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“Our Five Needs:  
Application for Understanding Behavior, Emotions, and Function”

Presentation

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This presentation contributes to the understanding of function of behavior for our school-aged population with a perspective that behavior is an attempt to satisfy five basic human needs. This has application to completion of functional behavior assessment, development of positive behavior supports, and implementation of strength-based learning environments.

Through behavior individuals seek to satisfy their basic human needs. In school settings, student behavior and the quest for need satisfaction can be positive and productive when it not only meets students' needs but also aligns with the expectation of others in the school and classroom environment.

Student behavior can be viewed as negative, counterproductive, and/or inappropriate if it does not meet the expectation of others in the immediate environment. This can lead to the labeling of students as discipline problems with teachers trying to figure out how to have control of their classrooms. The focus on following rules can lead teachers into a perpetual state of "trying to get students to do" resulting in ongoing efforts to externally control students.

Teaching proactive social behavior can begin with the understanding that behavior is the result of attempts to satisfy basic human needs, usually the result of need deficits.

### **Total Behavior**

William Glasser describes the components of behavior as four wheels of a car. The four behaviors within Total Behavior are: Action, Thinking, Feeling, and Physiology. The car is a front wheel drive car. The front wheels are Action and Thinking. The back wheels are Feeling and Physiology. All four behaviors interact together and are impacted/affected by one another. Whenever one component shifts the total behavior shifts accordingly. Our choice of action and thinking take us down a certain path in life. Our feelings and health give us an ongoing assessment of the "road" we are on doing what we are doing and thinking.

Our wheels are continually rebalancing moment by moment as behavioral components shift. Individuals tend to develop unique repetitive patterns, which become our recognized behavioral style. Our Total Behavior is an ongoing attempt to satisfy our needs that align also with our Quality World. So, all this is interaction in each individual.

All we do from birth to death is behave. We are always trying to behave in a way that gives us the most effective control over our lives. This means being able to act in a way that satisfies the pictures in our quality world.

The key is balance. We need to balance not only our needs, but also our behaviors. We are uniquely individual in our balancing act. Again, as with Choice Theory, we can choose to control our actions. We can choose to stop ineffective, painful behaviors. We can change our wants or shift our quality world. We can do both. But the only one any individual can control is self. Awareness that behavior is a total component of acting, thinking, feeling, and physiology – all in one total package is powerful.

Sources:

Glasser, W. (1998). *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom*. New York, NY:HarperCollins.

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## **Five Basic Human Needs - Overview for School Settings**

| <b>Human Need</b>  | <b>Components</b>  |
|--------------------|--|
| Survival           | Physical needs for food, water, air, safety, shelter, physical health, sexuality<br>Sense of security in ongoing provision of basic physical needs, including income |
| Belonging and Love | Psychological need for: family relationships, friendships, working relationships,<br>Connecting with people through cooperation, caring, sharing, involvement        |
| Power/Self-Worth   | Psychological need for: empowerment, worthiness, self-efficacy, achievement,<br>Accomplishment, pride, importance, recognition, self-esteem, to be able/capable      |
| Freedom            | Psychological need for: independence, autonomy, options, choices, liberty<br>Ability to create, free express of self, having sufficient space, free will             |
| Fun                | Psychological need for: enjoyment, pleasure, relaxation, laughter, learning<br>Engaging in a hobby, having interest, feeling excited, having a sense of humor        |

## **Five Basic Human Needs - Application of Unmet Needs to School Setting**

| <b>Human Need</b>  | <b>UnMet Needs Awareness for School Personnel</b>   |
|--------------------|---|
| Survival           | Impact of unmet food, clothing and health needs on ability to learn<br>Impact of unmet safety needs from home or school environment to learning<br>Impact of academic and learning challenges to survival with peer group<br>Impact of academic and learning challenges to survive (remain) in school                                 |
| Belonging and Love | Impact of lack of peer acceptance (perceived or real) on learning<br>Impact of strained family relationships and challenged family dynamics on learning<br>Impact of not having a role of value to peers and/or adults in the school setting<br>Impact of academic challenges to sense of belonging in a learning environment         |
| Power/Self-Worth   | Impact of learning challenges to feelings of self-worth in school setting<br>Impact of problem behaviors are not being respected in school setting<br>Impact of limited ability to contribute to decision making in school setting<br>Impact of academic deficits to feelings of accomplishment in school setting                     |
| Freedom            | Impact of having majority of learning scheduled by adults in school setting<br>Impact of little to no free time during daily learning schedule in school setting<br>Impact of crowded classrooms, sharing lockers, teachers making most decisions<br>Impact of having adults judge your thoughts and creativeness by their standards  |
| Fun                | Impact of doing uninteresting and routine school work on desire to learn<br>Impact of punitive rules and school environment on sense of enjoyment to learn<br>Impact of limited peer socialization and leisure during school day to learning fun<br>Impact of school as unmotivating and irrelevant on future learning for employment |

## Five Basic Human Needs as a Source of Function

### Sequence to Behavior Improvement

| <u>1. Current Behavior</u>  | <u>2. Function</u>   | <u>3. Behavior Improvement</u>   |
|---|--|--|
| Identify and Define Behavior  | Develop a Hypothesis   | Start with Function  |
| Collect Data<br>Frequency<br>Duration<br>Intensity<br>Location<br>Antecedents<br>Consequences<br>Time | Identify Cause/Motivation<br>* <b>Survival Needs</b><br>* <b>Love and Belonging Needs</b><br>* <b>Power/Self-Worth Needs</b><br>* <b>Freedom Needs</b><br>* <b>Fun Needs</b> | Design Intervention in:<br>* curriculum<br>* instruction<br>* environment<br>* relationships<br>* health |
| Review Data Needs   |  | For Positive Behavior Supports<br>in one or more Five Basic Needs  |
| Analyze Collected Data  |  | Implement Teaching in area of<br>Unmet Need  |

### Common Student Behavior Challenges and Examples of Unmet Needs

| <u>Behavior Challenge</u>          | <u>Relation to Basic Human Needs to be Met</u>   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Refusal to Work</b>             | Lack of sleep (survival) due to home challenges and unable work<br>Best friend is refusing to work; wants to maintain alliance (belonging)<br>Academic difficulty (power) and doesn't want to feel like a failure<br>Wants choice of current academic task versus teacher choice (freedom)<br>Bored by current academic task and just not interested (fun)                   |
| <b>Frequent Out-of-Seat</b>        | Failing in class, already will have to repeat (survival) no desire to focus<br>Wants to talk with friends and feel valued in class (belonging)<br>Finishes work early as it was easy, looking for more challenge (power)<br>Not defiant, just doesn't like being restricted in desk seat (freedom)<br>Is a hands-on kinesthetic learner in order for it enjoy learning (fun) |
| <b>Argumentative Communication</b> | Home environment has anger and confrontative behavior (survival)<br>Perception that peers are not accepting and fear of rejection (belonging)<br>Seeking to feel capable in the eyes of teacher and is challenged (power)<br>Values freedom of speech and voice for youth development (freedom)<br>Finds the school rules punitive and uninterested in school routines (fun) |

