

ATTACHMENT STYLES

Your system's way of organizing behavior to meet your need for security, safety and connection.

Attachment is your brain's understanding of whether connection is safe and dependable OR dangerous and unpredictable.

Your emotions are manageable and your body can be trusted OR emotions are dangerous and your body cannot survive them.

Your inner world makes sense and you are known, seen, heard, and understood OR who you are doesn't make sense and you don't deserve to be seen, heard, and accepted.

The quality of attachment you received in your childhood, has essentially created your belief system.

When an adult is unable, for whatever reason, to not meet a child's needs of safety, trust, attunement and love, then the protective responses come in with adaptive patterns instead.

ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

Attachment theory is how relationships with others and ourselves affect us throughout our lives.

Our bodies are always protesting because something should have been different. Our needs should have been met and will continue to try to make it right, until it is.

Our system knows how to and wants to come into secure attachment.

The more capacity you gain for secure attachment the easier your relationships will become. You'll be more open for connection, less reactive, and will recover faster from ruptures.

ATTACHMENT IS STORED IN YOUR IMPLICIT MEMORY

They are hard to remember and are experienced through body sensations.

They are rewired only through the body with somatic work. You have to feel your way into secure attachment.

Example: When a person gets close to you, you pull away.

ATTACHMENT STYLES

Secure

Avoidant

Anxious

Disorganized

SECURE

The ideal attachment needed to enjoy healthy boundaries, intimacy, and social engagement.

When adults were attuned to the child.

A safe haven was provided with consistency, attention and affection.

Children who experience this type of environment grow to feel safe to explore the world, interact with others with trust, have emotional resilience and regulation.

Adults with secure attachments tend to have greater confidence, better balance and choice in relationships, and the ability to both give and receive love safely.

Feel safe to ask for needs to be met.

Communicate their truth freely and feel safe to be seen.

Are able to lean on others.

Feel safe to be intimate and vulnerable.

Want people close, but know it is okay if they are not.

Able to keep long term relationships.

Can tolerate the discomfort of someone else being upset and know that it is not a reflection of them or that they are responsible to fix it.

Able to take responsibility.

Have healthy boundaries.

Ruptures, although unpleasant, don't feel dangerous.

I know we will come back into connection.
I'm able to step back into connection when a rupture happens.
I felt emotionally nourished by my parents.
I felt safe to be myself as a child and didn't worry how it'd make my parents feel.
I trust others and believe those that have proven to be safe and trustworthy.
I can feel my feelings without them overwhelming me.
I can communicate my truth, regardless of how it will make another feel.
I feel relaxed with my partner the majority of the time.
I enjoy affection and closeness and can be content in it.
I want to meet the needs of my partner and equally want my needs met.
I enjoy both closeness with my partner and alone time.
I feel enough as I am.
I am comfortable setting boundaries based on my truth. I honor other's boundaries.
I find it tolerable to take accountability when I've been wrong without it turning to shame.
I can keep secrets and protect my partner or friends' privacy.

As a Child, Your Primary Care Giver:

Was self-connected and felt trusted to be your caretaker.
Mirrored your facial expressions.
Gave you verbal empathy.
Offered you grounded care.
Understood your behaviors while trying to meet your needs.
Not threatened or afraid of the behaviors.
Encouraged you to discuss your feelings, hopes, dreams, wishes, and was able to "hold space" for you and actively listen, versus fix, problem solve, or shut down.
Apologized to you when a mistake was made, without being self-deprecating.
Soothed you whenever you needed it, day, or night.
Met their own needs and was proactive in requesting support.
Guessed what you were thinking to better understand your actions.
Communicated with you to understand and connect, instead of needing to be right or make a point.

As a Parent, with Yourself:

You pay attention to your body and what it is communicating to you.
You pay attention to your feelings and embrace all feelings.
You remember your childhood with compassion and understanding. You have made a coherent narrative.
When you make a mistake, you can forgive yourself easily and access self-accountability.

You are actively engaged in friendships and community.
You have the ability to emotionally regulate.
You know what you need and believe you're inherently worthy of getting those needs met.
You feel confident in your communication and have a strong window of tolerance when negotiating contrasting needs/wants/desires.

As a Parent, with Your Child:

You feel confident providing a haven and a secure base for your child.
You can see beneath the child's behavior into their feelings and needs.
You turn toward your child when they seek closeness and connection.
You can differentiate the experiences, thoughts, feelings between yourself and your child.
If your child is upset or grumpy, you can remain grounded and connected to joy anyway.
You can model regulation and soothe your child (no matter their age!) when needed.
You can communicate feelings and needs directly without passive-aggressiveness, making your child guess what is going on, or giving the child the silent treatment.
You can actively decondition your parenting from harsh punishments, or power over parenting tactics.

Your Child:

Believes that they are worthy of love.
Accepts the parent's bid for connection.
Can verbalize boundaries in a clear way.
Is willing to work as a team and has empathy for actions.
Can regulate their own emotions and self-soothe some of the time, knowing that even adults need co-regulation, rather than self-regulation, some of the time.
Welcomes the parents longing to support the child to be soothed.
Is drawn to friends circles that enhance their self-esteem and mirrors a healthy lifestyle.
Can focus on academics and maintain concentration.
Is independent, with a healthy relationship, self-agency, and self-awareness.
Believes that life is good, that they are worthy, and that no matter the difficulties, they will find a way to work through them.

AVOIDANT

If adults were emotionally unavailable and insensitive to a child's needs for connection they will form a coping strategy of disconnection.

Find it hard to ask for help, especially when feeling vulnerable.

Resort to shutting down or numbing.

Feel like an island or isolated.

A deep feeling of not belonging.

Not knowing how to ask for help.

Feeling uncomfortable when people try to help.

Shutting down and avoiding conflict.

Fear of being seen.

Running away when the thing your true self wants, gets to close.

Feeling apathetic about the relationship or person (I'll leave you before you leave me)

Going it alone and not knowing what you need. Self sufficient.

Not feeling a lot of their feelings.

Disengage instead of saying no.

Extremely independent.

Feeling crowded or suffocated.

Believe they don't need others.

I am an island. It's hard to let others close.

I prefer the company of animals over people.

I don't feel like I belong.

My work or purpose is more important than relationships.

When I get into an argument, I shut down and want to get away.

It's hard to ask for help or to even know how someone should help me.

I tend to do things solo, whether it's fun things I enjoy or at work.

If my partner wants something of me emotionally I find it dysregulating.

The closer a relationship becomes the more panicked/suffocated I feel.

It's easier to think about things rather than feel my feelings about things.

My parents were the source of danger, hostility or rejection.

My parents were never around or were neglectful.

The more others need from me the more I pull away.

I feel exhausted after social interactions and just want to be alone.

It's hard to make eye contact with people.
I find relying on others to be a weakness and self reliance to be a strength.

As a Child, Your Primary Care Giver:

May have ignored you and your attempts to meet your needs for connection. They were not present in their bodies.

May have become angry at you often for small things, limited capacity for feeling and or witnessing emotions.

May have expressed, verbally or nonverbally, that you were a burden or a "handful," perhaps having this belief about themselves, as well.

May have struggled with vulnerability and avoided close connection with you.

As a Parent, To Yourself:

Feel numb to your feelings.

Not remember your childhood.

Dismiss your childhood as "yeah, I was mistreated, but now I'm fine!"

Not feel your body.

Not take time to self-reflect and be curious about your inner experiences.

Want to run away, literally, when you are experiencing stress.

Avoid conflict and "sweeping things under the rug."

Not communicate your needs, because you do not know what they are and assume they will not get met anyway.

Really want to do better for your child but have trouble connecting in meaningful ways.

As a Parent, To Your Child:

Sense a "dismissive" attachment with your child.

See your child as "needy" and feel resentful about how much they depend on you.

Want your child to be self-sufficient at an incredibly young age.

Need a lot of space from your child and view your child as "clingy."

Want your child to self-soothe at an incredibly young age.

Place extreme emphasis on science and material evidence, and feel that emotions are uncomfortable and inconvenient.

Struggle to hold space for your child's feelings and think they are "over dramatic."

Your Child:

Avoids connection with you.

Does not communicate how they feel or what they think.

May struggle with empathy for siblings or others.

Seems withdrawn, “spacey,” and has trouble focusing or concentrating.
Struggles with memory and may appear irresponsible.
Struggles with emotional regulation, erupts and won’t allow you to soothe them.

ANXIOUS

Adults who were on again, off again in their attunement.

This happens if the adult is anxious and dysregulated themselves which in turn affects the child. It gives the child the message, things are not ok in the world.

Because of the lack of consistency and heightened sympathetic stimulation, the child doubts whether the needs will be met and is constantly looking for cues to how their behavior may or may not influence the adult’s responses.

Over time they are on an emotional see saw of needs being met and not.

It feels like I can want, but I cannot have.

It is having an insatiable desire for connection and feeling like they can’t do it on their own. Anxiety and over giving.

Anxiety when others are not close or if things feel out of control.

Feeling responsible for other’s feelings.

Enmeshment becomes comfortable.

Ruptures feel intolerable.

I want, but I can’t have, and if it changes to being available, they no longer want that thing.

Compulsion to fix things.

Insecurity about how others feel about us.

Need resolution immediately.

Need reassurance.

Excessive worry.

Lacking boundaries.

Told they are needy.

Feeling as if they can’t do it alone.

Fearing relationships will end.

Trouble enjoying things on their own.

Losing self in relationships.

I tend to lose myself in relationships and become more focused on their lives.
When a rupture occurs I become anxious and need to repair it in order to feel better.
If someone needs to cancel plans I have a hard time being flexible about it.
I have obsessive thoughts about how the relationship might end and that I won't be okay.
I worry people are mad at me often.
When I'm activated, my inclination is to ask friends/loved ones to help me feel better.
When I'm activated I want to vent to others but I'm not left feeling much better.
I find it hard to be alone, I don't enjoy it.
I often second-guess myself and can be unsure of what my truth is.
I feel anxious often.
If someone else is activated I become activated.
I often think about how my partner might leave or betray me in some way.
I apologize for things I didn't do or over accommodate others in an attempt to keep things connected.
I often yearn for someone or something I can't have and am often unsatisfied.
Even when connected with my partner, it never seems to feel like enough to feel safe.

As a Child, Your Primary Care Giver:

May have given help when you did not need it and withheld help when you did.
May have believed they needed to save you from your feelings, constant reassurance, distracting you from upsets.
Was not emotionally reliable; sometimes very present + warm, sometimes distant + cold.
May have expressed with body language and/or verbal cues that you were stupid, incompetent, not able to do anything right, or "will never learn!" Or, they may have had these unconscious beliefs about themselves, which radiated as unspoken and "normalized" truths within the family system.

As a Parent, with Yourself:

Experience an anxious disposition: "Feeling anxious about feeling anxious."
Get lost in "worst case scenarios."
Feel emotionally unstable and go through a "roller coaster" of feelings quickly.
Start projects and not follow through.
Have chronic self-doubt as a parent.
Struggle with shame and beliefs of worthlessness.

As a Parent, with Your Child:

Sense a “preoccupied attachment” to your child.

Not set limits or expectations, fearing that your child is going to be mad at you.

Have difficulty giving your child space when requested, or allowing anyone else to help; constantly worry that your child needs you to rescue them.

Feel the need for your child to be calm and regulated, so YOU can be calm and regulated.

Worry about the child's well-being and obsess over illness or worst-case scenarios.

Your Child:

Struggles with anxiety.

Is fearful of uncertainty.

Struggles to connect with friends.

Doesn't want to leave the house and wants to be with their caregiver at all times.

Struggles to self-regulate and has many “episodes” of emotional eruption a day.

Struggles with focus; experiences a mind that is “constantly spinning”.

DISORGANIZED

Adults give confusing messages. Come here...Go away message.

Adults create situations for the child that are unsolvable and un-winnable.

Adult will ask the child to do something and then criticize how or when they do it.

When exposed to these impossible to solve situations over and over, the child develops a pattern of not solving problems and a fear of the ones they love.

There is a desire to stay close to the parent for safety, conflicting with a drive to detach from a dangerous and confusing adult.

Not knowing what their truth is.

Wanting intimacy, but feeling terrified of it and that it is dangerous.

Thrive under pressure, but may struggle with setting up systems and organization.

They thrive in overwhelming circumstances and feel comfortable with chaos as the norm.

Feelings about even being in the relationship may contradict.

Strangers aren't as scary as romantic partners.

Struggle with having and being a friend.

Running hot and cold with their feelings.

Trusting a romantic partner feels dangerous.

I get confused about what my truth is and can be swayed easily.
I want closeness but when people get close I get activated and push them away.
I struggle to set boundaries in my relationships.
I find myself fearing my partner being upset.
I don't remember much of my childhood.
My parents were sometimes the source of love and sometimes of pain/danger.
My parents gave me lose-lose situations.
I tend to thrive in chaos.
I have a hard time thinking clearly.
I tend to dissociate.
I can feel frozen in fear when ruptures happen in my relationships.
When things are calming they can feel boring, still and lifeless.
I have a heightened startle response when a loved one tries to get too close.
My partner often says that I am controlling.
I often catastrophize situations and the outcomes.

As a Child, Your Primary Care Giver:

May have acted in ways that scared you, with no repair process in place after.
May have feared your feelings, especially your cries. Your emotions were "too much."
May have been emotionally distraught much of the time (outward presenting, or something that you sensed).
Practiced authoritarian parenting; was not able to create a safe environment or protect you from harm.

As a Parent, with Yourself:

Have difficulty staying focused and on task.
Be unable to cope with stress and feel very disoriented about your thoughts/feelings.
Have exceptionally low tolerance for loud noise, or conflict between siblings.
Feel very confused and not understand why you feel the way you do.

As A Parent, with Your Child:

Become enraged very easily, suddenly snapping nearly every day.
Scream, hit, threaten with violence, or use language to get your children to obey.
Struggle with chronic reactivity and be unable to stand your child's big feelings.
Take your child's behaviors and words very personally.
Feel that any kind of feedback from your child is harsh criticism of you.
Become angry easily and direct your anger onto your child, making your child fear you.

Your Child:

May be consistently eruptive and can become angry very easily over little things.

May not trust authority figures and not like to listen to anyone in a “power over” position.

May use violence and aggression to meet their needs for connection, to be seen, heard.

Does not compromise and talks back.

Uses hate speech to parents or siblings and seems defiant or out of control.

Whatever you got in childhood is all you know. Whatever you received, to you was love.

Everything is connected. You resource your nervous system related to your attachment style.