



Understanding “Being Safe”

We talk about being safe. We tell those we love to “be safe”. We want to live in “safe” neighborhood. We want to feel safe when we travel, go out in the community, drive through neighborhoods, send our children out to school. But what does it mean to “be safe”. From where does our strong need to be safe come? How do we secure safety for ourselves, our family, our community?

The driving need to be safe stems from the human desire to live...from each person’s primitive need for self preservation. While we are all going to die one day no one wants to die. We have an instinct to stay alive. As the country western song, sung by Kenny Chesney, states : “ Everybody wanna go to heaven....But nobody wanna go now.”

Our feeling of being safe or unsafe drives our behaviors and relationships from the time we are born. It impacts the development of our brain and influences our perceptions of the world. These early interactions with caregivers, who we expect to protect us, shapes our ability to trust others and our environments.

The less protected we are or feel by those initial caregivers the more we perceive the world as unsafe and our self-preservation behaviors rise to the surface. These primary “self-preservation” components were defined as “basic needs” by Psychologist Abraham Maslow. The basic survival needs include food/water, shelter and clothing. The next level of “safety” includes physical, financial, health and safety nets against disaster. When we feel unsafe we revert to “self-preservation”, coping behaviors such as lying, stealing and aggression, when we feel threatened, to protect ourselves and keep ourselves safe

Perceiving ourselves as unsafe impacts the behaviors of children, adults, seniors and families in a variety of situations including poverty, criminal environments, violent situations, war, natural disasters, neglect, abuse, (physical/sexual/emotional) and outside attacks.

To create safe environments for all persons in the family, community and world we must ensure that needs are met and people perceive themselves as “safe”, secure, belonging and in control.

Steps that need to be taken for all persons to be safe in all environments, throughout the world include:

- Ensure adequate food, shelter, clothing and warmth for all people
- Secure physical and emotional safety for all people by eliminating man- made disasters and responding quickly to correct natural disasters
- Create welcoming and accepting environments, for all persons, throughout the world regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, religious, sexual /gender orientation or other perceived bias.

What will you do to create a safe environment for yourself, your family, your community?

