



# Factsheet

## Understanding needs and behaviour

SOURCE: Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' was first developed in the 1940s and offers an explanation as to human behaviour that is widely in learning and development. His 1954 publication *Motivation and Personality* is the key source document for this theory.

Maslow's theory suggests there a range of core, common human needs which drive our behaviours and actions. According to this theory, all human behaviour can be understood in terms an attempt to meet one or more of these needs, and our emotions understood as a result of whether these needs are met, or not.

More controversially, Maslow initially suggested some needs take precedence over others. He revised his theory over time, concluding the hierarchy was less rigid than originally thought in terms of sequence, and he differentiated the layers in greater detail in later iterations.

The original 5-stage model is described below:

1. **Physiological needs** - these are biological requirements for human survival, e.g. air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, sleep. If these needs are not satisfied the human body cannot function optimally. Maslow considered physiological needs the most important as all the other needs become secondary until these needs are met. We might see this in the classroom – a hungry child is distracted and cannot learn well, for example.
2. **Safety needs** - protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear. If we feel afraid to make mistakes then our ability to solve problems is impeded.
3. **Love and belongingness needs** - after physiological and safety needs have been fulfilled, the third level of human needs is social and involves feelings of belongingness. The need for interpersonal relationships motivates behaviour. Examples include friendship, intimacy, trust, and acceptance, receiving and giving affection and love. Affiliating, being part of a group (family, friends, work). We know, for example, in terms of staff satisfaction feeling that someone cares about us at work and having a friend in the workplace are important factors for motivation.

4. **Esteem needs** - which Maslow classified into two categories: (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and (ii) the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige).

5. **Self-actualization needs** - realizing personal potential, self-fulfilment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences. A desire “to become everything one is capable of becoming”. This includes a sense of purpose, challenge, learning and discovery – and even a spiritual sense.

