

Fostering Self-Actualization in Children and Teens

When we think of human behavior, we often first focus on the problems or deficits that people have and how this affects their achievements, or lack thereof. Rarely is the first thought of what motivates someone and how to utilize that to help them grow and develop. Abraham Maslow's development of the "Hierarchy of Needs" helped create a shift in psychology and how we view human behavior.

When Maslow created his "Hierarchy of Needs" his goal was to look at human behavior from a different perspective. All other schools of thought, at that time, were focused on the problematic behaviors of humans. So, this new viewpoint challenged professionals to approach behavior modification with a more positive outlook.

Maslow's hierarchy is most often seen in a pyramid shape, indicating that the basic needs must be met before other, more complex goals can be achieved. And while the pyramid helps to help explain and visualize Maslow's thinking, its implementation can be very rigid. The theory states that the basic needs, such as food and water, of an individual need to be met before they will desire a need for the next level concerning safety and security. After those most basic needs are met, individuals then seek friendships and a sense of accomplishment. Upon achieving these "psychological needs", the person can then begin to fulfill their potential.

Although the overall foundation of this differing approach was groundbreaking, it is best for people to view it with a more fluid approach. Maslow only developed the pyramid to help give an overview. He never intended for those studying and using it to say that the bottom most levels would need to be fulfilled before the higher levels. While this may be true in some cases, that doesn't necessarily fit all individuals. What is necessary is that each need or level if fulfilled in various ways and degrees and in different orders. The way that fits the individual's road to self-actualization is key.

When the SKILLZ program was created, an extensive amount of research was done in different areas of science and psychology. One thing that was found is that not all individuals are the same and that there is no cookie-cutter approach to helping children and teens become the best version of themselves. What we must do is educate ourselves on what to expect and what not to expect from them at different ages. We then use this information as a guideline to help foster growth.

When we meet children and teens where they are in their stage of individual development, they thrive and are happier and more satisfied in their own development. This gives them the confidence to work towards higher goals. And since the instructors in the SKILLZ program are highly trained in the areas of child development and psychology, they recognize that one child may have a strong need for a feeling of accomplishment where another child, at the same age, may value friends more than achievement. We meet them where they are.

Focusing on the positive behaviors that each individual possesses and utilizing those things will help each person achieve personal growth and more satisfaction, thus resulting in self-actualization. This is especially true when working with children and teens because they need guidance and the more encouraging it is, the more confident they will be in the pursuit of their goals.