

## Basic needs

We are all born with innate needs, like every organism in the universe, and our instincts drive us to get these needs met. All behaviours can be seen as an unconscious instinctive drive to meet one or more of these emotional and physical needs.

We can all go off track sometimes, but a thorough knowledge of what the basic needs are, and how they can be met in different ways, will give you the ability to get back on track again whatever you experience.

Seemingly complex mental health problems can often be explained and helped through an awareness of faulty pattern matching and understanding what happens when basic needs are not met.

The Human Givens Foundation has carefully categorised the different needs and expanded our understanding of what it takes to ensure mental and physical wellbeing. Their list includes nine essential needs:

### *Attention*

Inter-connection with other human beings is vital to human survival. Without regular quality contact with other people, mental health, emotional state and behaviour can suffer quite drastically.

If attention needs are met outside of work, then the worker has more capacity to work effectively, as their emotional needs are less likely to get in the way. A psychotherapist who gets their attention needs met from their clients can compromise the whole process of therapy, as the therapist may try to 'hang on' to their client.

### *Mind-body connection*

The way we look after ourselves *physically* directly impacts on our *psychological* wellbeing. We need to have enough rest, sleep, exercise and the right kind of food and drink. A sure way to induce mental and physical breakdown is to deprive someone of company, food, drink or sleep. (A fact well understood by oppressors everywhere.)

### *Purpose and goals*

Human beings appear to be 'hard wired' to imaginatively project into the future – thereby giving us something constructive to work towards. Art and technology developed because humans have the basic need for and ability to create goals which gives a sense of meaning to their lives.

### *Connection to something greater than ourselves*

We feel happier when we have a sense of connection to like-minded people or others who share our perceptions and who work for a common goal.

### *Creativity and stimulation*

We tend to feel healthier and happier when our lives stimulate us to be creative and inventive. Boredom and lack of achievement leaves us unsatisfied and depressed. Human beings have always 'pushed forward'. Creative stimulation in one area encourages the development of new interconnections in our brain. These new neurological routes can be used for other brain functions, thus improving other parts of our lives. For example, if someone learns to dance, this can also enhance their mathematical ability.

### *Sense of security and safety*

Without a sense of security and safety in life we can be exposed to anxiety conditions which hamper normal functioning. Our survival as children depends on others providing this sense of safety till we can meet this need for ourselves.

### *Intimacy and connection*

It is important to feel that at least one person really knows us for who we are and will allow us to totally relax and be 'ourselves'. This could be a partner, a friend or a family member. For some people this need for close connection can be met by a beloved pet: 'My cat really understands me!' Close connection is important for the development of a healthy emotional life.

### *Sense of control*

Feeling that one has 'no control' – either in a given situation or in life generally – can lead to feelings of hopelessness. There are many examples of people being placed in care homes and 'giving up' on life because they feel that all choice about their environment and how they act within it have been eroded.

### *Status*

Feeling that we have something worthwhile to contribute, that other people appreciate our talents, contributes to a sense of strength and wellbeing.

If needs are not or cannot be met in a healthy way, we will try to get them met some other way, even adopting harmful and unhealthy practices in response to the powerful drive to get them met *somehow*. For example, many people self-medicate with too much alcohol in an attempt to relax, or as a misapplied way to help them connect socially to others. Others may crave the excitement of drugs as a misapplied way to meet the need for stimulation.

Taking practical measures to get these needs met appropriately can be the first steps to real problem solving. Taking action on addressing basic needs is much more effective than getting caught up in what we might call 'cul-de-sac worrying/rumination' that leads to no solution.

Fulfilling basic needs will always come ahead of the fulfilment of what we might call 'higher needs' to learn and develop. When we say that someone

is 'letting their ego get in the way' of a project, we are *really* saying that they are trying to meet emotional needs for status, or attention, in the wrong place and in too great a degree to have spare capacity to work cleanly and effectively.