

HOME ECONOMICS

GUIDE



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Priorities in Human Needs

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In some ways every person is an individual with his own unique ways of expressing himself, his interests, and capabilities. It is certainly true that no two people are alike. Yet in some very important ways people are similar. We all have certain very basic needs and we all must seek in one way or another to satisfy these needs.

Abraham Maslow¹ has suggested that these needs common to all of us are arranged in a hierarchy, or ladder. Those at the bottom of the ladder must be reasonably satisfied before others higher on the scale are felt.

Physiological Needs

At the bottom of the ladder are the basic physical needs—Food, water, air, shelter, rest, exercise and others required to satisfy the biological demands of the human organism. If these are seriously lacking a person cannot act or learn. A restless child, an adult in a room too cold or too hot, a hungry man, all of us must satisfy these needs before anything else.

Safety Needs

We must feel free from fear of deprivation, danger, or threat. The fear of physical harm is but a part of this. In today's complex world, fear of the uncertain or the uncontrollable occurs far more often than fear of natural disaster or wild animals. To the marginal welfare recipient the loss of the welfare check threatens to break his slender thread of security.

These first two steps on the ladder are very basic and failure to achieve some degree of need satisfaction makes a person unable to relate to others or make much effort for self-improvement.

Social Needs

Man has a need for being with other people, for gregariousness and social interaction. He needs to associate, to belong, to be accepted, to love and be loved. He will do more if someone cares. Failure to achieve physical and safety needs may help explain why some family members seem unable or unwilling to respond to others, even their children.

Esteem Needs

Further up the ladder, we begin to feel the need for self-esteem and self respect. Man needs to feel regarded by others, to get recognition and status. But some satisfaction of needs further down the ladder are necessary before a person can afford to feel the need for ego satisfaction.

Self-Actualization Needs

At the top of the ladder is the need for realization of individual potential, the development of creative talents—in short personal fulfillment.

According to Maslow few people achieve much at this level as they use their energies attempting to satisfy needs further down the ladder.

One can think of exceptions to the orderly pattern described above. In the face of disaster (flood or tornado) or external motivation one temporarily forgets physical needs or threat if these needs are normally satisfied in a reasonable manner.

Other exceptions

- For some people, self-esteem seems more important

¹Maslow, A. H., *Motivation and Personality*, Harper & Rowe, New York, 1954.

than love.

- Strongly creative people may forgo lower level needs.
- Level of aspiration may be permanently deadened or lowered: "live to eat."
- Psychopathic people may have a permanent loss of love needs, unable to give or receive affection. Lack conscience.
- People who have been satisfied in their basic needs throughout their lives, particularly their early years, may develop exceptional power to withstand thwarting of these basic needs simply because they have strong, healthy characters.