

8 Needs of Every Partner, Parent, and Child¹

Victor William Harris²

One of our greatest desires is the desire to be happy. So what do you need in order to be happy? Have you ever sat down and made a list?

Using **Table 1**, take a minute and write down what *you* need in order to be happy. Then take a few minutes and make a list of what you think *your partner/spouse* needs to be happy. Finally, if you have *children*, consider each child and make a list of what you think they need to be happy.

As you look at your lists, you may be surprised about which needs are being consistently met and which ones are not. Although most of us may recognize that we have unmet needs and desires, we often don't manage to meet them very consistently. As a result, we may remain starved for what we truly need, perhaps spending much of our lives feeling emotionally hungry, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled.

Helpful Information

Meeting Personal, Partner, and Children's Needs

When individuals, couples, and parents learn how to meet their personal needs consistently, they can better help others and their children learn how to meet their own needs. These personal and others-related needs are listed in order of essential to potential, according to Abraham Maslow (1968), and include meeting needs in the following order: physiological (food, water, shelter); safety (security); love and belonging (close relationships); success and esteem (feeling worthwhile and competent); and self-actualization

(achieving potential). Maslow believed that before self-actualization could occur, the lower needs must first be met.

Interestingly, when we feel unfulfilled, unhappy, dissatisfied, or out of balance, we can usually trace our discontent directly back to a personal need(s) we have neglected. The awareness of this neglect may then motivate us to take responsibility for our own happiness. In other words, it may motivate us to find new ways to meet our needs. Learning how to meet our own needs in healthy ways is directly linked to happy and satisfying relationships.

Things You Can Use

Researchers and therapists have pinpointed at least eight needs that we must meet regularly if we are to feel happy, satisfied, and fulfilled (Coplen & MacArthur, 1982). Each of these needs is interrelated.

1. **Develop a positive picture of ourselves.** Our self-concept, or picture of ourselves, is like a puzzle made up of individual beliefs that we have developed over time. These beliefs are based upon our experiences and how we interpret these experiences in both positive and negative ways. Saying three positive things about ourselves when we wake up in the morning is a good way to start out our day. Focusing on sending positive messages to our partner and children can also be instrumental in helping them see themselves in a positive light.

1. This document is FCS2313, one of a series of the Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date January 2012. Reviewed February 2018. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Victor William Harris, Ph.D., assistant professor and Extension specialist, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

2. **Develop close real-love relationships.** Real-love relationships are kind, giving, unselfish, sharing, straightforward, and healthy. Counterfeit-love relationships tend to be unkind, taking, selfish, manipulative, and unhealthy. Knowing this can help us recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships. Making an effort to share real-love can help us develop real-love relationships with our partners and children.
3. **Feel like we belong.** To belong is to feel connected, to feel that we are an important part of a relationship. The people and relationships we perceive we belong to the most tend to have the most influence on us. Feeling peer pressure is a good example of this need. When we, and our children, associate with peer groups that are doing positive kinds of things, we tend to do those same kinds of things. However, the opposite is also true. Setting up a home environment with a lot of fun things to do so our children and their friends will want to “hang out” there is a good way to promote belongingness and positive peer pressure.
4. **Receive the respect of others and ourselves.** Self-respect and the respect of others are developed when we try to live according to what we truly value and believe. We cannot really be happy unless we are trying to live according to our value and belief systems. Families, culture, and religion tend to have a large influence on what we choose to value and believe. Writing down three important values and beliefs and then talking about where they come from and why is an excellent family activity to engage in.
5. **Feel worthwhile by developing a healthy self-esteem.** Self-esteem and feeling worthwhile can be defined as how we *feel* about how we *see* ourselves. If we want to change how we feel about ourselves, we will need to identify the beliefs we have about ourselves, and work on changing those beliefs that are unhealthy. Making a list of our beliefs about ourselves and helping our children identify their beliefs about themselves are good ways to begin. Sometimes it is necessary to see a counselor or therapist who can help us in this important process.
6. **Feel competent.** We need to feel like we are good at some things. Being involved in intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual activities that develop our talents and skills will help us feel like we are competent and capable. Promoting our partner’s and children’s involvement in these kinds of activities will also help them feel competent and capable. Money spent on these kinds of activities is usually well worth the investment.
7. **Experience growth.** Developing and fostering an attitude of lifelong learning is an important key to happiness. If we are bored or our children are bored, then we need to promote learning activities. When we are learning new things and gaining new skills, we tend to experience growth. Reading good books, attending a class, practicing a musical instrument, and exercising are some good examples of things we can do. One way to nurture this need is to remind ourselves that “if we are not green and growing then we are ripe and rotting.”
8. **Feel safe and secure.** Families and marriages as social institutions are designed to help us feel safe and secure in our relationships. If we feel safe and secure socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically in our couple and family relationships, then these relationships can be considered healthy relationships. If not, it is important to see a counselor or therapist who can help us develop healthier relationships and, if necessary, get out of unhealthy relationships.

Learning to meet our needs in each of these eight areas can help us experience happiness. Once we learn to meet our own needs, we will become better equipped to help others, such as our partner and children, meet their own needs regularly. Meeting our needs regularly increases our capacity to love and to feel loved in our relationships. When we give real-love and feel real-love, we experience happiness.

Meeting Our Eight Needs

Tracking how we are doing at meeting these needs is an important way to measure our happiness and the happiness of our partner and children. **Table 2** provides you with an easy way to do just that. At the end of each day (e.g., after you put the kids to bed), take a minute and put a “+” or a “-” next to each need as you track how well you met each of them throughout the day. Don’t get discouraged if you find you are not meeting all your needs as regularly as you would like—it’s normal. It may be that you notice that the meeting of these needs changes throughout the day based upon situations you find yourself in. This might also help you identify healthy situations and unhealthy situations that affect your ability to meet your needs successfully. Maximizing putting yourself in these healthy situations is a good way to increase your happiness. Put this sheet up on the refrigerator door next to your children’s homework (as Mom’s and Dad’s homework) to remind you how you are doing. When you get good at meeting your own needs consistently, you can then better help your partner and your children learn how to meet their needs regularly. Good luck!

References

Coplen, Roger, and James D. MacArthur. (1982). *Developing a healthy self-image*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press.

Maslow, A.H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand.

Table 1. My lists for what is needed to be happy

What I need to be happy	What my Partner/Spouse needs to be happy	What my Children need to be happy
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.
7.	7.	7.
8.	8.	8.

Table 2. **Meeting the Eight Needs**, Week: _____

Target Behavior	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Totals
1. Positive Self-Concept								
2. Close, Real-Love Relationships								
3. Feel Like We Belong								
4. Self-Respect, Respected by Others								
5. Positive Self-Esteem								
6. Competent								
7. Growth								
8. Feel Safe & Secure								