**Our vital emotional needs**

The human givens model identifies the following specific emotional needs as core drivers of our behaviour:

**SECURITY** – a safe territory and environment that allows us to live without undue fear, develop fully and have space to grow. When we don't feel safe in our environment our emotional brain can take over, dominating our thinking and behaviour, in effect making us less able to use our rational human brain, and more likely to be fearful and aggressive or become anxious and stressed. This can be clearly seen on a grand scale in countries torn apart by war, but occurs wherever security and safety are compromised, within families, at work, at school and within our communities.

**AUTONOMY** – a sense of control over what happens to us and around us, the freedom to make our own decisions and choices, which helps us to feel in charge of ourselves rather than overwhelmed by life.

**ATTENTION** – giving and receiving it are both vital forms of nutrition that fuel our development. If we didn’t immediately seek attention as newborn babies, we might starve. Paying attention to each other forms part of our group bond as a gregarious species and helps us maintain a shared sense of reality.

**INTIMACY** – emotional connection to others through friendships and loving relationships. We all need at least one person who accepts us for who we are, ‘warts and all’, who is biased in our favour and will support and defend us. This need not be the more obvious parents, siblings, partners or spouses, but may be a grandparent, a teacher, a good friend, a neighbour or a colleague.

**COMMUNITY** – connection to people outside our immediate family, through work, hobbies, sport, geographical and cultural communities. We have evolved as group animals because our survival in harsh conditions depended on being part of a collaborative team – traditionally our tribe. This harks right back to our hunter-gatherer era, and even before that our ancestors would have owed their existence to being part of a primate group. Those who got separated or ostracized were very likely to be eaten by predators or die of starvation. Even in today’s world, where we are unlikely to be eaten by hyenas, we still feel the mortal fear of likely death if we are outcasts. We therefore have a very ingrained need to belong to a group of some sort. Do today’s ‘virtual’ communities, gathered together and joined through the technology of social media, give us the same sense of safety?

**STATUS** – within our communities. A sense that we are accepted, valued and have status within the groups to which we belong (work, family, town, sporting etc); being respected for who we are and what we can do (how we can be useful within the group) by at least some people. We need to feel that we are respected and valued by the groups, or communities, to which we belong so that we don't feel in danger of being thrown out or left behind.

**ACHIEVEMENT & COMPETENCE** – a sense of our own competence and abilities, knowledge and skills, without which we may feel inadequate, lack confidence and develop ‘low self-esteem’, and may even withdraw ourselves from our own communities if we don’t feel useful enough. Genuine confidence, built through competence, gives us resilience to cope with life’s difficulties.