

'I need it' vs. 'I want it'

Tips from Dr. Darek Dawda
of DAVDA Psychology*

BY MATHILDA WATERS



According to our expert on well-being, Dr. Darek Dawda of DAVDA Psychology, replacing one word with another word makes a world of difference.

MW: I have a demanding and rather unhappy friend who always complains that her needs are not being met. What advice do you have for her?

Dr. DD: Here's an idea that might help your friend: any time she feels she needs something, she could tell herself, 'I want it, but I don't need it.'

MW: How does this make a difference?

Dr. DD: To need something is to lack, to be incomplete, whereas to want is to desire what you can live without. If the world doesn't grant your wish, you are still going to be fine. In other words, a fulfilled and motivated person might 'want' what someone feeling deprived and empty 'needs.' Changing just that one word can be quite empowering.

MW: Can you give me an example?

Dr. DD: Let's say you feel sad and lonely. You can think, 'I need someone to comfort me,' and feel deprived until someone does comfort you. Or you can think, 'I want someone to comfort me, but I don't need anyone to comfort me, because I can handle my feelings of loneliness and sadness on my own.'

MW: I guess that would save you from disappointment.

Dr. DD: Precisely. We always expect our needs to be met, and expectations lead to disappointments. Wanting something doesn't mean expecting it. We all know you can't always get what you want.

MW: Is it fair then to say it's healthy to cut down on your needs?

Dr. DD: Absolutely. Cutting down on your needs has great rewards. The more needs you have, the more needs will be frustrated, and the more rejection, dissatisfaction, depravation, resentment and anger you are likely to experience. It's easier to feel gratitude for receiving what you want but don't expect, than for just getting your needs met. It's the extras that make us happy. There is nothing extra about need fulfillment.

MW: Does your logic apply to all needs?

Dr. DD: Of course there are legitimate needs, such as a need for clean air, healthy food, safe shelter, basic respect, care of those who can't care for themselves (children, disabled), and so on. But we'd save ourselves a lot of disappointment if we stopped expanding our definition of needs to include luxury lifestyles and products, or too much support, understanding, and affection from others.

MW: So you're applying this logic to both physical and emotional needs?

Dr. DD: Yes. Our consumerist culture teaches us that we need stuff to be happy. Our economy is 70% consumer spending, and it will collapse if we stop buying all this stuff we don't need. People will buy anything if they think they need it. But if you examine your so-called 'needs,' you might realize that not only do you not need everything you buy, you don't even want most of it, because it doesn't advance your well-being.

MW: How about love? Do we need to be loved?

Dr. DD: Many people will say they need to be loved. And of course being in love is great, and it's very human to desire to be loved. But if it is not happening, do yourself a favour and don't use the language of needs regarding love, as it will likely make you feel like there is a black hole in the middle of your chest. I think it's important to seek love, as it is one of the greatest things in life, but don't start your quest from a position of deprivation. Focus on giving love, as you do have direct control over that. And if others love you as well, that's just a great bonus.

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