

Horney's 10 Patterns of Neurotic Needs



The need itself is normal. It becomes "neurotic" when it becomes excessive, compulsory, inflexible, anxiety-driven, and disproportionately important to the person's sense of safety or worth.

THE PROGRESSION



THE KEY QUESTION



What does this person desperately need in order to feel safe?

What am I afraid will happen if I stop doing this?

THE THREE GREAT DIRECTIONS

Moving Toward People
(COMPLIANCE)



"If I attach myself to you, I'll be safe."

Moving Against People
(AGGRESSION / DOMINANCE)



"If I am stronger and control others, I will be safe."

Moving Away From People
(DETACHMENT / WITHDRAWAL)



"If I don't need anyone, I cannot be hurt."

THE 10 PATTERNS OF NEUROTIC NEEDS

- 1

Affection & Approval
- 2

Partner to Take Over One's Life
- 3

Restrict Life Within Narrow Borders
- 4

Need for Power
- 5

Need to Exploit Others
- 6

Social Recognition or Prestige
- 7

Personal Admiration
- 8

Personal Achievement
- 9

Self-Sufficiency & Independence
- 10

Perfection & Unassailability

HEALTHY NEED vs NEUROTIC NEED

Healthy Need

- Flexible
- Proportional
- Reality-based
- Reciprocal
- Tolerates Frustration



The question is not the need, but how the need operates.

Neurotic Need

- Compulsive
- Excessive
- Rigid
- Anxiety-driven
- Identity-dependent
- Difficult to Satisfy

HEALTHY vs NEUROTIC TRANSFORMATION

Healthy Need (Preference)		Neurotic Need (Psychological Necessity)
I'd like to be liked.	→	You must like me.
I'd like a loving partner.	→	I cannot survive alone.
I enjoy a quiet life.	→	I must avoid risk.
I want influence.	→	I must control you.
I want mutually beneficial relationships.	→	I need to get something from you.
I enjoy recognition.	→	I need status.
I appreciate compliments.	→	I need admiration.
I want to accomplish things.	→	I must prove my worth.
I value independence.	→	I must never need anyone.
I value excellence.	→	I must never be flawed.

ARE THEY STILL RELEVANT IN 2026?

Conceptual Usefulness 9/10	Clinical Diagnostic Usefulness 4/10	Self-Observation Usefulness 9/10	Scientific Completeness 4/10
The behavior may change across generations, but the underlying psychological mechanisms remain.			

22 GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING THESE NEEDS APPROPRIATELY

- 1

Separate the need from the compulsion
- 2

Identify the underlying anxiety
- 3

Don't shame the need
- 4

Replace "must" with "prefer"
- 5

Tolerate small amounts of frustration
- 6

Build multiple sources of self-worth
- 7

Maintain reciprocal relationships
- 8

Learn to receive without becoming dependent
- 9

Learn to give without becoming submissive
- 10

Develop assertiveness
- 11

Develop tolerance for disagreement
- 12

Stop confusing control with safety
- 13

Don't use people as emotional regulators
- 14

Don't become the regulator of another's need
- 15

Distinguish boundaries from withdrawal
- 16

Distinguish ambition from compulsive achievement
- 17

Distinguish excellence from perfectionism
- 18

Practice being imperfect publicly
- 19

Practice being ordinary
- 20

Develop an internal audience
- 21

Look for flexibility, not elimination

- 22

The ultimate guideline: CHOOSE RATHER THAN REACT
Move toward people, against people, or away from people as appropriate. The problem is not any one direction, but being trapped in one direction.

THE FREEDOM TEST

- Ask five questions about any behavior:
- 1

Can I tolerate not getting this?
- 2

Can I get this without harming or controlling someone else?
- 3

Can I function reasonably well without it?
- 4

Can I accept the opposite outcome without psychological collapse?
- 5

Can I choose differently depending on circumstances?
- ✓

Mostly YES = Normal Need
- ✗

Mostly NO = Neurotic Pattern

UNDERLYING ANXIETY MAP (Examples)

- Approval

→

Fear: Rejection

→

Core: I will be abandoned.
- Power

→

Fear: Helplessness

→

Core: I will be vulnerable.
- Achievement

→

Fear: Inadequacy

→

Core: I am nobody.
- Independence

→

Fear: Dependence

→

Core: You can hurt me.
- Perfection

→

Fear: Criticism

→

Core: I'll lose my worth.

MODERN TRANSLATION (2026)

- Affection/Approval

→

External validation dependency
- Partner to take over life

→

Externalized emotional security
- Restrict life

→

Safety-driven avoidance
- Power

→

Control-based security
- Exploit others

→

Instrumental relationships
- Prestige/Recognition

→

Status dependency
- Personal admiration

→

Self-esteem regulation through others
- Personal achievement

→

Contingent self-worth
- Self-sufficiency

→

Defensive independence
- Perfection

→

Defensive perfectionism

REMEMBER



Human beings develop ways of making themselves feel safe. Those strategies can become rigid. Eventually, the person may no longer be using the strategy.

The strategy is using the person.