

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Abraham Maslow is a humanist psychologist who developed a personality theory that humans strive to fulfill the highest level of their potential that they possibly can. He proposed a hierarchy of needs, with individuals having to fulfill lower order needs before they can move on to those at a higher level.

Maslow proposed five levels of need:

- Physiological needs. These are basic, biological needs fundamental to our survival, and include oxygen, food, water, and a relatively constant body temperature. If an individual has literally lost everything, as is often experienced following a tragedy, the physiological needs are the ones that will be pursued first, out of necessity.
- Safety needs. When all physiological needs are met, the need for security becomes engaged. Adults typically show little concern for their safety unless a specific threat is perceived, or they have a history of trauma or anxiety-related difficulties; children are generally much more aware of their safety needs on an ongoing basis.
- Needs of love and affection. When physiological and safety needs are met, needs for love and affection can emerge. Overcoming feelings of loneliness and alienation becomes a higher priority. One of the goals of PFA is to reach out to and connect with individuals at a time of need, so they don't feel that they are going through the experience alone. (Needless to say, that is as close to meeting survivors' needs for love and affection that we will come.) Adolescents are particularly vulnerable when these needs are threatened, and sexual acting out can occur – important to note that adults, including PFA providers, are not immune to this.
- Need for esteem. When the first three levels of need have been met, the need for esteem becomes a priority. These include both self-esteem, and the need to be valued by others. This is fundamental to our sense of value in this world. When this need is frustrated, feelings of insecurity, inferiority, or worthlessness prevail, and if they persist, may lead to suicidal thoughts and acts.
- Need for self-actualization. Maslow defined self-actualization along the lines of finding who you are and what you are called to do, and then looking to fulfill this. When unfulfilled, this need may manifest itself in a sense of restlessness, the source of which can be difficult to define.

The concept of a hierarchy of needs has become a basic tenet of delivering PFA – you cannot deliver psychological intervention to survivors until some of their more basic needs have been met. Specifically, someone who is injured, cold, hungry, lacking in shelter, or still feeling that the immediate threat has not passed has more important needs than those that are psychological in nature. **Research suggests that trying to provide psychological interventions before basic needs have been met, not only is of no value, it may actually make people worse. “Do no harm” is the first principal of any involvement as a provider of PFA.**

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