

# LEGITIMATE NEEDS

This is a development of Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs': a list of totally legitimate needs. These are things that we all need – every person on the planet – and, for many of these, we even have a right to expect, or claim, them. It is up to us now to own these legitimate needs, and to claim them – in everyday life. There is an assorted mixture of environmental, social and personal conditions, activities, and experiences: all these are important for our physical and psychological health.

- **Physical Needs:** From the moment you are born, you have the physical need for: clean air, pure water, and wholesome food. Everyone on the planet needs this to survive. You also need suitable shelter and clothing: the ability to stay warm. You need to be able to feel safe, in your own space or place. You also need to be able to keep yourself healthy: exercise and relaxation are important. We all also need degrees of stability, peace and freedom in the physical, social and political environment around us, in order to stay healthy and sane. Many of these needs are now being seen as basic human rights: some of these have been incorporated into the UN and EU Charter of Human Rights.
- **Emotional Needs:** We need to be able to be happy. We need security, nurturing, intimacy, and tenderness. We need people paying attention and being interested in us, as well as just caring for us. We need outlets for our emotionally expressive and creative feelings, and later on, for our sexual or intimate feelings. We need to be treated kindly, fairly and honestly so that we can learn what these qualities really are. We need to be able to communicate, and to learn when not to. We need some humour in our lives. We need to be able to learn from our mistakes, without too much criticism.
- **Social Needs:** As humans and social animals, we need the company of others. We need to love and be loved; to have friends; and to feel respected and valued. At times of stress or distress, we need sympathy, compassion and generosity. At times of achievement, we need recognition, appreciation and congratulations. At times of difficulty, we need understanding, help, and maybe even to be forgiven, in order to learn forgiveness. We need to be able to interact with others; and we also need to be able to be by ourselves sometimes. We often need to feel that we are part of a group, or groups, that we can trust others. These needs can help determine who we are, in terms of our social identity. We need to be able to work together, and to cooperate, which sometimes means accepting leadership of others or over others.
- **Creative Needs:** We need to do creative and useful work. It may also need to be remunerative. We need to feel that we are making a positive contribution to society. Our minds need information, stimulation and challenge: we have an innate need to understand people and the world around us. We need, and have the right to, education. We need variety, recreation and play. We have a drive towards accomplishment, and need to exercise this. We need to grow and experience change. We also need times of quietness and peace. We need the freedom of ideas, and to be able to express these openly and honestly. We have the right to freedom of thought and speech. We need authentic and consistent responses from others. Conformity can be restricting but chaos does not work, neither does anarchy make for contentment.
- **Personally, we have moral, ethical and spiritual needs:** We all need to feel there is some value to our life. We need to feel that there are rules and a degree of order, value and rightness: We also need a degree of autonomy, self-determination and to make our own decisions about our own lives. We need to figure out, and live by, our own standards of behaviour. We need to believe in ourselves, in people, in a natural order to things, and in the power (or rightness) of love. We need to experience power, both use and abuse, so that we can learn how to accept one and reject the other. We also nearly all seem to (need to) believe in something larger than ourselves: a Higher Being or Power – by whatever name one calls it.

Not having these needs fulfilled (being deprived of them, not owning them, nor claiming them or repressing them) can mean that we get to feel lesser than who we really are, or less than we should be. We limit our own potential through limiting own self-image and cutting our selves off from some of our legitimate needs. It can mean that we feel depleted or deprived. This can mean that we eventually become depressed, ill, anxious, angry, or feel bad about ourselves. So we have a degree of responsibility towards ourselves to make sure that we fulfil these legitimate needs. We may even need to challenge the conditions around us, or others, or old patterns within ourselves, that prevent us from so doing.

There is a form of a 'hierarchy' with these needs. These are the arrows that follow through from one sector to another in the diagram. If the needs in one sector are not totally fulfilled (which is quite likely), it is unlikely that we will be able to fulfil all the needs in another later sector. However it is not an absolute hierarchy. We may be able to survive and grow with some of the needs in a particular sector being fulfilled. Later we can come back and complete those unfulfilled needs. The arrows lead us around to the start again. The list of needs given here is not complete, nor is it absolute. If you come across a particular need that you have, add it to the list in the relevant sector.

Please consider what needs you feel are unfulfilled or incomplete. Make a checklist or inventory on a sheet of paper using three columns: “**Yes**”; “**Partially**”; and “**No**” for all these needs being fulfilled or not. Be as scrupulously honest with yourself as you can be. This form of self-awareness is really essential. No one else knows or can tell you what you need. Some people who know you very well might be able to guess a bit. But you are the real expert – about yourself!

### **Unfulfilled Needs:**

Some of these unfulfilled needs may even be behind some of your more dysfunctional behaviour patterns. Often we try to find someone else to give us what we never got earlier in life: and when it doesn't work with that person, then we are likely try with someone else, or someplace else. We can repeat this pattern over and over again: desperately trying to get a basic need met that should have been fulfilled many years ago. And we do it now in ways that are increasingly inappropriate or dysfunctional: “*Maybe this time...*” or “*This person seems the right person.*” But we are often setting ourselves up for a disappointment. This is a tragic mistake. Often we just repeat the pattern of not getting our needs fulfilled.

Most of the time, now that we are adult, we have to, we need to, find out how to give these things to ourselves: How To Fulfil Our Own Needs – instead of being dependent on others to fill them. That is a hard one! You have to do it for yourself. Your friends can possibly help you with some areas; your partner may be able to help you with any needs at work or other issues, but probably not about needs at home (as they may be part of the problem); sometimes a parent can help you a little with difficulties with other people – but we are also trying to get away from the purely parental view and work out what we need for ourselves.. But that is about it!

A good place to learn how, where and in what way to get your needs fulfilled properly, and to practice exploring this area at first, is probably in a course of counselling or psychotherapy. Life coaching is a new area of work that might be able to help a little here as well.

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**PHYSICAL NEEDS**

Good Food – Water – Clean Air –  
Shelter – Sleep – Warmth –  
Safety – Space – Exercise –  
Relaxation – Comfort – Stability  
– Peace – Freedom

**EMOTIONAL NEEDS**

Security – Nurturing – Intimacy –  
Attention – Grounding – Equality –  
Truth – Tenderness – Fairness –  
Kindness – Love – Beauty – Respect –  
Openness – Understanding –  
Forgiveness – Communication  
– Humour – Release –  
Sexuality – Contentment  
– Friendship

**MORAL, ETHICAL &  
SPIRITUAL NEEDS**

Identity – Self Esteem – Spiritual –  
Time to Self – Contact with Nature  
– Authenticity – Self Confidence –  
Autonomy – Conscience –  
Discrimination – Acceptance –  
Compassion – Solitude – Meaning –  
Rightness – Maturity – Values &  
Ethics – Justice – Vision – Belief –  
Self-Actualisation

**We all require:**

Gainful Employment –  
Potency – Creativity –  
Expression – Poetry, Music & Art –  
Competence – Competition –  
Flexibility – Feeling Useful – Being  
Inventive – Reward & Appreciation  
– Power – Effectiveness –  
Responsibility – Mastery – Status –  
Reputation – Fulfilment

Family – Friends –  
Relatives – Kinship –  
Social Life – Honesty –  
Trust – Contact – Acceptance –  
Generosity – Social Identity & Status  
– Order – Recognition – Dignity –  
Belongingness – Contribution –  
Cooperation – Synergy – Privacy –

**CREATIVE NEEDS**

**SOCIAL NEEDS**