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# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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*Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) was an American psychologist who wrote extensively about human behavior, motivations, and needs. He is one of the most frequently cited psychologists of the 20th century, and is best known for creating the hierarchy of needs. As you read about this theory, consider how Maslow describes human development.*

- [1] Psychologist Abraham Maslow first introduced his concept of a hierarchy (arrangement) of needs in his 1943 book called *Motivation and Personality*. His theory states that all human behavior is motivated by universal needs and desires.

According to Maslow, our most basic needs — such as the need for food, air, and water — are inborn. These needs are required for the survival of our species. According to Maslow, humans are motivated to fulfill the obvious needs for survival *first*. Only once these needs are met do we begin to grow and focus on our “higher order” needs.



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This hierarchy is most often displayed as a pyramid. The lowest levels of the pyramid are made up of the most basic needs, while the more complex needs are located at the top of the pyramid.

## Five Levels of the Hierarchy of Needs

There are five different levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs:

### I. Physiological Needs

- [5] Physiological needs are the physical requirements for human survival. If these requirements are not met, the human body cannot function properly and will ultimately fail. Physiological needs are thought to be the most important; they should be met first.

Air, water, and food are metabolic requirements for survival in all animals, including humans. Clothing and shelter provide necessary protection from the elements.

## II. Security Needs

Security needs are important for survival, but they are not as critical as physiological needs. Security needs include financial security (usually through employment), and protection against fear, harm, or illness. This level also includes law and order, and general stability. In other words, at this level, humans tend to focus on making sure that their physiological needs will be provided to them in the future.

## III. Social Needs

After physiological and safety needs are fulfilled, the third level of human needs is interpersonal and involves feelings of belongingness. Humans need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance and may achieve this through clubs, office culture, organized religion, sports teams, or gangs. People may also seek to fulfill this need through social interactions with family, boyfriends or girlfriends, mentors, close colleagues, or confidants.

According to Maslow, the need to love and be loved by others is a very powerful need in human beings. In the absence of it, many people become vulnerable to loneliness, social anxiety, and clinical depression. This need for belonging can sometimes overcome physiological (Level 1) and security needs (Level 2), in the presence of peer pressure. For example, a person with an eating disorder may ignore the need to eat and the security of health for a feeling of belonging.

## IV. Esteem Needs

- [10] All humans have a need to feel respected; this includes the need to have self-esteem and self-respect. Esteem refers to the normal human desire to be accepted and valued by others. For example, people often engage in a profession or hobby to gain recognition. These activities give the person a sense of contributing something of value to society.

Maslow noted two versions of esteem needs: a lower one and a higher one. The lower one is the need for the respect of *others*, the need for status, recognition, fame, prestige, and attention. The higher one is the need for self-respect, the need for strength, competence, mastery, self-confidence, independence, and freedom. The latter one is considered to be “higher” because it rests more on inner competence won through experience.

## V. Self-Actualizing Needs

In 1945, Maslow wrote, “what a man can be, he must be.” This quotation forms the basis of Maslow’s theory about the universal need of self-actualization — the idea that each person has

a basic need to reach their full potential. Maslow describes this level as the desire to accomplish everything that one can, to become the most that one can be. For example, one individual may have a strong desire to become an ideal parent. Another person may work relentlessly to become a top athlete. People may also create art, donate to charity, or invent something new. As previously mentioned, Maslow believed that to understand this level of need, the person must not only achieve the previous needs but master them.

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