

# Kitwood's fundamental emotional needs

## Personhood

Professor Tom Kitwood, in his text, *Dementia Reconsidered*, introduced the concept of personhood, which he defined as the "status that is bestowed upon one human being by others ... It implies recognition, respect and trust".

Kitwood unpacked what it means to be a 'person'; he argued that personhood is more than just physical needs and that it encompasses emotional, psychological and spiritual needs. Kitwood believed that for **everyone's** mental health and wellbeing, certain fundamental emotional needs must be met.

## The five fundamental emotional needs

Kitwood developed the 'Kitwood Flower' to represent a person's emotional needs.

Kitwood believed that if these needs are not met or are unbalanced for a sustained period of time then that person will be at greater risk of poor physical or emotional health.

Central to all of these emotional needs is love, which sits in the middle of the flower and is core. To love someone; to be loved and accepted; to love an activity, a food; to love God, self-love/self-respect. To both give and to receive.



## Attachment

We need to feel attached to another person or to a group. We want to feel connected to someone or something. There is evidence that we need close connections with a minimum of at least two people.

## Comfort

We all need to feel comfort. We need to be warm, dry, and clean; to have a full stomach and not be thirsty; to have quiet when we want it; to have our anxiety calmed; to have a sense of tenderness, closeness and bonding with others. This comfort is physical emotional and spiritual.

## Identity

We need to have others know 'who I am' or 'who I was'. We want to be individual, to be special and to have our own identity. We want to be recognised in our food preferences, our clothing, our activities and recreation. It is important to us that others know our story and what is important to us.

## Inclusion

We want to feel we are a part of something, to belong to a group, to be a member, to not feel left out. The opposite of inclusion is exclusion and/or rejection. We need to know there is somewhere where we are accepted and fit in.

## Occupation

We want to have something to do; to help others; to occupy ourselves. The work we do needs to have meaning and purpose.

## Dementia and personhood

For a person with dementia the five fundamental needs have a greater significance, as the integrity of their personhood may be reliant on others, as they may not be able to necessarily provide for and meet their own fundamental needs.

## References

*Dementia Reconsidered*, Tom Kitwood © 1997. Reproduced with the kind permission of Open University Press. All rights reserved.

## Where to find more information

### beyondblue

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Learn more about anxiety, depression and suicide prevention, or talk through your concerns with our Support Service. Our trained mental health professionals will listen, provide information and advice, and point you in the right direction so you can seek further support.

☎ 1300 22 4636

✉ Email or 💬 chat to us online at [www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport)

### mindhealthconnect

[www.mindhealthconnect.org.au](http://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au)

Access to trusted, relevant mental health care services, online programs and resources.

### Donate online

[www.beyondblue.org.au/donations](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/donations)