

The Emotional Pyramid of Needs

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We are currently facing one of the biggest challenges of our lives as we attempt to navigate this global pandemic. Many of us are struggling to maintain daily routines as we isolate in our homes and distance ourselves from our family, friends, and neighbours.

It's a time full of difficult and overwhelming emotions that range from uncertainty to anxiety to sadness, and we each turn to our own set of coping mechanisms, productive or otherwise.

On the one hand, we might obsessively brood over our feelings, struggling to sleep in the face of discouraging statistics or replaying a minor quarrel with a spouse in a maddening mental loop. On the other, we might bottle our emotions, blindly pursuing a sense of normalcy that doesn't truly exist right now or invalidating our own feelings ("I shouldn't be sad.").

Our culture often dictates the idea that natural emotions are either good or bad, positive or negative, and as a result, we often find ourselves forcing happiness rather than embracing our emotional reality.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not anti-happiness. I like being happy. But when we push aside normal emotions to embrace false positivity, we lose our capacity to develop skills to deal with the world as it is, not as we wish it to be.

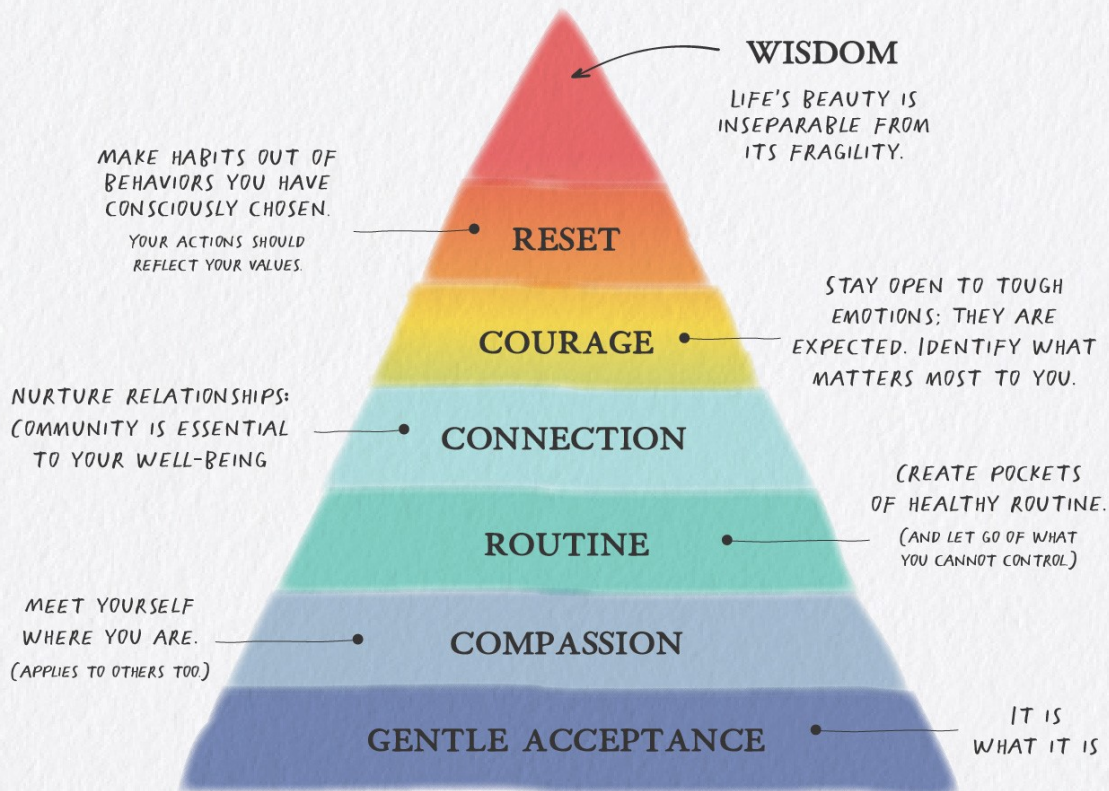
Now is not the time for white-knuckled control. Instead, it's the time to cultivate the wisdom and courage to move forward with emotional agility.

The "Emotional Pyramid of Needs" model I've developed illustrates the critical steps we can follow to deal with both the reality of our present and the emotions that come with this reality in a healthy way. The steps outlined here can enable us to become more resilient and stronger than ever.

EMOTIONAL PYRAMID OF NEEDS

SUSAN DAVID

EMOTIONAL
AGILITY



Gentle Acceptance

As much as we want to, we cannot control every situation—especially a global pandemic. There is no value in struggling to deny or suppress feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, or grief. This only makes us feel worse. By showing up to a difficult situation and accepting it, we free ourselves to move beyond it. Acceptance is the prerequisite for positive change.

Compassion

You must be kind to yourself. These are not normal times: hundreds of thousands of people are dying and losing their livelihoods. Recognize that you are trying to live your life and juggle competing demands in abnormal circumstances. Give yourself a break and let go of perfectionism. Now is not the time for perfection but for

forgiveness and flexibility. Also, see if you can let go of judging others. They, too, are doing the best they can. You don't have insight into the history of the woman who is hoarding food. You don't know what she has seen in her past, but she is scared. Try to broaden your scope.

Routine

Human beings need routine in order to maintain a sense of order. It's the glue that holds us together from day to day. When we are faced with the unfamiliar, we tend to fill in the gaps with fear. We are currently away from our routines—working from home, home-schooling, and living in close quarters with others. We are adapting to unprecedented circumstances. This can be scary.

So let's fill in the gaps of the unknown with things that are comfortable, familiar, and connected with our values. Healthy routines are essential, specifically those associated with sleep, exercise and eating. Our bodies and minds are so interconnected and our physical health is reflected in our psychological state. Try to ground yourself during the course of the day by incorporating experiences that are reminiscent of your normal lifestyle.

Whether that means waking up at the time you normally would commute to work or maintaining your family tradition of Friday movie night, the preservation of these small habits will give you comfort.

Remember that it may not be possible to adhere to all aspects of your regular routine and approach this new reality with grace instead of rigidity.

Connection

It's important to note that "social distancing" is really physical distancing. Connection is so important, now more than ever. Even though you cannot be in someone's physical presence, you can continue to nourish your relationships, especially if you're feeling lonely. You need that support. Also, if safe, make sure to hug your child and/or partner often. Put down your phone and laugh with your family, play games, do puzzles. If you live alone, reach out to your loved ones. Try to approach the situation creatively by scheduling Zoom dinner dates or virtual game nights.

Courage

Research now shows that the radical acceptance of all of our emotions—even the messy, difficult ones—is the cornerstone to resilience, thriving, and true, authentic happiness. But courage is more than just the acceptance of emotions. Our emotions are data that tells us what we're missing in our lives. A 'guilty' parent might be missing real connection with their child. Grief is love looking for a home. Slow down and face into your difficult emotions with courage. What you find there will signpost to you how you can make better decisions and take values-based actions.

Reset

This is the time for reflection. What priorities did you once have that no longer seem important? What parts of 'normal' do you not want to rush back to? Gather your data, keep a journal, and reflect on what you learn about yourself. This information is valuable and it will guide you as you move forward.

Wisdom

Life's beauty is inseparable from its fragility. We are young until we are not. We walk down the streets feeling sexy until, one day, we realize that we are unseen. We are healthy until a diagnosis brings us to our knees. The only certainty is uncertainty, and once we realize this as truth, the healthier and more authentically happier we will be.

When I was little, I would wake up at night terrified by the idea of death. My father would comfort me with soft pats and kisses. But he would never lie. "We all die, Susie," he would say. "It's normal to be scared." He didn't try to invent a falsely positive buffer between me and reality. It took me a while to understand the power of his guidance. What he showed me is that courage is not an absence of fear; courage is fear walking.

Our time on this earth is all too short and all too precious. Life is asking us all right now—are you agile? Let the answer be an unreserved "yes." It's a yes borne of a correspondence with your own heart—in seeing yourself for who you truly are.

Because in seeing yourself, you are also able to see others, too: the only sustainable way forward in a fragile, beautiful world.

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