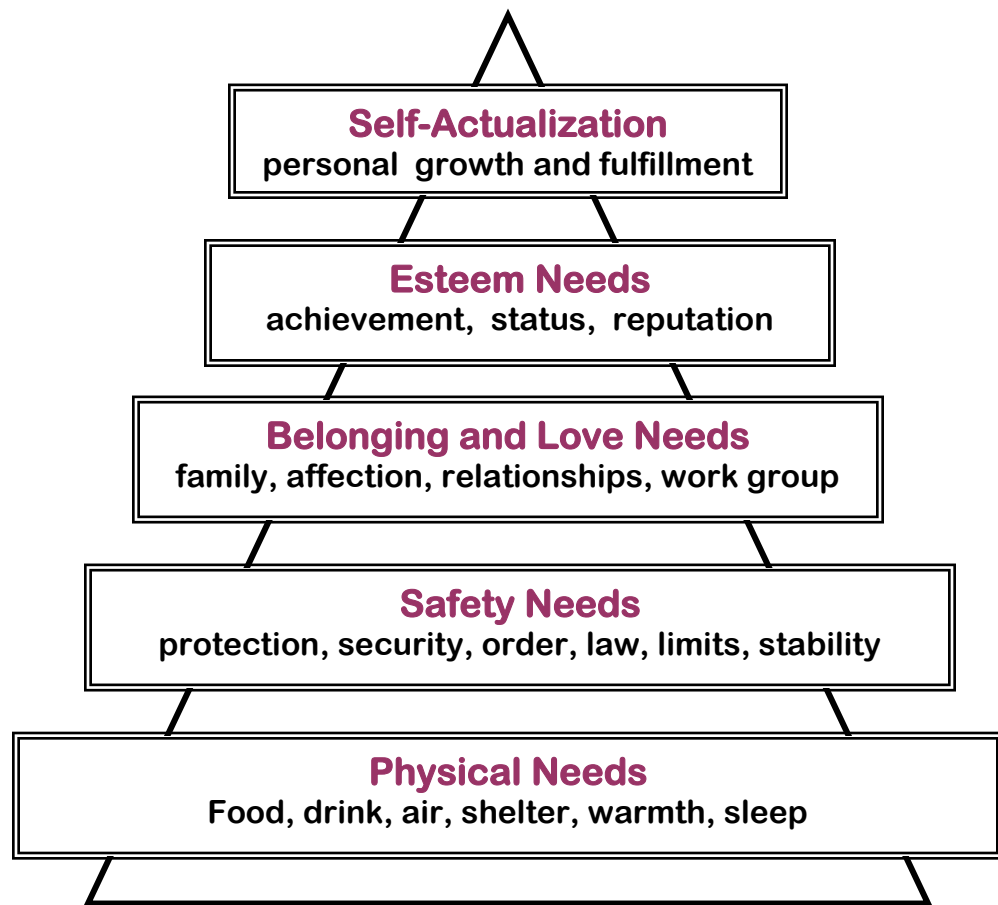


Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Meeting Children's Needs

A psychologist by the name of Abraham Maslow developed a useful model for understanding human needs. It applies to adults as well as children and is helpful to parents in prioritizing various needs and in understanding the ways in which we need to support children's development.

Survival

The first and most basic level is survival. Hunger, thirst, warmth, rest and fresh air are on this level. A tired, hungry child is not in a place to play or learn. They can't be expected to entertain themselves while you get on with what you are doing unless these basic needs are met. Grizzling and demanding attention are the child's way of letting you know they have a problem. Teach them to use words to ask for what they need and meet real needs promptly. (Real needs do not include lollies or the latest toy!) Taking a tired hungry child to the supermarket and expecting him or her to behave is unrealistic. Better to go after lunch and a nap.

Safety

This is the need for freedom from anxiety and threat. It is hard to concentrate on anything when you don't feel safe. A child might need mum to stay close in a new place until they develop confidence. The child who keeps coming back to mum or dad at playgroup or a children's party is not being naughty, they need

reassurance. If mum shows pleasure and enjoyment, gets down on the floor and joins in, the child is likely to settle. If mum is anxious, cross or embarrassed by the child then the child's fears are reinforced. Bullying at school can interfere with a child's ability to learn. Domestic violence, even when the child is not the target, is very damaging to children. If mum is not safe then the child cannot feel safe either.

Social needs

Love and belonging needs. Even though these needs are third on the hierarchy they are absolutely essential for the child's survival. Babies feed through their eyes and through their sense of touch as well as their mouths. They gaze at mum while feeding, mum gazes and coos and smiles back and the child's soul is fed. Children (and their parents) need a sense of belonging to someone special, acceptance and understanding, affection, to be listened to and share what they feel.

Success needs

Children who are physically well cared for and feel secure and loved pretty soon are exploring their world, trying out what they can do and getting into everything. They cry 'look at me' as they show off some new skill, from the toddler who gets the wee in the potty to the adolescent showing off his computer skills. Success needs involve developing enough confidence in achievement to be willing to try new things, to have some self respect and a degree of independence and freedom appropriate to the child's age. A two year old may put on his own pants; a twelve year old may catch the bus to the movies with friends.

Self actualized

This was Maslow's term for the person who continually met their own basic needs and was not dependent on others' approval. Such a person is in "overflow" mode, they can focus on meeting the needs of others. Few of us are there for very long, life has a way of sending sleepless nights and bouts of the flu and overly busy days. Children are by nature dependent, and we can't expect them to be focused on others. As they grow they gradually get a sense that others have needs too. We teach them to wait their turn, to share, to think about what they are doing and whether they would like it done to them. These things begin from about the age of three and develop slowly. It is wonderful when children give back to us, their love, smiles and gifts of kinder paintings, but we must remain responsible for being in charge as the adult. They cannot meet our needs and should not be expected to, although they can be taught to help.

Cheryl Davis 1999