

[Your Name]

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An Introduction to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) was an American psychologist who is most noted for developing the hierarchy of needs theory. Considered the founder of humanistic psychology, Maslow typically wrote about such topics as behavior and motivation, and first introduced the hierarchy of needs in his 1943 paper, *A Theory of Human Motivation*.

The basic premise of this theory is that humans are born with certain needs, which can be categorized into levels depending on their degree of importance. Our most fundamental needs are physiological needs, and then safety needs, love needs, esteem needs, and finally the need for self-actualization. The idea is that as we fulfill our most basic needs in life we are able to move upward and fulfill the more complex needs represented higher on the hierarchy. We will not seek to reach higher levels, however, until our most basic needs are realized.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is commonly depicted as a five-tier pyramid, in which the bottom level represents our physiological needs, or the most critical needs for life. In this category are the requirements necessary for survival: food, water, air, warmth, and sleep. Once these needs have been addressed, we are able to move onto the next level, which is comprised of safety needs.

The need to feel safe and secure is psychological as well as physical, and may manifest itself in different ways depending on individual circumstances. Job security and a stable family environment are two examples of ways individuals seek to bring safety into their lives, and feeling removed from danger is an important step in reaching more advanced platforms of the pyramid.

When we feel out of danger and secure in the world, we are able to progress up the hierarchy and begin to fulfill our needs of love and belonging. In the third level of the pyramid, our social needs become a priority only after our physiological and safety requirements have been met and maintained. Our affiliation with and acceptance by others becomes the focus of our desires. While many adults look to fill this need by marrying someone and starting a family, children seek belonging from their parents and teenagers work to gain acceptance from their peers.

The fourth tier of the pyramid is reserved for esteem needs, or the need for achievement, confidence, respect, recognition, and approval. People increase their self-esteem by gaining an education, advancing in their careers, and working to improve themselves.

After all the previous needs have been met, an individual is capable of achieving the highest point in the pyramid is self-actualization. According to Maslow, fulfilling this need means reaching one's highest potential and truly understanding one's self. Few people reach this level in their lifetime, and even fewer stay there on a consistent basis. If the previous levels are thought to be oriented towards physical and psychological needs, the fifth level can be considered more spiritual in nature.

Works Cited

Collins, J. Mr. Collins Health. Golden Valley High School, Merced, CA. Web. 10 September 2014.