



Wellbeing Insights

Dignity: Our Inherent Right

Donna Hicks', in *Dignity*, defines dignity as 'recognition of our worth and value'. She identifies the first developmental stage of dignity, the dependence stage, as the one we experienced as a child. In this stage, our sense of our inherent dignity was shaped by the way those who loved us reflected it to us. This reflection was seen in the way they looked at us as a baby; the way they encouraged us, and celebrated our achievements; the words they used to speak 'to' and 'of' us. The sum total of these reflections was the value we gave ourselves.

If overall we did not receive sufficient positive reflection (the amount needed varies from individual to individual) in our formative years (or indeed we received mostly negative reflection), we may never leave the dependent stage and consequently spend an inordinate amount of time, well into our adult years, looking for external recognition of our worth. This may be demonstrated in 'pleasing' behaviour motivating our actions, rather than by behaviour guided by a values system based on a secure sense of our inherent worth.

Recognising aspects of our behaviour arising from the motivation to please (our partner, our boss, our friends) need not drive us into shame. However, it may signpost the need to make change. Before we are able to do this, it may be necessary to allow ourselves some time to mourn what we feel we have missed out on - unconditional regard. We can then continue our growth towards the second stage of dignity, the independent stage. We can give unconditional regard *to ourselves* and recognise *our own* dignity, afterall, Hicks characterises dignity as our inherent birthright.

When we have embedded practices which recognise and celebrate our successes, both small and great, we can begin to move towards the interdependent stage in which we seek input from others to deepen our sense of worth. In this stage, we demonstrate awareness of ourselves as members of a community, each reflecting the dignity of the others and together building a culture in which each and every one of us is heard, seen and valued.