

Human Development

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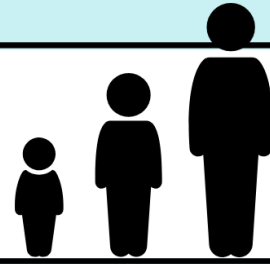
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AI Declaration

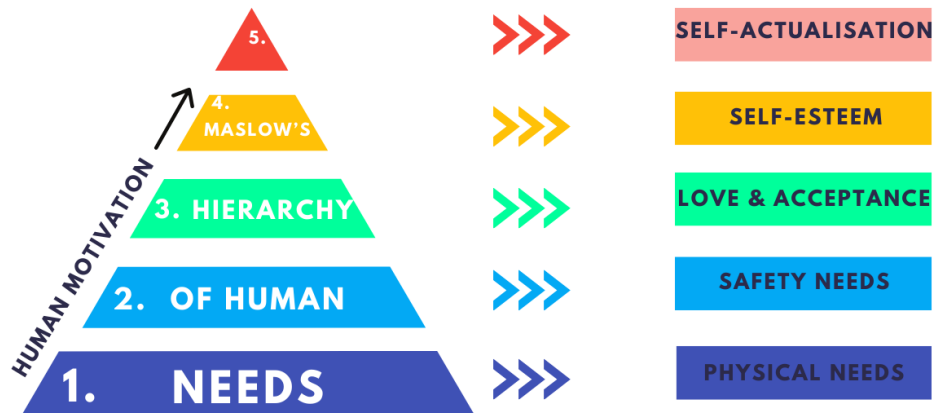
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Maslow as we grow



INTRODUCTION & AIMS

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs (1943) contains five dimensions of human motivation and how these develop towards achieving 'self-actualization', fulfilment and a well-balanced life. This infographic critically explores this model when applied to the developmental processes of childhood.



PHYSICAL NEEDS

Maslow's hierarchical model emphasizes physiological needs as the most important and necessary as without basic survival. These include access to food, water, oxygen, sufficient sleep, and meeting sensory and sexual needs (Mullins and McClean, 2019). The School of Life (2019) describes these fundamental needs as being 'utterly non-negotiable' and Stoyanov (2017) reminds us of this reality, noting how if homeostatic needs are not met, a person will die.

This stage is especially important in infancy, which is a rapid time of development and growth (Doherty and Hughes, 2014). For instance, without adequate nutrition, the brain will not be able to develop as expected – normally tripling in size in the first two years alone (Boyd and Bee, 2014). Children often depend on others for basic needs including nutrition, clothing, and a sheltered, warm environment (Lindon and Brodie, 2016). They may also require access to healthcare professionals and early years health interventions such as vaccinations and the Welsh Governments Flying Start Programme (Welsh Government, 2017).

SAFETY NEEDS



The human need for safety in Maslow's model is explained by Stoyanov (2017) as a fundamental motivator for humans to organise themselves socially in groups and communities, as this provides more opportunities to share resources and protection compared to operating as solitary beings. Maslow describes how children and adults perceive threats to safety differently and how infants might not have learnt how to recognise possible danger (Maslow, 1943). The safety of children therefore is considered the responsibility of caregivers, who may also teach them about staying safe, for example how to respond to emergencies and navigate the wider social world (Baruni and Miltenberger, 2022). In today's context, this can include considering safety when using digital platforms and technology. For example, the UK's Online Safety Act (2024), aims to protect users, specifically children, from online harm, placing extra responsibility on social media platforms. Safety also includes emotional and psychological components. Forster (2021) explains that children who do not have this need met, for example experiencing emotional trauma or abuse, can have adverse impacts on their health and wellbeing throughout life.



LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

Both giving and receiving of love are required to create a feeling of belonging, acceptance, and emotional wellbeing. This need is only fulfilled by human relationships which can take many forms including family connections, friendships, romantic partners, and interactions with the wider community.

For children and young people, relationships can help them understand and manage emotions by developing regulation strategies they learn from others. For example, in infancy, a loving relationship with a primary caregiver is seen as fundamental in regulating physical and emotional states (Perry, 2019). Doherty and Hughes (2014) explain how emotional understanding can also help young children relate to the feelings of others.

Meaningful connections can also contribute to a sense of shared identity. Developing a cultural identity has been described as "a fundamental and complex task ... that takes place initially within the family and then broadens out into wider community and society" (Smidt, 2013, p. 206). If social settings are challenging for a child, they may not gain these benefits, impacting their ability and confidence to find meaningful relationships in the future.



SELF-ESTEEM

Maslow defines self-esteem as the way people evaluate themselves and their worth. This is made up of two factors; self-respect or inner esteem, and the self-esteem obtained from recognition by others. Feelings of self-worth, confidence, capability, and potential can give a sense of status and purpose in the world (Maslow, 1943).

Children develop self-esteem in many ways, such as learning new skills, feeling valued by others, and having opportunities for autonomy (Doherty and Hughes, 2014). Experiences with caregivers, educators and professionals can help build self-esteem by providing children with praise, validation, constructive criticism, and opportunities for choice and support (Lindon and Brodie, 2016). Action for Children (2024) emphasize how active listening can support validation, for example.

Low self-esteem can limit children from accessing social situations and trying new things, negatively impacting other areas of development and contributing to poor mental health and wellbeing (Young Minds, 2023). Social and cultural factors can also shape how self-esteem is interpreted. For example, expectations and norms about opportunities for autonomy can vary across different cultures and contexts, which can impact how much children are trusted to make independent decisions (Clark, 2016).



SELF-ACTUALISATION

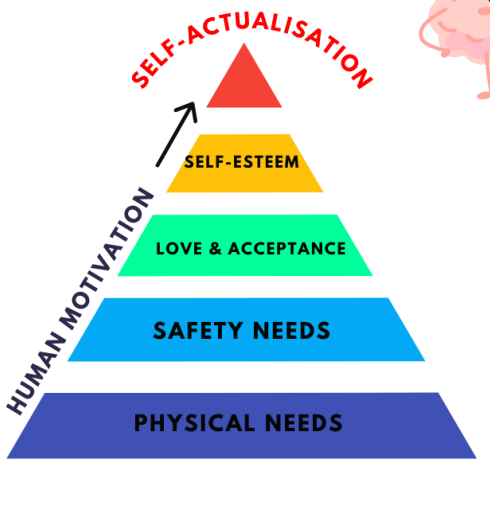
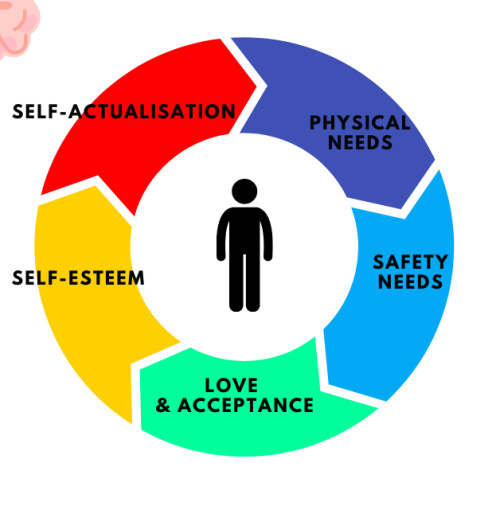
Self-actualisation relates to realising and achieving one's full potential, something which is governed by personal desires, interests, abilities, and aspirations. Maslow describes how even when all other needs are met, a person "may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop" (Maslow, 1943, p. 382). The underlying dissatisfaction that arises when goals and values are not fulfilled can be made worse by barriers to pursuing passions such as poverty (Beckett, 2023), showing that opportunities for self-actualisation are not equal across society.

For children, self-actualisation could be found in pursuing an extracurricular activity, or by going beyond what is expected in an educational setting in areas of personal interest. However, Ivtzan et al. (2013) describe how children may not be able to identify their personal interests during childhood and early youth. The Curriculum for Wales aims to provide children opportunities to explore these through the Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience (Welsh Government, 2021).

Critical Analysis

Maslow's model has been very influential in many fields, including child development and education. However, there are many factors which allow us to consider his theory more critically. For example, Stoyanov (2017) refers to the hierarchical way in which the five needs are arranged in order of importance, which suggests that each need must be met entirely before accessing the next. This is challenged by Mullins (2019), who suggests that individuals may not experience their development in a fixed order, giving examples of how some higher-level needs might be achieved even if lower-level needs are not satisfied. This challenges the pyramid structure and rigidity of the model.

Concerns have also been raised about how the model reflects 'normal' human development rather than diversity. Maslow's started developing his model based on people he admired, which has been criticized for creating bias and value judgements about wellbeing that could be seen as elitist (Compton, 2024). The ethnocentric nature of the model, based on Western ideals of the time, has also been challenged (King-Hill, 2015), suggesting a more flexible approach to Maslow's model may be more useful in understanding child development in the present day.

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Explore the significance of Maslow's model and other developmental theories to support holistic child development. This should include a critical discussion around the concept of holistic child development.

Brodie (2018) defines the meaning of holistic child development as considering the whole child. The current Curriculum for Wales recognises the importance of developing a child not only in terms of educational success, but from a holistic point of view. This is outlined in its Four Core Purposes which aim to children's abilities in areas including attitudes to learning in childhood and beyond, skills in creativity, being knowledgeable in ethical considerations as well as being confident, healthy and valued members of society (Welsh Government, 2024).

With the concepts of child development being vast, as well the nature of children and their developmental differences being unique (Macblain 2018), this essay will focus on the concepts of play, safety and relationships in relation to a child's holistic development whilst drawing on influences from educational theorists.

Children's play is defined by Lindon (2001) P. 2 as *"a range of activities, undertaken for their own enjoyment or the satisfaction that results."* Play is protected by the UNCRC which Article 31 says that every child has the right to play. Considering this is such a fundamental element of childhood, play relates to many aspects of Maslow's model and has been of interest to lots of different theorists when understanding child development (Yates, 2018).

Relating to children's social development, Ouvre and Furtado (2020) explain the significance of play in allowing children to form relationships with others. By establishing relationships through the means of play, children are able to fulfill needs which are mirrored in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, including safety, love and self-esteem. The social nature of many types of play connects with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) which explains how people learn through the imitation and observation of others. Moyles (2010), also discusses the benefits of play in relation to social development as it enables children to learn and utilise interpersonal skills such as planning, sharing and teamwork.

Understanding the importance of movement in play, we can draw direct comparisons to the elements of Maslow's theory regarding physical needs. White (2015, p.9) portrays children as being inherently '*programmed*' to engage in physical activity, helping develop gross motor skills and coordination. Considering play for a twenty-first century child is likely to include access to digital technology and

virtual online worlds, Blum- Ross and Livingstone (2016) highlight concerns about impacts of screentime limiting opportunities for physical interaction with others.

Archer and Siraj (2015) inform us of neuroscientific research which evidences a direct link between the physical movement of a child and brain development. Play and physical activities have been shown to strengthen the connections between neurones, as does language showing the importance of a holistic approach to play in child development (Macblain, 2018). The physical nature of play may support the physiological needs outlined in Maslow's model; however, these needs might be met in different ways for physically disabled children or those with speech and language difficulties (Encarnação, 2018). This illustrates how play as a concept is hard to define in inclusive ways (Brodie, 2018).

Directly linking to the safety element of Maslow's theory, Mello et al. (2014) discuss the importance of protecting a child from physical harm to maintain effective development and point to factors such as securing safe environments, for example adequate food and shelter.

Considering the holistic development of a child, safety can be recognised as including other elements too, such as emotional and psychological safety (Davidson and Bilfulco, 2019).

Socially, support from adults when undertaking new tasks can help children learn how to assess risks and expose safely to challenges in ways that support wellbeing and mental health (Yates, 2018). The need for children to be exposed to controlled risks challenges rigid ideas about safety, with Clark (2016) arguing that *"the long-term consequences of denying children responsibility is that they become infantilised"* (Clark, 2016, p. 149). Vygotsky's theory of the 'zone of proximal development' describes the important role of support from a more skilled or experienced person to help a child build upon what they can achieve independently (Pound, 2008).

The safety needs of children are changing in the modern world, with Brodie (2018) highlighting how children's increasing access to the internet means they risk being exposed to unsuitable material.

The importance of safety is shown by the negative impacts that children can experience when their safety is compromised by abuse, neglect and/or trauma. For instance, changes in brain development have been shown amongst children who have experienced traumatic events, who are also more likely to present with mental health conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Abbott and Burkitt,

2023). However, whilst these impacts are significant, the brain is able to create new pathways and has plasticity throughout life (Stiles, 2012).

Relationships are a key to holistic child development and link to Maslow's model predominately in relation to love and connection (Maslow, 1943), however the concept of relationships can be noted in each of the five stages.

For children, positive relationships are important in making strong attachments which are achieved by the caregiver's ability to emotionally engage with them (Johnston and Wood, 2018). These relationships have a direct link to the child's ability to both feel and recognise emotions, whilst also developing self-esteem, confidence and ability to communicate effectively (Bradbury and Swailes, 2022).

Boyd and Bee (2014) discuss the exploration of the parent-child relationship as a central consideration in developmental psychology and theory. Perhaps the most well-known theorist in this area was John Bowlby, whose theory of attachment focused on the importance of the emotional bond between mother and child, which develops through responsive interactions and shapes attachments in later life (Holmes, 2014).

Early negative experiences in childhood may influence a parent's ability to bond with their own offspring (Gerhardt 2015), which Bowlby recognised as being detrimental to the development of the child themselves. His theory focused on the maternal relationship; however, this has been challenged as the nurturing role can be fulfilled by either parent or a range of caregivers (Doherty and Hughes, 2014). The experiences of parenting and attachment can also vary across different cultures (Sanders and Guerra, 2016).

The framework of Maslow's model helps in analysing the different components of holistic child development. By considering other developmental theories, we can not only explore these components in more depth but assess how they interlink. This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model which explains how humans develop within interconnected systems throughout life (Bronfenbrenner, 1996).

Offer three examples from early years practice to highlight Maslow's significance in understanding child development. One of which should link to transitions.

Cullen (2011) describes how Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs theory (Maslow 1943) can be applied usefully to help understand child psychology and development. For early years practitioners and caregivers, Maslow's model can help them to create environments that are more likely to support children's developmental needs (Care Learning 2024). This essay will examine three examples of early years practice and how these are recognised within Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs theory.

Pérez-Escamilla and Moran (2017) acknowledge how there are multiple dimensions of child development, focusing specifically on the importance of nutrition in the early years in supporting neurological development. Jiang (2020) also highlights the role of healthy sleep routines, which support the development of a child's cognitive ability, memory skills, and the ability to regulate emotions. Relating to nutrition, as of September 2024, all primary school aged children in Wales have access to free school meals, helping to ensure that they are ready for learning (Welsh Government, 2024). It is important to recognise however that a child experiencing poverty might have inconsistent access to food across the day, and how poverty may impact the ability of caregivers to meet their children's needs in other ways Masten (2022).

The World Health Organisation (2024) highlights the importance of healthcare in childhood in lowering the rate of preventable infant health problems and fatality globally. The Welsh government ensures children have access to continuing healthcare from birth, which includes vaccinations, developmental assessments and treatment for illness (Welsh Government, 2024). It can be difficult for a child to communicate that they are unwell, so the responsibility for recognising a child's healthcare needs sits with a responsible adult who knows the child well and can recognise abnormal signs (NHS, 2023). However, this could be more difficult for a parent/carer who has healthcare needs themselves, something which might also impact the child's wellbeing if they need to take on caring responsibilities (Jones, 2024).

The provision of a safe environment is also essential, as emphasised by Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which states how every child has the right to an adequate standard of living (UNICEF 2024). In the early year's context, this means a child needs

access to hygienic and safe spaces. In schools, for example, children often require the provision of suitable clothing. Depending on families to provide this could be a challenge for the 4.3 million children who are estimated to be living in poverty in the UK (UK Government 2024).

Brodie (2018) believes that the personal development of a child is dependent on the successful growth of both social and emotional skills, which is another important focus of early years practice. However, Doherty and Hughes (2014) argue that social and emotional development can often be overlooked in favour of other areas such as language and physical motor skills. This would overlook how central these elements of development are within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which includes the need for love and belonging, and other areas where relationships are important such as safety and self-esteem (Maslow, 1943).

Bowlby's theory of attachment demonstrates the fundamental role of relationships in the emotional development of a child, explaining how having a secure attachment to a primary caregiver in infancy leads to better developmental outcomes such as being able to regulate emotions (Bolby, 1969). He describes how this is achieved through an infant experiencing affection, stability, and validation of their emotional state.

A key element to a child's social development is the skills acquired through the means of role modelling (Johnston et al., 2018). This is when a child witnesses, interprets, and often imitates the social behaviors of others, including adults and peers. For example, adults and children can learn to understand and respond to emotional situations together in a process known as co-regulation (Doherty and Hughes, 2014).

Play can also have a role in giving children opportunities to engage and communicate with others (Brodie, 2018). However, it is important to consider that some children, including those with neurodivergent conditions, may find it more difficult to engage with social situations (Watson, 2022). There is also evidence of the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on children's social development, owing to the limitations on human interaction (Cameron and Tenenbaum, 2021). The impact of cultural factors and wider society on child development is also important. With sociocultural contexts being subject to change over time, children often exist amongst increasingly diverse societies which broaden their experiences, providing both challenges and opportunities for their social and emotional development (Lindon and Brodie, 2016).

Lastly, the development of confidence and independence is an important feature of early years practice, linking to Maslow's focus on self-esteem and self-actualisation, as well as being vitally important in supporting children and young people to make transitions (Trodd, 2013). Transitions can take many forms throughout childhood. They can be considered in practical and educational terms when, for example, a child progresses from an early year's care setting to nursery and then primary school. Transitions can also be considered in developmental terms where children learn new skills as they grow. Many theorists of child development use staged models to describe how children transition from one stage to the next such as Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Pound, 2008).

Developing confidence and independence supports transitions in a number of ways. For example, praise and encouragement in the early years supports confidence and self-esteem (Davies and Troy, 2020). This can help children engage in new experiences which they might not have otherwise had access to independently. By offering choice in a range of new activities, children have the agency to explore their own interests. In the early years practice this might be achieved by exploring alternative educational methods such as Forest Schools (Pound, 2008). Learning communities can also be structured in different ways to give children more of a voice, such as in the Awen Project (The Awen Project, 2022). However, for some children, an unstructured environment may not provide clear enough transitions between activities and may lack routine. This could be particularly challenging for autistic children who have a preference for sameness and might find transitions more difficult generally (Cobbe, 2019).

In conclusion, Maslow's Hierarchy of Need model is highly significant in understanding child development. Early years practice provides a range of examples which support various stages of Maslow's model, including practices that support children's basic needs, emotional and social development, and confidence and independence when facing transitions. This shows how understanding different areas of human development and how key theories relate to practice is essential when working with children and young people.

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