

# Emotional, Behavioural and Social Development: Modality of Hierarchy of Needs in Supporting Parents with Special Needs

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**Abstract**—Emotional development is developed between the parents and their child. Behavioural development is also developed between the parents and their child. Social Development is how parents can help their special needs child to adapt to society and to face challenges. In promoting a lifelong learning mindset, enhancing skill sets and readiness to face challenges, parents would be able to counter balance these challenges during their care giving process and better manage their expectations through understanding the hierarchy of needs modality towards a positive attitude, and in turn, improve their quality of life and participation in society. This paper aims to demonstrate how the hierarchy of needs can be applied in various situations of caregiving for parents with a special needs child.

**Keywords**—Hierarchy of needs, parents, special needs, caregiving.

## I. INTRODUCTION

EVERY parent's vision is geared towards the betterment of their child. This in return helps to empower the education industry, parents and caregivers with the knowledge and skills required for them to enable children with special needs to integrate seamlessly into the society they live in. There are many parents who care for their special needs child, but have little knowledge as to how they can provide the best support for their child. Others may want to learn more skills that will be useful in guiding their child to better manage daily life challenges or may want to have the opportunity to interact with other parents and caregivers and share the similar life experiences that they go through.

Fig. 1 shows the ecosystem of support for persons with disabilities (including the special needs), where the caregivers and parents provide care to the special needs individual. These caregivers and parents take on many important roles such as family, friend, confidante, teacher, nurturer, supporter, and advocate. The parents of special needs children are the crucial link between the child and society.

When a family member is diagnosed with a disability (special needs), other members of the family often struggle with acceptance of the condition and their expanded role of caregiver. Such a diagnosis could also affect relationships within the family and waken the support system for both the parents/caregivers and the special needs child.

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate and focus on the positive side, encouraging parents and caregivers to adopt

the learning skills and competencies required to support the well-being of their child with special needs, through the theory of Hierarchy of Needs.

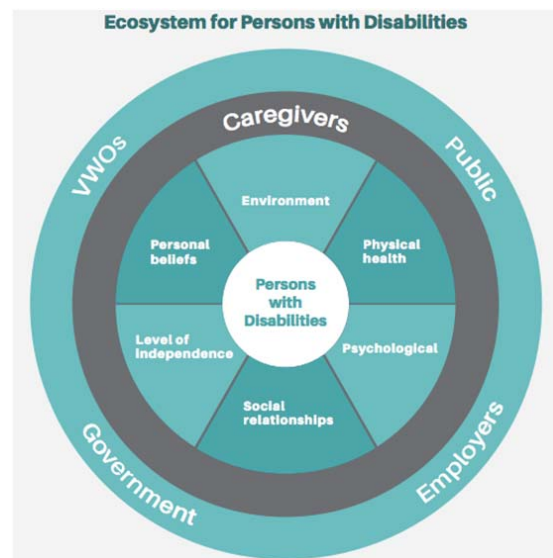


Fig. 1 Ecosystem for Persons with Disabilities (2016) [15]

### A. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

All humans have basic needs to be met in life and this includes special needs children dealing with their emotions and behaviours to adapt to society. As shown in Fig. 2, Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), theorised that a specific series of needs must be met before next level of needs can influence behaviour.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs, developed by Abraham Maslow in 1954, is a way to organise the basic needs of a human on different levels [1]. These children will be more competent as they go on to the higher levels. There are six levels to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as stated by Gorman in the Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal.

The first level of the hierarchy of needs is physiological, which covers the basic necessities of human life. This set of needs includes food, water and shelter. Before proceeding on to the next level, these needs must be met [2].

The second level is to fulfil the safety needs of the children. This is to ensure that they feel safe and secure in the environment that they live in with no outside threats. The safety needs are not fulfilled if these children feel like they

could be potentially harmed.

In the third level of the hierarchy, children need to feel a feeling of belongingness and love. At this level, children will want to feel a sense of belonging with other people in their environment [3]. They need to have a sense of recognition and acceptance within the group they are in.

In the fourth level, children want to establish good esteem through recognition, confidence and achievement [3]. By receiving recognition from others, these children will have higher self-esteem and have more confidence in their ability to learn.

At the fifth level, self-actualization becomes important when children look for ways to fulfil their personal potential in learning and also seek fulfilment in their learning. At this level, they will strive for certain learning goals and seek to achieve them [2]. For example high school students would study hard for their examinations with an aim of achieving the best possible grades and to be accepted into higher education at the tertiary level.

In the sixth and final level of the hierarchy, which can only be reached if all previous levels have been met, children are motivated through self-transcendence. At this level of self-fulfilment, they have accomplished most of their personal goals and are now inspired to better the lives of those around them [2]. Through this, they can develop a better sense of understanding and work on their own experiences. For example, they could help their friends in an area which they are good at. In other words, a child must be encouraged and inspired to learn. When all levels of needs have been fulfilled, they are at their full potential for learning [1]. Another example would be that of a hungry child who is in school. The child might not be able to function and be successful in the classroom when he has a fear of dying from starvation. The child has needs that must be met in order to maximise their learning. The higher up the hierarchy a child is, the more levels that are met, the better the motivation and therefore the more learning the child will experience.

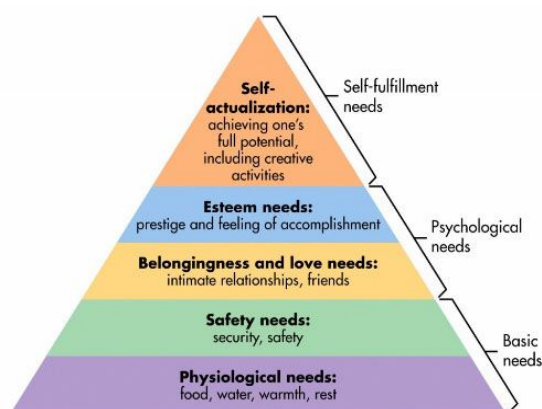


Fig. 2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

### B. Special Needs Children

Maslow's hierarchy of needs can also be applied to children with special needs. According to Norman Kunc, all children

need to feel a sense of belonging [4]. In order for students with special needs to be motivated to learn anything, they must have a sense of belonging.

Belonging is the third level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which may be difficult for these students to obtain because they may have learning or physical disabilities that may set them apart from their peers.

The physiological needs of these children need to be met and there is no possible way that others can provide the basic needs except through parents and caregivers. It is important to know how this knowledge can be applied by parents and caregivers to help their special needs children to adapt to the society and to face challenges.

### C. Special Needs School

Most special needs schools are doing their best to provide their students with access to programs within their schools that are designed especially for them. This provides parents with a peace of mind, knowing that they can depend on their children's schools to a certain degree.

Some pointers for parents to consider when searching for a special needs school:

- In terms of safety needs (level two), parents are to look out for teachers and school leaders that can help make their children feel safe. This can be derived from a routine or a predictable world. See that on a daily basis routine, the school provides clear procedures with an agenda for the day so that these children know what to expect, enhancing the feeling of being safe in their learning environment. This will allow the children to feel like they have more control over their learning environment by simply being aware of what to expect. In addition to this, the children should be able to feel psychologically and emotionally safe within their learning environment by ensuring that they would be able to freely ask questions and get answers or share their thoughts, without fear of ridicule from other students. Through safety needs, they would be able to establish trust with their educators/teachers.
- In order to help satisfy belongingness and love needs (level three), as well as self-esteem needs (level four), children will want to feel loved and cared for. They will be seeking this fulfilment from educators and it is important to ensure that the children know they are valued and appreciated as individuals.

## II. METHOD

### A. Applying Maslow's Hierarchy (For Parents and Caregivers)

Focusing on the parents, they can apply the modality of the hierarchy of needs in every situation, improving their relationships and keeping their days with their family, especially with their special needs children, meaningful and fruitful. Parents and caregivers can practice these needs while supervising their family and providing support to the cognitive ability of their children.

### *B. Level 1: Physiological*

As we know, parenting brings every parent closest to their base needs. From the moment they bring home their new mewling little human, they must begin to re-attain their basic physiological needs, such as the need to distinguish between day and night, the need to remember that their spouse is not a stranger and the need to take a shower more than once a week and keep themselves clean.

*With group learning and activities*, parents can get to discuss their physiological needs at home. These activities also enhance human brain-compatibility in learning and are able to create a better physical environment that is inviting and warm, which eventually leads to a safer environment.

*Discussion:* Parents can discuss the issues and challenges they face in attaining their basic needs through reflection and asking this set of questions: What do they need? Are they tired? Are they hungry? How much water have they had over the past 24 hours? Is it enough? What resources (family, food, items etc.) could assist them in reaching small and larger physiological and psychological goals?

To continue discussing issues and challenges in attaining these needs, parents can ask these questions to themselves: Why can't they get enough rest? What is hindering them from spending their time well? Who can help them? Are they financially stable? Where can they get help?

### *C. Level 2: Safety*

Protecting themselves from the minefield of tending to their young is a priority. For example, they need to get enough sleep so that they are coherent enough to ensure safety in their house for themselves and their loved ones. It is important for them to feel the stability, safety, security, and the freedom from fear.

*With group learning and activities*, parents can discuss on their home safety. Looking at possible triggers and the attitude of other parents is sometimes enough to have personal affirmation that creates feelings of safety and security? Right now, at this very moment, are they safe? They are breathing, they are aware, they are awake. But are they feeling well?

*Worry drop box:* As parents enter their homes, they would 'drop' a written concern in a box located by the entry of their homes. Research has pointed out that writing our concerns out gives room to the working memory and reduces our anxiety. Working memory (WM) is a fundamental cognitive process, often conceived as a limited capacity system [5]. The central executive function of WM [6] is responsible for the controlled processing and attention [7] needed for higher order processes such as comprehension, reasoning, planning, and problem-solving [8]. These measures of controlled processing, often called WM capacity tests, require the simultaneous storage and processing of information.

*Pin-ups:* We all need to feel validated but as humans, we regularly lose sight of our strengths and talents. This is due to the fact that the human brain is created with a negative bias. Through these activities (pin-ups), parents would be able to focus on the positives instead of faults and mistakes. They can have this pin-up on their fridge or create a wall specially

designed for this.

*Discussion:* To adapt to changes and requirements in order to suit special needs children, parents can create experiences together. Attend talks that promote service and safety. For example, in their children's schools, police officers, community services, former parents who have risen above difficult situations, etc.

### *D. Level 3: Love/Belonging*

Isn't this exactly why parents had children in the first place? To have a sense of belonging and love. It is certainly a great benefit. Increasing the family size certainly does increase the potential for love and belonging. But it can create a new set of needs, such as the need to do 'more' with their spouse other than exchanging sleepy grunts when attending to the demands of their special needs child at night.

*With group learning and activities*, they can also apply the five love languages by Gary Chapman, to recognise their main love language. That is, to identify their family members' love language, to improve communication with their family members, to have Share-Time: Using "I" statements, removing blocks to listening, practicing active listening, and becoming a better listener.

*Discussion:* On dealing with high levels of stress. Parents can ask themselves: How do they handle negative situations? When these situations occur, what do they typically say to themselves? What statement would encourage them? What are three negative emotions they felt most often? What are three positive emotions they felt often or sometimes?

*Celebrations:* Parents can create special and celebratory days within their family (birthday, anniversary, achievement etc.)

### *E. Level 4: Esteem*

As parents, they might often think that they have their lives pretty well figured out. They're living large and they are wired. Then their little ones enter their world and they become quite small and unplugged at times. Here is what they need to grow a bit and re-plug themselves in, to see their achievements, recognition, and respect of mastery and self-esteem. For example, the need to buy new clothes to replace the ones that are stained and worn out at the knees, the need to seek good chiropractic work to repair the twisted and bent muscles in their backs (from lifting their special needs children) and the need to know that they are doing good. To feel capable and successful, they must create a home environment that lends itself to this type of mastery.

*With group learning and activities*, parents can master small goals.

*Discussion:* On small goals that they want to master: Work completions. Dialogues about frustrations. Respect and compassion for others. Contribute ideas and suggestions to a conversation and to create better solutions at home. Self-reflections about their day and interactions.

*Questions to ask themselves:* What statement would encourage them? Who are their heroes? What character traits do they admire that make them their heroes? How would they

know that they are on the right track? What are their strengths? What are their challenges? How will they focus on these strengths knowing that their thoughts and feelings drive all their words and actions?

#### *F. Level 5 and Level 6: Self-Actualization and Self-Fulfilment*

Human beings are driven to get to this level. It is believed that parents progress slower at this level because of the attribution and credit they hold instead of the needs. It seems that this level is reached, once parenting has stopped and usually this happens when their children are grown-up and out of their homes.

For a special needs family, it is known that parents of special needs are blessed as their special needs children will be with them throughout their lives.

As we know, each individual is unique and the level/motivation of self-actualization leads people in different directions [9]. For some parents, their self-actualization can be achieved through creating works of art or drawing, for others, through sports, or in a group setting, or within a corporate setting. Abraham Maslow believed that self-actualization could be measured through the concept of peak experiences [10]. This occurs when human experiences the world entirely for what it is and there are feelings of extreme happiness and amazement. Is it crucial to know that self-actualization is an ongoing process of becoming instead of a perfect state one reaches of a 'happy ever after' [11].

*With group learning and activities*, parents can get to use technology to support better living, learning, applying and sharing of new information.

*Discussion:* On the use of basic technology application and knowing what is safe social networking. They will also be able to use technology to be resourceful parents and caregivers and contribute their knowledge and real life experiences to other families and community for the betterment of their special needs children's integration into the society.

Even though their children have special needs, parents can continue to encourage each other by providing basic cognitive development support to their children. Here, are some basic activities that parents continue to do with their children.

*Activities:* Sing-a-longs with their child. Play their favourite songs and music in the house, showing regular care so that they may eventually start to enjoy the moment. Parents may consider: singing along to the "Alphabet Song" and reading books about the alphabet. Do counting and identifying of shapes and colours.

*Identify Noises:* To the best of their ability, have their child identify noises that they hear throughout the day i.e. a bird singing, a car horn and running water of the dishwasher. Ask questions and talk to their child. Play with them and offer parent-time. Take them out (depending on their condition.)

When dealing with a child's difficult behaviour, it is best to understand what the trigger is and how parents react to the behaviours. This will require parents to be aware of their special needs child's desirable/undesirable behaviours.

### III. RESULTS

In contradiction, Maslow recognised that not all human personalities followed his proposed hierarchy. While a variety of personalities might be linked to motivational needs, one of the most often cited is that of introversion and extroversion. For example, reserved parents at the level of others/relatedness might be more concerned with their own perceptions of being included in a group, thinking whether they are accepted because they have a special needs child; while, an extrovert at that same level would pay more attention to how others value their friendship/membership.

There is still much work to be done in this area before we can rely on a theory fully. However, this research information can be very important to parents, caregivers, educators, and others who are concerned in helping their special needs child in developing and using human potential. It provides an outline of some salient points that need to be addressed if humans are to meet the levels of character and competencies that are essential for them to be successful in the information/conceptual age [12], [13].

With parents continuing to apply the hierarchy of needs, it allows them to explore and be a role model. This includes evaluating their family situation and analysing information outside of their own basic needs, and using these needs to care and serve others especially their special needs. This will allow parents to improve their cognitive ability, discover their own problems, and be a better problem-solver. They will also be pushed to be a better self-assessors and self-reflector. Parents will be able to see and understand how their actions, thoughts, and feelings affect all lives and also learn to cultivate the learning concept and build on their networking.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow stated that human motivation is based on people seeking fulfilment and change through personal growth [3], [14]. People who have achieved self-actualization are those who are fulfilled and have done all they are capable of. The growth of self-actualization [10] refers to the need for human personal growth and to discover themselves. For Maslow, a person is always 'becoming' and does not remain stagnant. In self-actualization, a person discovers significant meaning to life.

With this, parents can continue to write about their journey, experiences and hope as a parent or caregiver of special needs.

*Questions to ask themselves:* What is their purpose in life? What are the challenges in reaching their purpose and the lives of others? What can they share with the other parents of special needs children? What are three important tips for parents to be shared? Which areas do parents want to focus on to help make a difference in society? How can parents achieve this goal?

Parents can initiate post discussions on sourcing, learning, applying and sharing of new information on social networks to invite more parents to join their group, with frequent gatherings and sharing sessions, as well as plans for more intensive topics to discuss with regards to special needs. This can help to provide a sense of belonging and contribute to society.

## IV. DISCUSSION

With these needs of how humans are motivated to develop and learn, without the first level of the hierarchy met, a child cannot move on to the next level. Fulfilling each level will allow these children to have the ability and motivation to learn. Each of them can move up the hierarchy with proper support. With special needs children, especially, parents have to be aware of the hierarchy. The biggest hindrance for special needs children is the lack of sense of belonging. Through several methods discussed above, parents can help to provide support for their special needs child to feel a sense of belonging and then move up the hierarchy. Maslow described the highest level namely, to the tendency for parents to become actualized in what they are potentially. The specific form that this hierarchy of needs will take, of course, will vary greatly from person to person and/or from parent to parent. In one individual it may take the form of the desire to be an ideal mother (parent), in another it may be expressed athletically, while in yet another, it may be expressed in painted pictures or in inventions [3].

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