



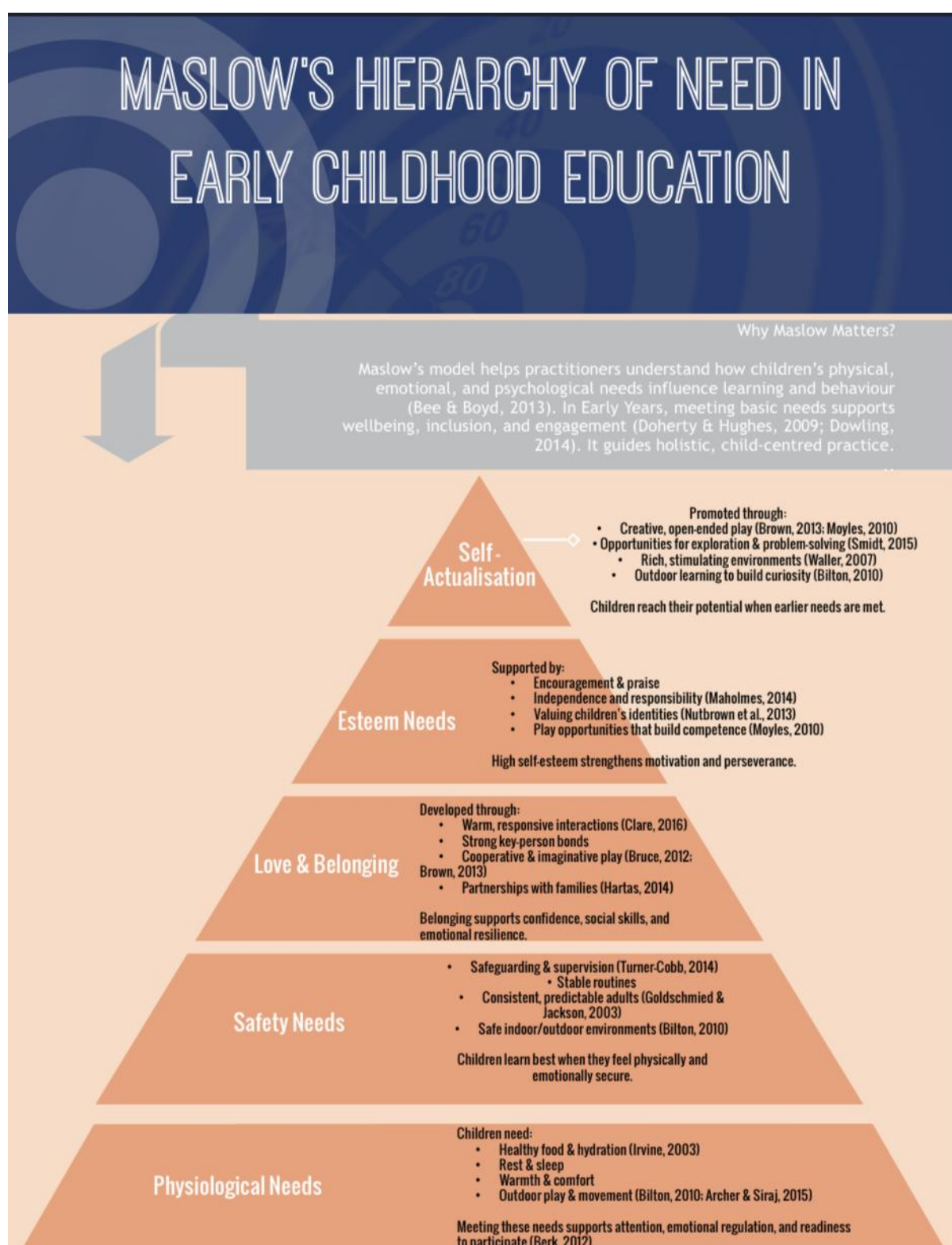
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Generative AI (ChatGPT) was used to support research guidance, and proofreading; all academic content, analysis and final wording are my own. The infographic for Component 1 was designed using Visme (non-AI graphic tool), with no AI-generated text or images included.

1. Develop an infographic to explore Maslow's model in depth (1000 words).





Curriculum Links (Wales)

- Needs may not follow a strict order (Bee & Boyd, 2013)
 - Children's needs vary culturally (Mukherji & Dryden, 2014)
 - Oversimplifies complex development (Doherty & Hughes, 2009)

Still widely used due to simple, holistic structure.

Why Maslow Supports EY Practice

Maslow aligns with Welsh Early Years priorities:

- Holistic development (Siencyn & Thomas, 2007)
- Child wellbeing
- Rights-based practice
- Inclusion & tackling disadvantage (Siencyn, 2010)
- Play-based learning (Moyle, 2010)

Supports responsive, child-centred planning (Rodger, 2016).

Critiques of Maslow

Helps practitioners:

- Identify unmet needs
- Plan inclusive, nurturing environments
- Support wellbeing and relationships
- Understand behaviour and engagement
- Advocate for children facing poverty or trauma (Maholmes, 2014)

Promotes whole-child support.

Conclusion

Maslow's theory helps Early Years practitioners understand and meet children's diverse needs. By supporting physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation needs, practitioners create inclusive, enriching environments where children can thrive.

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2. Explore in depth the concept of holistic child development with links to Maslow's model and other developmental theories (971 words).

Holistic child development recognises that physical, emotional, social, cognitive and language development are fundamentally interconnected rather than separate areas of growth. Early Years practice emphasises that children learn best when their wellbeing, relationships, environment and experiences are nurtured together (Doherty and Hughes, 2009). Bee and Boyd (2013) similarly describe development as dynamic and interactive, where progress in one domain is influenced by others such as emotional security, physical health and cognitive opportunities. Within Welsh policy, a holistic perspective is embedded across the Curriculum for Wales, where wellbeing, belonging and children's rights are positioned as essential foundations for learning (Siencyn and Thomas, 2007). Maslow's Hierarchy of Need (1943) is often used in Early Years settings to conceptualise this interconnectedness by illustrating how basic needs underpin a child's capacity to engage, learn and thrive. Although criticised for its linear nature, Maslow's framework remains useful when applied flexibly and alongside other developmental and sociocultural theories.

Maslow's first tier, physiological needs highlights the importance of nutrition, rest, health and physical comfort for development. These basic needs directly influence attention, emotional regulation and children's readiness to learn (Irvine, 2003). Movement opportunities also support holistic foundations. Archer and Siraj (2015) emphasise that physical play strengthens neural pathways and supports self-confidence and wellbeing. Outdoor learning contributes further by allowing children to develop risk awareness, motor skills and social interaction (Bilton, 2010). Berk (2012) reinforces this by showing that hunger, fatigue or poor health restrict children's working memory, language skills and problem-solving. These perspectives demonstrate that meeting basic physiological needs is essential not simply for welfare but for children's overall learning.

Safety needs, the second tier of Maslow's hierarchy, include both physical and emotional security. Early Years practice addresses this through the key carer relationship central to attachment-informed care which provides consistent, warm and predictable interactions (Goldschmied and Jackson, 2003). This emotional security encourages children to explore, communicate and manage feelings, supporting social and cognitive development (Dowling, 2014). Broader aspects of safety, such as safeguarding routines and predictable environments, also contribute to children's sense of security. In the Welsh context, rights-based legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the incorporation of the UNCRC into Welsh policy reinforces practitioners' responsibility to ensure children feel safe, valued and protected. These frameworks highlight that emotional and

physical safety is a prerequisite for engagement and learning supporting Maslow's emphasis on security as foundational.

Maslow's third level, love and belonging, is reflected in children's relationships, attachments and sense of community. Communication and social interaction flourish when children feel emotionally secure (Clare, 2016). Play also supports belonging, friendship and emotional development, enabling children to negotiate roles, express feelings and develop empathy. Bruce (2012) highlights the holistic nature of play, which nurtures social, emotional and cognitive skills simultaneously. Brown (2013) further argues that play is central to children's identity formation and understanding of the world. Partnerships with families also strengthen belonging; Hartas (2014) notes that secure home setting connections reinforce wellbeing and developmental progress. These perspectives align with Maslow's notion that emotional connection supports both cognitive engagement and personal growth.

Esteem needs relate to children's confidence, independence and feelings of competence. Experiences of success, challenge and recognition help children develop self-belief and resilience (Maholmes, 2014). Inclusive practice strengthens esteem by valuing individual differences and celebrating diverse abilities and backgrounds (Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton, 2013). Play theorists such as Moyles (2010) argue that when children lead their learning through decision-making, problem-solving and imaginative exploration they develop a sense of agency that underpins both esteem and cognitive development. Here, Maslow's framework intersects with play theory, highlighting how emotional and cognitive growth are mutually reinforcing.

Maslow's final level, self-actualisation, is reflected in children's creativity, curiosity, imagination and problem-solving. In Early Years settings, self-actualisation emerges through open-ended play, exploration and child-led inquiry. Brown (2013) argues that such play nurtures creativity and flexible thinking, while Smidt (2015) highlights how careful observation can reveal children's intrinsic motivation to investigate and construct knowledge. Connections can also be drawn with Piaget's view of active learning and Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction and scaffolding. While Maslow suggests that self-actualisation depends on fully met lower-tier needs, contemporary researchers argue that development is more fluid and non-linear. Bee and Boyd (2013) note that children often demonstrate creativity or resilience even when some basic or emotional needs fluctuate, suggesting that Maslow's hierarchy oversimplifies developmental complexity.

Holistic development also requires attention to environmental, cultural and socio-economic contexts areas that Maslow's model does not fully consider.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, discussed by Mukherji and Dryden (2014), stresses the influence of families, communities, local services and wider society. This ecological view is particularly relevant in Wales, where factors such as rural isolation, poverty and unequal access to play spaces influence development (Siencyn, 2010). Welsh children's rights policy also emphasises agency, participation and equality concepts not addressed by Maslow's original model but crucial in holistic practice. These perspectives illustrate the importance of integrating Maslow with sociocultural, ecological and rights-based theories when interpreting children's development.

Although Maslow's hierarchy is sometimes criticised for assuming universal progression through hierarchical stages, it remains a valuable reflective tool. It helps practitioners identify unmet needs, interpret behaviour and plan appropriate support particularly when combined with attachment theory, play-based pedagogy and Welsh policy. Used flexibly, Maslow supports practitioners to assess the whole child, consider barriers to learning and provide responsive, personalised care.

In conclusion, holistic child development emphasises the interconnected nature of physical, emotional, social and cognitive growth. Maslow's hierarchy offers a meaningful starting point for understanding how children's needs influence their learning, although it must be applied critically and alongside other developmental theories. Integrating attachment theory, sociocultural approaches, play theory and ecological perspectives provides a fuller understanding of children's development. Supported by rights-based Welsh policy, secure relationships and responsive environments, holistic practice enables Early Years practitioners to nurture children's wellbeing and potential effectively.

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3. Offer three examples from early years practice to highlight Maslow's significance in understanding child development, one of which should link to transitions. (978 words)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Need (1943) remains widely used in Early Years practice because it offers a clear conceptual structure for understanding how children's basic needs underpin their emotional security and developmental progress. However, contemporary research challenges the linearity and cultural bias of Maslow's model, arguing that children's needs are fluid, interconnected and shaped by multiple environmental forces (Berk & Boyd, 2013; Dowling, 2014). When used critically and alongside attachment theory, Welsh safeguarding duties and children's rights under the UNCRC, Maslow's model becomes a useful tool for analysing behaviour and informing inclusive practice. The following three examples, focused on separation anxiety, neglect and transitions, illustrate how Early Years practitioners can apply Maslow's framework holistically within real-world settings.

The first example involves a three-year-old who shows acute distress during morning separation, clinging to their mother and struggling to settle for long periods. Maslow suggests that safety and belonging are foundational for emotional regulation and learning; when these are insecure, children cannot fully engage in higher-level tasks. Attachment theory reinforces this interpretation. Goldschmied and Jackson (2003) highlight that emotionally responsive, predictable relationships are essential for young children's security. The child's behaviour here suggests an insecure attachment pattern and uncertainty about whether their emotional needs will be met. Welsh policy similarly recognises emotional safety as a prerequisite for learning: the Curriculum for Wales positions wellbeing as fundamental, emphasising that children must feel safe, valued and supported to learn effectively. Additionally, the UNCRC, incorporated into Welsh early years policy requires that children's emotional needs and rights to protection and care are upheld.

Practitioners respond using an attachment-informed approach centred on attuned communication (Clare, 2016). A consistent key carer greets the child daily, offering predictable routines and transitional objects to reduce separation-related anxiety. Visual timetables and calming sensory activities further support emotional regulation. These strategies reflect Dowling's (2014) argument that secure emotional foundations promote resilience, confidence and social competence. Over time, the child begins to separate more calmly and engage with peers and activities. However, this example also highlights a limitation of Maslow's model: emotional needs often fluctuate and do not neatly follow a strict hierarchy. The child may display bursts of confidence even on days when separation is difficult, demonstrating how needs

interact dynamically with family circumstances, developmental stages and cultural expectations.

The second example concerns a four-year-old who consistently arrives hungry, tired and wearing clothing unsuitable for the weather. The child is withdrawn, anxious around peers and hesitant to participate in group tasks. These observations indicate unmet physiological, safety and belonging needs. Research confirms that hunger and fatigue impair emotional regulation, attention and social interaction (Irvine, 2003; Berk, 2012), while inconsistent or neglectful care undermines children's self-esteem and resilience (Maholmes, 2014). Maslow's framework helps practitioners recognise that these behaviours reflect deeper unmet needs rather than deliberate disengagement.

The practitioner's response must be both nurturing and underpinned by safeguarding duties. Welsh safeguarding procedures require staff to record concerns, monitor patterns and escalate information to the designated safeguarding lead (Siencyn & Thomas, 2007). This aligns with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, which emphasises prevention, protection and children's rights as core principles. In practice, the child is discreetly offered breakfast, provided with clean clothing and supported with access to rest spaces. These actions preserve the child's dignity while meeting immediate physiological needs. Strengthening the key-carer relationship helps rebuild emotional security, and child-led play supports belonging and autonomy, consistent with Bruce's (2012) emphasis on play as a pathway to confidence and self-efficacy. As these supports are implemented, the child becomes more socially responsive and increasingly confident in group settings.

This example illustrates how Maslow's theory can guide the identification of unmet needs but also reveals its limitations. A strict hierarchical interpretation would suggest that learning is impossible until all lower-level needs are met. Yet Welsh policy and contemporary developmental psychology argue that children can still learn and develop despite adversity if relational and environmental supports are strong (Turner-Cobb, 2014). Maslow is therefore most effective when used as one interpretive tool within a broader safeguarding and wellbeing framework.

The third example focuses on transitions, particularly the move from nursery to primary school. Transitions naturally unsettle children's safety and belonging needs, even for those who appear socially confident. Children may become anxious, temporarily regress in behaviour or show reluctance to separate from familiar adults. While Maslow's model helps explain the emotional disruption caused by transitions,

broader developmental theories provide deeper insight. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model highlights how environmental changes such as shifting from one microsystem (nursery) to another (school) can significantly influence a child's emotional stability. Resilience research similarly emphasises the importance of protective factors, such as consistent relationships and predictable routines, during periods of change (Rodger, 2016).

Practitioners support transitions through structured, predictable strategies such as school visits, transition photo booklets, opportunities to meet new teachers and role-play activities that familiarise children with new routines. These actions help stabilise children's feelings of belonging by making unfamiliar environments more predictable. Welsh policy strongly endorses this approach: Curriculum for Wales guidance identifies smooth transitions as essential to wellbeing, while the ALN Code emphasises early planning for children who may find change particularly challenging. My own experience supporting my child during a recent transition to high school highlighted the emotional impact transitions can have on children and families, deepening my professional awareness of the need for sensitive and relational transition planning in the early years.

Across these three examples, Maslow's Hierarchy of Need remains a valuable interpretive framework, but it is not sufficient on its own. Children's development is shaped by complex interactions between emotional, physical, social and environmental factors. When practitioners combine Maslow with attachment theory, safeguarding frameworks, resilience research and Welsh policy, they are better equipped to understand and support children's behaviour holistically. Ultimately, Maslow's greatest value lies not in its hierarchical structure but in its ability to guide practitioners towards inclusive, relational and developmentally informed provision.

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