

V.1



Attachment Styles

ULTIMATE GUIDE & WORKBOOK

ANXIOUS, AVOIDANT, DISORGANIZED, & SECURE



The
Attachment
Project

Instructions on How to Use This Workbook:

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A separate exercises printout was attached to your purchase if you would like to print out and fill in the traditional way (pen & paper).

Note: The separate attachment profiles contained within this book were designed to function cooperatively and independently.

Thus, you might find that some small sections of content overlap between chapters. This is intentional as we strived for equality of information between the attachment profiles.

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Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the next step towards understanding your attachment style by purchasing your profile book. I strongly believe that you are currently in a similar place to where I was when I first started *The Attachment Project* - searching for the best resources to help you understand and cope with your negative thoughts and feelings.

As someone who regularly deals with anxiety, there were moments when I read through this workbook and thought: "Oh, wow! *That sounds so like me!*" It's not always comfortable to pinpoint your feelings - trust me, I know. I spent years searching for answers for why I had a particular outlook on life, why I struggled to read my own thoughts and emotions, and why I wasn't experiencing success in relationships. Believe me, it is possible to change this.

Studies have shown that approximately one third of people have attachment issues that are the result of a transgenerational behaviors (although the results of our questionnaire suggest that this number might be more like two thirds!). My father suffered with PTSD from Vietnam, My Grandfather was a World War II veteran, and my great grandfather was a World War I veteran - you could say that trauma started to run in the family. Many people never get the chance to heal these attachment issues, but I don't want this to be the case for you.

I worked for what felt like night and day to create a business from the ground up, and finally, after ten years of slogging, it paid off - I created the first tech company in the world to put iPad's at restaurant tables to automate ordering. I sold this company and was finally able to focus on attachment theory. This meant that I was able to participate in a wide range of therapies and group experiences, each with a leading expert attempting to convey the benefits of their field. Unfortunately, this didn't work for me personally - it just ended up creating a maelstrom of conflicting opinions which mentally pulled me in different directions. Instead of being freed from my anxious thoughts, I ended up struggling against them even more.

At this point in my journey, I realized that there doesn't have to be just one school of thought, or one particular therapy, that could heal my attachment issues. In fact, through exploring the area, I found some incredible teachers and therapists who don't go out of their way to market themselves and their approaches. Instead, their aim was to help people live more fulfilling lives using relatively simple methods. I started to think: *"What could happen if I were to combine some of these techniques?"* This was my Eureka Moment - therapy doesn't necessarily have to be black and white or fit into a certain mold for you to reach your mental health goals.

This isn't to suggest that there are any quick fixes - nothing replaces therapy with a well-trained therapist or skilled group processes which promote positive change. However, this workbook encompasses some of the leading, peer-reviewed perspectives on attachment and some alternative viewpoints and approaches to healing. Your life experiences are unique, but our aim is to help you get to know yourself by understanding how your past has affected your present and how you can prevent it from affecting your future.

As a company, our group has reached over 1 million people, and we're delighted to have raised over US\$700,000 that went directly to cultural preservation projects in Nepal. But we don't want to stop there. We are keen to continue evolving; therefore, we welcome your feedback on how we can improve the content of this book and the included exercises. After all, our aim is to make this the world's leading workbook on attachment style. We will adapt according to changing research, experience, and your opinion.

<https://www.attachmentproject.com/improve-workbook/>

Remember, understanding gives you the power to achieve change. I hope that you find this book both useful and healing in your personal journey. We look forward to your guidance.

Jock Gordon

**Jock Gordon,
Founder of The Attachment Project**

July 2022



Note to Our Readers:

We strived to use the pronoun “They” as much as possible throughout this workbook (with the exception of previous research findings and case vignettes). This is not because we are making assumptions about our readers. Instead, we are attempting to maintain respect for how our readers wish to express their identity and relate to the world. Furthermore, we don’t wish to limit the applicability of this workbook for anyone who wishes to use it. Not everyone fits into a category, and we at The Attachment Project respect individuality and diversity.



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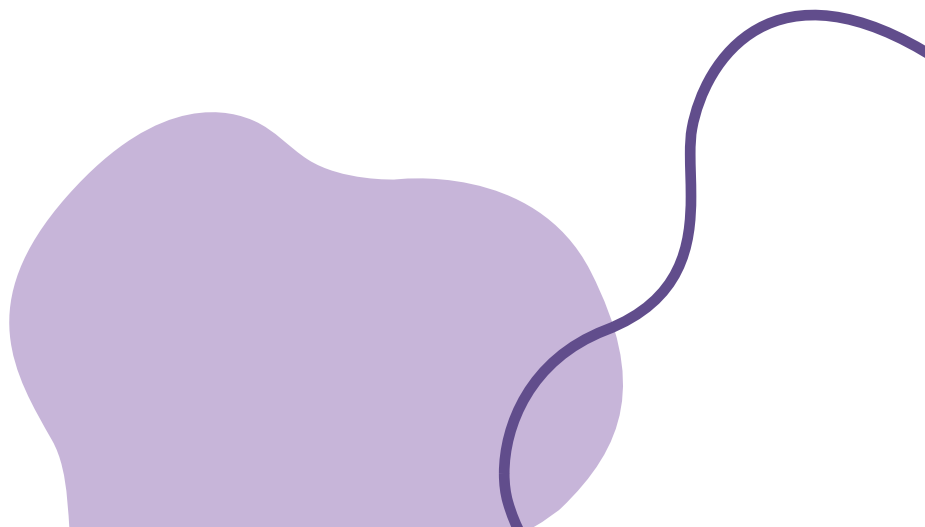
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CHAPTER I

All About Attachment



Intro

Do you have a hard time trusting or depending on others? Perhaps you crave closeness, but need constant reassurance that your partner cares about you? Or maybe your issue is that you constantly worry that your partner will abandon you, so you cling on to them as much as you can? However, it could also be the case that you're fortunate enough to not have any of these concerns, and in fact, relationships are a bit of a breeze for you...

The struggles (or lack thereof) that we experience in our adult relationships are usually linked to the flexibilities of our attachment system, but to fully understand the impact of this system on our romantic lives, we might need to delve a little into our past.

The good news is that having a particular attachment style doesn't mean that your thoughts and actions are completely concrete or fixed. **Through this book, we will help enlighten you on the patterns that play out through your relationships whether they be intimate, friendships, or professional, to help you understand the impact of your attachment style and how to change it.**



1.1 The Birth of Attachment Theory

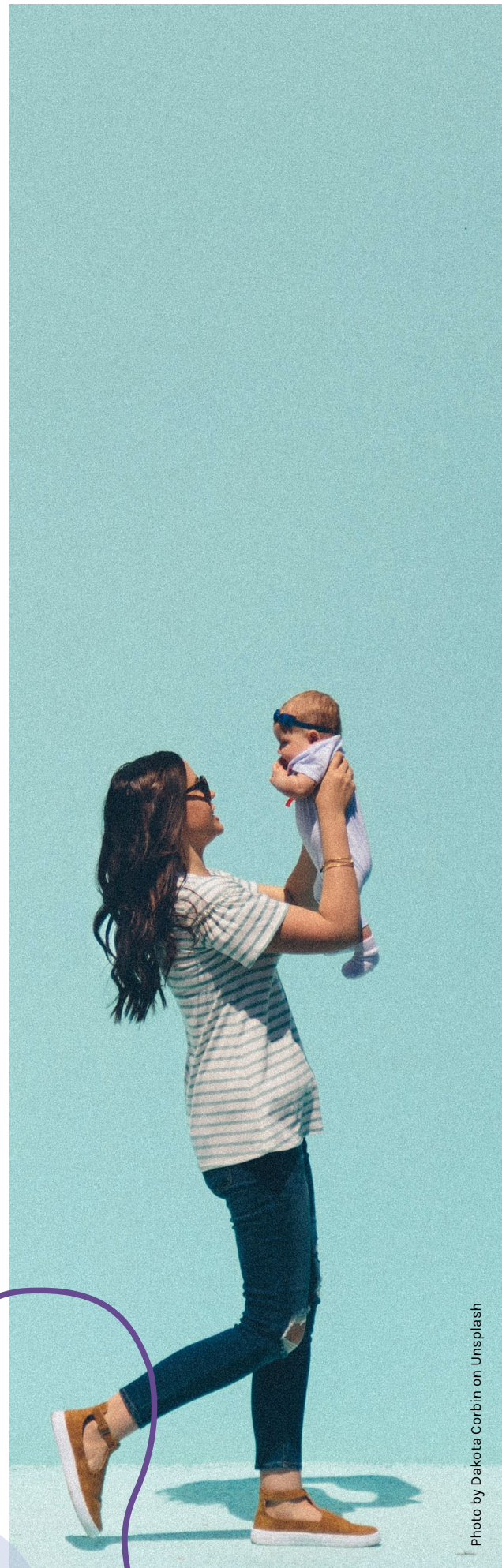
In 1949, child psychoanalyst **John Bowlby** introduced a new way of thinking about individual behavior and treatment - the very first form of family therapy.

He started by forming a research unit at the *Tavistock Clinic* in London which examined young children's responses to separation from their caregiver.

In essence, it could be said that **Bowlby conducted the first scientific study on human love.**

Bowlby's collaborator, Mary Ainsworth, a developmental psychologist, spent much of her time looking into how the mother/child relationship affected the child's bond with their mother. **This led to the identification of three attachment patterns:** secure, anxious, and avoidant. But where did these patterns come from?

In the 1960s, Ainsworth and colleagues observed how mothers responded to their children's needs, as well as how the children related to their mothers in return - this led to the invention of *The Strange Situation*, experiment in 1969. Although perhaps a little ethically questionable by today's standards, *The Strange Situation's* aim was to examine how a young child behaved when they became increasingly stressed by separation from their mother (106 babies between 11 and 18 months of age were involved).



1.2 The Strange Situation

Picture the scenario:

A mother and her toddler (between 12 and 18 months old) enter a strange room. The room is neutral, so not especially inviting; it's sparsely decorated with just two chairs, a blanket, and some toys for the toddler.

This strange environment is a little distressing for the toddler, but it's all OK - Mom is there. This is enough to put their fears at rest.

Now they feel comfortable enough to teeter over to the blanket, plop down, and start playing with the toys. Mom sits in the chair.



A stranger enters the room:

After three minutes, a lady enters the room and sits on the other chair. The child looks up and notices this stranger. They don't like the combination of a strange place and a new person - they're a little unnerved. Their stress level rises.

The strange lady starts to talk with the mother before perching on the blanket next to the toddler. The child's stress level inches a little higher again. Still, though, it's OK; Mom is close by.

But the child isn't expecting the next stage in *The Strange Situation's* dastardly plan...

Mom leaves the room.

The stranger and the toddler are left alone for three minutes. The poor child's stress rises to panic levels.

If the baby cries, as many do, Mom is allowed to come back into the room before the three minutes are up to comfort the toddler. Their stress level drops - but not for long.

At the experimenter's signal, Mom - even though she may find it hard - has to leave her baby alone again.

At this stage, pretty much any child would become distressed. What else can they do but sob and wail? But this time Mom isn't allowed to come back and comfort them.

They are left alone with the stranger.

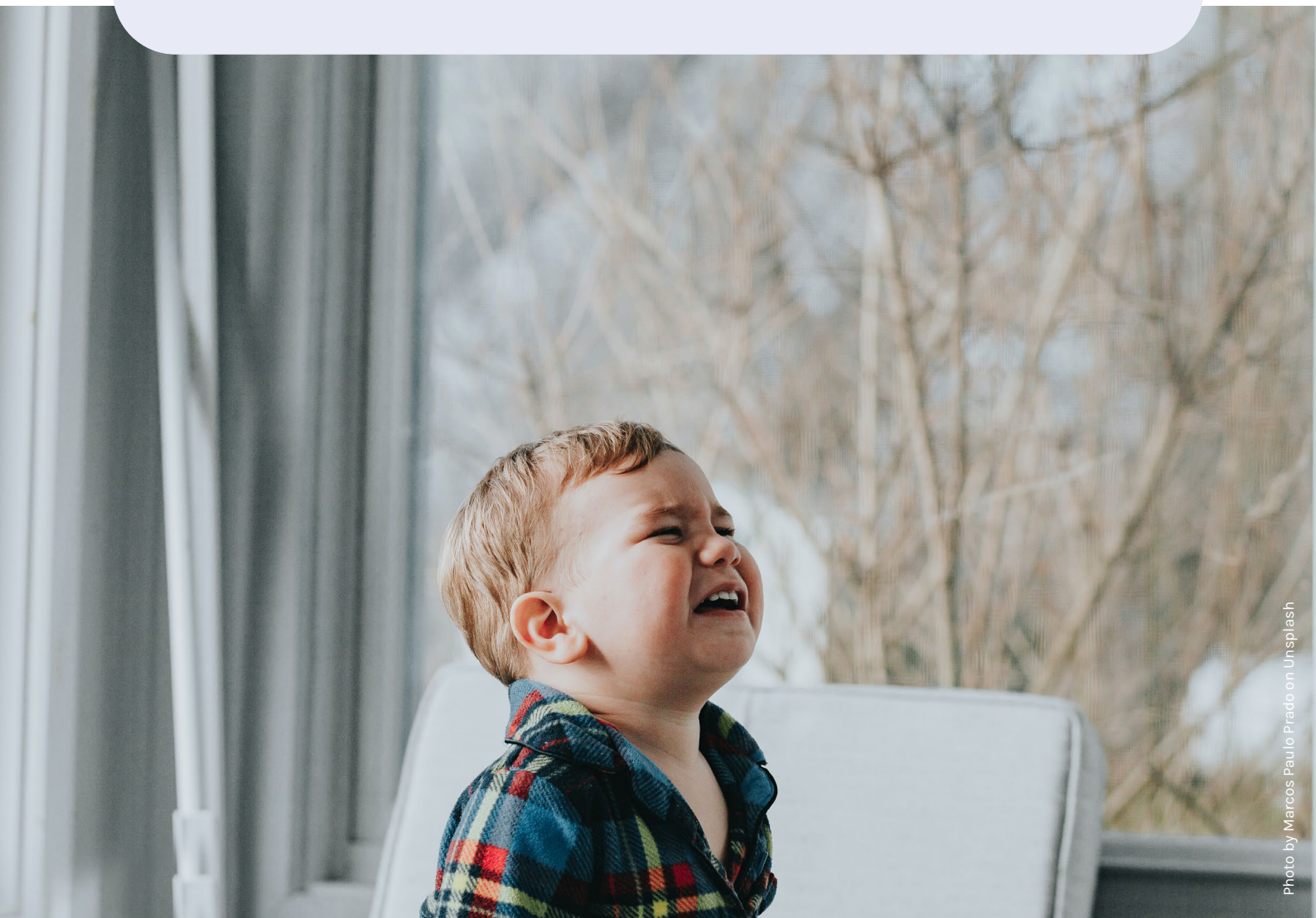
After three minutes, Mom is finally allowed to return to the room and the stranger leaves at last.

Reunion:

By this stage, you're probably picturing how the toddler responds to their Mom's return - what do you think they do?

Well, typically, they respond in one of three ways:

- 1. They greet Mom happily and then explore again.**
- 2. They ignore her and seem more interested in exploring.**
- 3. They run to her but can't be calmed down.
They turn away angrily.**



1.3 What the ‘Strange Situation’ Tells Us About Attachment

Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues expected the children to cry when they were separated from their mothers. And most of the time, they did. Instead, the *really* interesting part of *The Strange Situation* was **how the children behaved during their reunion with their mothers.**

The way the toddler responded to the reunion was based on the quality of their bond with their Mom - their attachment to her.

Essentially, how the child understood this bond determined the type of attachment style that they developed - whether it was *secure* or *insecure*.

SECURE ATTACHMENT

Let's return to *The Strange Situation*.

The securely attached children knew that Mom would return. When she did, they looked at her, then crawled, or ran to her for comfort. Mom responded by scooping her baby up into her arms. After a stroke and a kiss, the toddler returned to playing.

Fifteen-month-old Samuel was securely attached. When his Mom walked back into the room, his face lit up and he yelled “Mommy!” Running over to her, he opened his arms wide because he knew that she would scoop him up in a cuddle. After a deep hug, he sat happily on the floor, showed Mom his toy, and babbled to her as he played.





INSECURE ATTACHMENT

Insecurely attached children, on the contrary, were subconsciously unsure that Mom would return.

Even though all of the children experienced only a brief separation from their mothers, the insecurely attached children became considerably more distressed than the ones who were securely attached; as though the time apart was longer than it actually was. As a result, they **protested loudly, despaired, and then shut off their emotions.**

The way that insecurely attached children think and behave can be broken down again into two initial categories: *anxious-ambivalent* and *anxious-avoidant*.

**Please note that in adulthood, anxious-ambivalent is known as anxious-preoccupied, anxious-avoidant is known as avoidant-dismissive, and fearful-avoidant is disorganized.*

ANXIOUS-AMBIVALENT

When Mom left the room during *The Strange Situation*, the **anxious-ambivalent** children acted as though they had been abandoned; they panicked and then seemed confused by Mom's return.

Although they first might have run to their mother for comfort, they seemed very difficult to calm and also likely changed their mind and rejected her attempts to cuddle and soothe.

In daily life, anxious-ambivalent children may become inconsolable when they're upset; they might cry aggressively (hitting, kicking, and throwing toys out of frustration), demand, then refuse, comfort from Mom, and stay distressed for a long time. They often seem like they're not able to calm down and return to happy activities like play-time.

When seventeen-month-old Alice was left alone with the stranger during *The Strange Situation*, she looked startled, before holding her breath and throwing herself to the floor. She howled, pounding her fists and feet against the floor until her Mom returned. Still wailing, Alice stood up and ran towards Mom before she changed her mind and passed her by. Mom said, "Oooh, did my pumpkin miss me?" But she didn't pick up the still-upset Alice and instead took a seat.

Despite Alice's cries for comfort, Mom never picked her up until the reunion phase. By that time, when Mom tried to soothe and comfort her, Alice was far too hysterical and unable to calm down.

ANXIOUS-AVOIDANT

Although still a form of insecure-attachment, **anxious-avoidant** children's behavior is quite different from that of an anxious ambivalent child.

When the mother of an anxious-avoidant child left the room during the *Strange Situation*, the child seemed quite indifferent and continued to play. When she returned to the room, the child remained quiet **or** they seemed completely unconcerned.

Sitting on the blanket, the child simply carried on with play-time, seemingly indifferent to the company of the stranger. It was actually difficult to tell whether they even noticed their mother's disappearance!

However, Mom usually acted equally unconcerned; when she returned to the room, after a quick look to her child who didn't seem to need anything from her, she didn't make any attempt to hug them. It's not like they behaved like they needed her to!



Photo by Joseph Rahamatkar on Unsplash

Seventeen-month-old Marisol was an avoidant infant. When Mom left, Marisol looked up, her face blank and her body very still. She looked back down at the toys on the blanket and started twirling a Slinky around.

The stranger asked Marisol whether she liked playing with the Slinky. Marisol babbled to her with downcast eyes. When Mom walked back into the room, Marisol glanced up briefly. She looked down again and continued to play with the Slinky. Mom stood at the door, her arms held half-open, and said, “Come here, Marisol.”

Marisol toddled to her mother, but stayed at her feet, playing with her Slinky.



Photo by Carly Kewley on Unsplash

A FOURTH PATTERN : FEARFUL-AVOIDANT/DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT

When Mary Ainsworth established the three categories of attachment – secure, avoidant, and anxious – one of her students noticed a problem.

There was a group of children who didn't “fit” with these categories. Instead, they experienced a more tumultuous home-life, sometimes even involving mistreatment, and as a result their behaviors were quite distinct.

Therefore, the child's source of security and love was also a source of fear. Thus, they were left unable to deal with their complex feelings.

To fill this gap, a fourth pattern was identified by Mary Main (Ainsworth's doctoral student at the time and a prominent psychologist) – **disorganized attachment.**

Attachment terminologies

ATTACHMENT STYLE	IN CHILDHOOD	IN ADULthood
Secure	Secure	Secure
Insecure	Anxious-ambivalent	Anxious-preoccupied
Insecure	Anxious-avoidant	Avoidant-dismissive
Insecure	Fearful-avoidant	Disorganized

1.4 The Attachment Styles

So, there we have it - *The Strange Situation* opened the doorway for people to study how a child's bond with their caregiver might affect how they act in relationships for the rest of their life by identifying four patterns of attachment; **secure**, **insecure-anxious**, **insecure-avoidant**, and **insecure-disorganized**.

What's more, these patterns of attachment have been proven to be universal, even if there are cultural differences in the frequency of each style. The following chart based on the findings of *The Strange Situation* in different countries demonstrates these differences clearly (Van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988):

	SECURE	ANXIOUS-AVOIDANT	ANXIOUS-AMBIVALENT
Great Britain	75%	22%	3%
Germany	57%	35%	8%
United States	65%	21%	14%
Netherlands	67%	26%	7%
Sweden	67%	22%	4%
Israël	54%	7%	29%
Japan	68%	5%	27%
China	50%	25%	25%

Now that we have an understanding of how each attachment pattern is formed, let's take a closer look at the mother's and child's role in each one, as well as how the attachment pattern changes as the child develops into adulthood.

Please be aware that some of the following descriptions could potentially trigger an emotional response. If this happens, be mindful that there are many factors that might affect how a caregiver parents a child.

Issues such as physical health and mental health problems, financial difficulties, and developmental complications can influence a child's bond with their caregiver. Parenthood is a tricky road to maneuver; *caregivers aren't perfect and sometimes - even with the best intentions - can still make mistakes.*

We have different experiences with relationships as we grow up, and in our early years we often have several caregivers around us who behave in different ways. Therefore, we may have a general attachment style, but also traits of other attachment styles based on our interactions with the important people in our life. **For this reason, most people do not fit an attachment style perfectly - instead, it should be seen as a spectrum in which we can move between characteristics.** For example, you might have traits of secure attachment and avoidant - you don't have to strictly belong to one or the other.

For the purposes of the findings of The Strange Situation, we will temporarily refer to the primary caregiver as the mother, but the wording used in this section is not specifically ours. We do not wish to minimize or inflate the formative issues behind the attachment styles, so we have left the terminologies as they are.



SECURE ATTACHMENT

[reminder - the following terms are in line with the original terminologies and do not reflect our opinions]

THE “RESPONSIVE” MOTHER

Caregivers of securely attached children tend to be readily available and sensitive to their child’s needs. If their child cries, they are promptly on hand and will respond in the way that the child wants, whether it’s by cuddling, helping them to communicate, soothing them with kind words, or distracting them with play or by making funny faces. **This caregiver is emotionally in-tune with her child.**

As a result, the child knows that when they need something, Mom will be there to help them. This leads to them becoming a *receptive* child.

THE “RECEPTIVE” CHILD

The child of a responsive caregiver understands that they are their safety net – because they are nearby in case anything scary happens, they are safe to explore their world.

Eventually, through feeling safe and loved, the child begins to develop a sense of independence. They start to soothe themselves and control their own emotions when upset. They can see themselves through their caregiver’s adoring eyes – worthy of the love and affection that they give them.

As the child grows up, they know that they will continue to be loved and supported unconditionally.

Their experiences have taught them to trust that their needs can be met by other people, so they have a bright and positive outlook on others because they know that they'll be there for them if needed.

They explore their world with confidence and joy, eventually evolving into a secure adult.

THE SECURE ADULT

Securely attached adults tend to have a strong understanding of who they are as a person. **They have easy access to their early memories and they can deal with their emotions without too many difficulties. They typically have a positive outlook of themselves, as well as of other people.** This feeds into their attitudes regarding their romantic relationships; they are comfortable allowing another person to become emotionally close to them. Essentially, this means that securely attached adults have a pretty smooth ride when it comes to initiating and maintaining a successful romantic relationship.





INSECURE ATTACHMENT: ANXIOUS-AMBIVALENT/ ANXIOUS-PREOCCUPIED

[reminder - the following terms are in line with the original terminologies and do not reflect our opinions]

THE “AMBIVALENT” MOTHER

Caregivers of anxiously attached children may be unpredictable in how they respond to their child’s needs. Sometimes, they might act attentive and loving, but on other occasions they might seem harsh or distant.

It might be the case that this type of caregiver never received the affection that they needed from their own caregivers.

Perhaps they felt at an early age that their caregiver’s needs were more important than their own; they ate when they were hungry, were quiet when they were sleeping, and were docile after a hard day’s work. This belief can extend into adulthood, and as a result, these caregivers are aware of their own personal needs but might not be connected to those of their children.





THE “COERCIVE” CHILD

When caregivers are inconsistent - sometimes loving, and at other times distant - the child becomes confused.

They may start to feel insecure about how reliable their caregivers are; will they be safe and protected if they need support? The child ends up feeling conflicted - they desire closeness with the Mom that acts warm and loving to them, but they're also super anxious around the Mom that ignores them when they need her. They too start to become ambivalent in their actions.

The ambivalent child feels less confident about exploring their world than a secure child does. Since they don't feel that their caregivers are a safe base, they focus on staying physically close to them; they want to make sure that they are there if they need them. Sometimes, to make sure that they are aware of them, they will behave in a way that they can't ignore - by crying, being clingy, and throwing temper tantrums.

These attention-seeking behaviors don't really disappear as the child grows up unless they try to change them. Instead, they continue to evolve and the child eventually becomes an anxious-preoccupied adult.

THE ANXIOUS-PREOCCUPIED ADULT

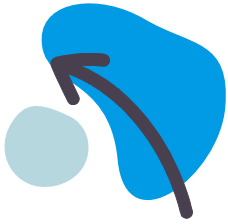
Anxious-preoccupied adults tend to be anxious, insecure, and distrusting in their romantic relationships. What's more, they might resort to behaving in a way that they know will get the emotional responses that they want from their partner **(they learned this from the attention-seeking behavior that they used with their caregiver as a child).**

Deep down, an anxious-preoccupied adult's worst fear is that of abandonment and rejection. So, they try to control it by staying close to their partner, but this often comes across as clingy and needy. What's more, due to their needs being met inconsistently as a child, they might act over-emotional at times and exhibit poor self-control because they never feel as important and valuable as their partner.

What this behavior burns down to, is that people with this attachment style just want reassurance that they are loved.



Photo by Taylor Deas Melesh on Unsplash



INSECURE ATTACHMENT: ANXIOUS-AVOIDANT/ AVOIDANT-DISMISSIVE

[reminder - the following terms are in line with the original terminologies and do not reflect our opinions]

THE “REJECTING” MOTHER

There are, unfortunately, many reasons why a caregiver might act dismissive towards her child.

They might be unaware that they are reenacting their own childhood experiences of being held at an emotional-arms-length. Thus, being unfamiliar with physical intimacy, they might be unsure how to act warm and physically affectionate towards their child.

Because “rejecting” caregivers might be out-of-tune with their child’s needs, they may misinterpret their signals, which could cause them to ignore them, react to them with apathy, annoyance, or helplessness, and - in more severe cases - anger.

It’s not that these caregivers don’t try to protect their children - they do. They might just protect them in the way that they think is right; “*Be brave, be strong, and then you’ll survive.*” They might be trying to toughen their child up in preparation for how harsh the world can be. Remember, “rejecting” caregivers were probably not soothed themselves as children. Their own cries possibly triggered avoidance, annoyance, or aggression from their caregivers, and as a result, a cycle of dismissive behavior was born. This pattern of behaviors can result in a *defensive* child.



THE “DEFENSIVE” CHILD

It’s difficult for a child to cope with a caregiver who seems unavailable; they end up feeling empty because their needs weren’t met and they might even become ashamed or embarrassed about expressing their feelings.

The child’s survival instincts often end up kicking in and they shut down emotionally; just so that they can feel like everything in their world is OK.

Whereas a **secure child’s** aim is to explore their environment while staying close to their caregiver, and an **ambivalent child’s** focus is to keep their caregiver close, the **avoidant child** acts like they don’t need them, and even tries to keep them from getting too close. They explore a lot, don’t seem afraid of anything, and can even put themselves in dangerous situations (for example approaching strangers). Yet they also do not want their caregiver to leave entirely because then they would be left feeling unprotected. This often creates conflicted feelings towards them.

The way that an avoidant child’s needs were left unmet can lead to unresolved emotional issues, and, in time, they may end up becoming an **avoidant-dismissive adult**.



THE AVOIDANT-DISMISSIVE ADULT

An avoidant-dismissive adult can be quite uncomfortable with displays of intimacy; they weren't given affection in the way that they needed as a child, and their attempts at showing it were often not received adequately. The avoidant adult also may have limited access to their emotions and early memories. They might have inconsistencies between what they imagine was an ideal childhood, but also a lack of real-life examples.

Therefore, avoidant-dismissive adults might not have a solid basis for understanding a healthy relationship. At a young age, they were taught that they could only rely on themselves, so as adults they are typically fiercely independent and may spend a lot of time focusing on their career and personal interests. Depending on someone else might make them feel uneasy and they may show a lack of trust in a romantic partner.

Underneath the surface, though, avoidant-dismissive adults just want to feel loved but don't know how to deal with this uncomfortable feeling.

Because displays of emotion weren't encouraged when they were children, they now try to hide their need for affection by shutting down emotionally. They have learned not to trust others and to expect knock-backs, so they work hard to avoid being vulnerable.



INSECURE ATTACHMENT: FEARFUL-AVOIDANT/ DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT

[reminder - the following terms are in line with the original terminologies and do not reflect our opinions]

THE “FRIGHTENING” MOTHER

Caregivers of disorganized children may have been disorganized themselves and did not adapt to their child’s needs. In stressful situations they might have struggled to protect their child, or they may have reacted with fear or anxiety. **To a small child, they might have appeared frightening and bizarre.** In the worst-case scenarios, some children might have experienced abuse or mistreatment from the person that was supposed to take care of them. This would have been traumatic and may have resulted in a **chaotic** child.

THE “CHAOTIC” CHILD

A “chaotic” child doesn’t really have what every child should have - a safety net and security. Instead, their world is a scary place, and they might feel helpless in it.

These children may respond by behaving confusedly; they struggle to focus on small tasks, they’re constantly on edge, and they become impossible to comfort. Sometimes, they even start to mirror the dissociated behaviors of their caregiver and feel disconnected from who they are and the world around them.

It is, therefore, understandable why this lack of structure in a child's life could eventually lead to them becoming a **disorganized adult**.



Photo by Krakenimages on Unsplash

THE DISORGANIZED ADULT

Disorganized adults often have difficulties with day-to-day functioning. The confusion of their early years taught them to believe that they are not worthy of love and acceptance, so they now fear and expect to be abandoned by their loved ones.

Because of this fear, they act edgy and might struggle to manage their emotions. They can become easily overwhelmed, but at the same time try to protect their emotions by keeping the people in their life at arms-length.

Reflection

Some of the information that we have gone through in this section might feel upsetting or triggering to you. We encourage you to take a few minutes to tune-in to the feelings and emotions that you might be experiencing, as well as any changes that you notice within your body. Now is not the time for judgement, but instead a moment when you should be kind and understanding towards yourself.

1.5 Why Our Early Years Affect Who We Turn Out to Be

First of all, when we are born, we need our caregivers to survive. Instinctively, we know that they are our only chance to eat (and to not be eaten if we lived in the wild!), to keep warm, and to stay clean. Once these basic needs are met, we are eager and ready to learn. Our brains are like sponges to our environment and soak up everything that they possibly can.

For this reason, our early years are a crucial period for development as this is when the “wiring” and architecture of our brain is formed.

This wiring lays the foundation for our choices and functioning in later life.

Although there are a number of theories which discuss our early responses to our environment, we will briefly discuss the more salient ones to attachment theory.

THE INTERNAL WORKING MODEL

According to Bowlby, a child’s early experiences combine to create a certain way of seeing the world and the people in it. It could be seen as a filter through which they view their environment. This outlook also affects how someone might interact with others, including people that they know and new situations. Bowlby called this the *Internal Working Model*.

As a simplified description, someone’s internal working model of the world, themselves, and others, is guided by the memories and expectations that they developed in their early years.



Thus, they expect others to “fit” with their understanding of the world. For example, as the primary caregiver is the prototype for future relationships according to the internal working model, if a child has a secure attachment to their caregiver then they expect that most people are trustworthy and reliable. However, if a child has an insecure attachment to their caregiver, then they may see others as unreliable.

What’s more, there are three main features of this model which guide how someone responds to others in their environment:

- A. How you see others as trustworthy**
- B. How you see yourself as valuable**
- C. How you see yourself as you interact socially with others**

THE ROLE OF NATURE VERSUS NURTURE

In the field of psychology, it would be safe to say that the argument of *nature versus nurture* is prevalent when it comes to their impact on human development and relationships. Many psychologists with a developmental influence would say that nurture - or our environment - has the biggest effect on how we turn out, but then many with a more biological influence would counteract this argument by claiming that certain elements of nature, such as evolutionary factors, impart the larger effect. However, the rising field of Epigenetics attempts to marry these two separate fields of thought and demonstrate how consideration of how both nature and nurture interact with each other can provide us with a more thorough understanding of how we develop in the way that we do.



WHAT IS EPIGENETICS?

Epigenetics is the study of how our behavior and environment interact to cause changes that affect the way that our genes work. Essentially, it studies changes to our DNA that aren't inherited through our genetics. The role of *nature* in epigenetics is whether or not a gene is expressed (active) or not (dormant). The role of *nurture* in epigenetics is when environmental influences cause a gene to be "turned on or off." Simplified, epigenetics is the study of the biological influences that switch our genes on and off, and in turn, affect how we develop. It hammers home just how much influence *nurture*, our environment, has over *nature*, our genetics.

Let's have a look at *The Skinny Brown Mouse study*. At Duke University in 2007, a group of scientists were interested in examining their theory around epigenetics using a set of fat yellow mice. As is typical with genetics, these fat yellow mice gave birth to little fat yellow mice, and this cycle continued because they had a specific "chubby yellow gene." However, when the scientists fed the treatment group of mice a different diet to the control mice, the fat yellow mice started to give birth to skinny brown mice! When examining the DNA structure of these mice, the scientists found that the "chubby yellow gene" was still present, but the way that the gene expressed itself was gone! In other words, the gene was suppressed and its characteristics no longer showed up in the mice.

Here's where epigenetics and attachment theory connect - whereas *The Skinny Brown Mouse study* showed that environment can affect DNA in utero, there have been subsequent studies that demonstrate that epigenetic changes can also occur **after birth**. In a study by Meaney and Szyf (2005), the researchers showed that baby rats who received differing amounts of affection from their mothers ended up developing strikingly different temperaments; the ones who received more attention were more sociable, less stressed, and more relaxed than their less-attended peers. The researchers, wondering whether this was merely hereditary, switched out the baby rats from the attentive mother-rats to the non-attentive mother-rats, but still, the results showed that the baby rats who received the most attention grew up to be better adjusted and with stronger social skills. What's more, as the field of epigenetics progressed, the same group of researchers showed

how humans suppress genes in the same way – using post-mortem brain tissue from people who had experienced trauma as children - demonstrating that we too can alter our DNA based on our experiences. You can find out more about this fascinating study at the website [Lick Your Rats](#).

The parallels between these studies and the development of an attachment style seem somewhat undeniable – **both demonstrate how the infant-caregiver bond affects the development of emotional stability, feelings of security, and the success of future relationships**. Therefore, the studies suggest that attachment styles are the consequence of epigenetic influence on our genes as a result of our caregiver's parenting style. Fortunately, we as human beings are a little more advanced emotionally and psychologically than rats, so we have the ability to change the way our early years molded our development...

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Current epigenetic research is looking into **reversing** the gene suppression associated with the development of insecure attachment styles. Whereas the gene suppressing effects of social interactions are strongest during our early years, we can still suppress genes at all stages of life. Consider, for example, the development of a secure attachment style; the child's environment was deemed safe by their epigenetic mechanisms, therefore their brain is sculpted to trust people and believe that they are worthy of affection and attention. On the contrary, someone with an insecure attachment might have experienced an inconsistent early environment, so they adapt to survive in an environment

that they don't trust - they put up defence mechanisms such as becoming clingy or detached because they see others as being untrustworthy.

Therefore, in order to try and reverse an attachment style, it is important to retrain the brain into seeing others as reliable by breaking through defensive barriers and encouraging someone to engage socially.

This means that through taking the correct steps, such as effective therapy, you can change your attachment style and develop the ability to initiate and maintain healthy relationships. In childhood, this can be done by involving a child in experiences that retrains their attachment style, such as modeling open and encouraging behavior to a child that is mistrustful of others. The process is similar in adults, but it requires more intensive retraining to “unlearn” the old patterns of behavior. **However, techniques such as effective therapy, mindfulness, and group processes can all be used to promote change.**

Towards the end of this workbook, we will discuss the various forms of therapy (and other routes) that can help you to reverse the effects of an insecure attachment. The most suitable form of therapy will come down to what fits you best. Even if you're securely attached, you might find yourself in a relationship with an insecurely attached person - in this situation, it might be useful to know the appropriate forms of therapy for attachment issues, as well as the ones that are suitable for a couple.





1.6 RECAP

The *Strange Situation* experiment led to the formation of four attachment styles; **secure**, **anxious-ambivalent (anxious-preoccupied in adults)**, **anxious-avoidant (avoidant-dismissive in adults)**, and **fearful-avoidant (disorganized in adults)**.

Securely attached adults tend to have grown up with a caregiver that was readily available and sensitive to their needs. As a result, they feel safe and loved and develop a sense of independence. As a secure adult, they have a positive outlook of themselves and others and they are comfortable allowing another person to become emotionally close to them.

An **anxious-preoccupied adult** would have been an **anxious-ambivalent child**. Their caregivers might have been inconsistent in how they met their needs. This might lead the child to feel confused about how their caregiver will respond to them, so they may focus on maintaining physical proximity. They might also engage in attention-seeking behaviours. As an adult, they typically fear abandonment, so they seek constant reassurance that they are loved through their actions.

An **avoidant-dismissive adult** would have been an **anxious-avoidant child**. They might have seen their caregiver as unavailable and were possibly discouraged from expressing their feelings, so they shut down emotionally. As an adult, they might have difficulty trusting others and believe that they can only rely on themselves. They want to feel loved, but hide their affection because they fear rejection and don't want to be seen as vulnerable.

Disorganized adults might have grown up in an environment which seemed “scary” to them, and with caregivers that were often a source of both love and fear. They often expect to be abandoned by those they love and as a result, they may experience extremes in emotions. They might try to protect themselves from others by keeping them at a distance.

The Internal Working Model of behavior suggests that our early experiences (such as attachment with caregivers) affects how we interact with others and our environment.

Epigenetics suggests that attachment styles are the result of **epigenetic influence** on our genes as a result of our caregiver’s parenting style.



Further Information

If you would like to understand more about what happens inside our brains when we feel that we're accepted or rejected by someone we love – then you can! Fortunately, **through studies of the brain, we can understand how our early attachment shapes us; why some of us find relationships pretty easy, but also why some of us struggle to communicate with the people that we love, and relationships end up falling apart.** It's a bit detailed, so it might not be everyone's cup of tea – that's why we put it to the back in the Neuroscience Appendix!



CHAPTER II

Your Attachment Style



Intro

By this stage you likely have an understanding about how attachment theory developed. Now we come to the important part – how attachment theory relates to **you**. What is your attachment style and what does it mean?

Remember, each of the four attachment styles has its own traits and characteristics and most people won't fit into each attachment style (or profile) perfectly. And that's ok – after all, only you have lived through the unique experiences of your life. There is only one you.

But this isn't about categorizing you, instead it's about giving you the opportunity to examine the way you think and act and how they might be linked to your attachment style.

Through knowledge and practice, you will eventually be able to identify any negative thoughts and unhealthy behaviors that you might have, as well as the steps that you could take towards happier relationships and a more fulfilled love life.

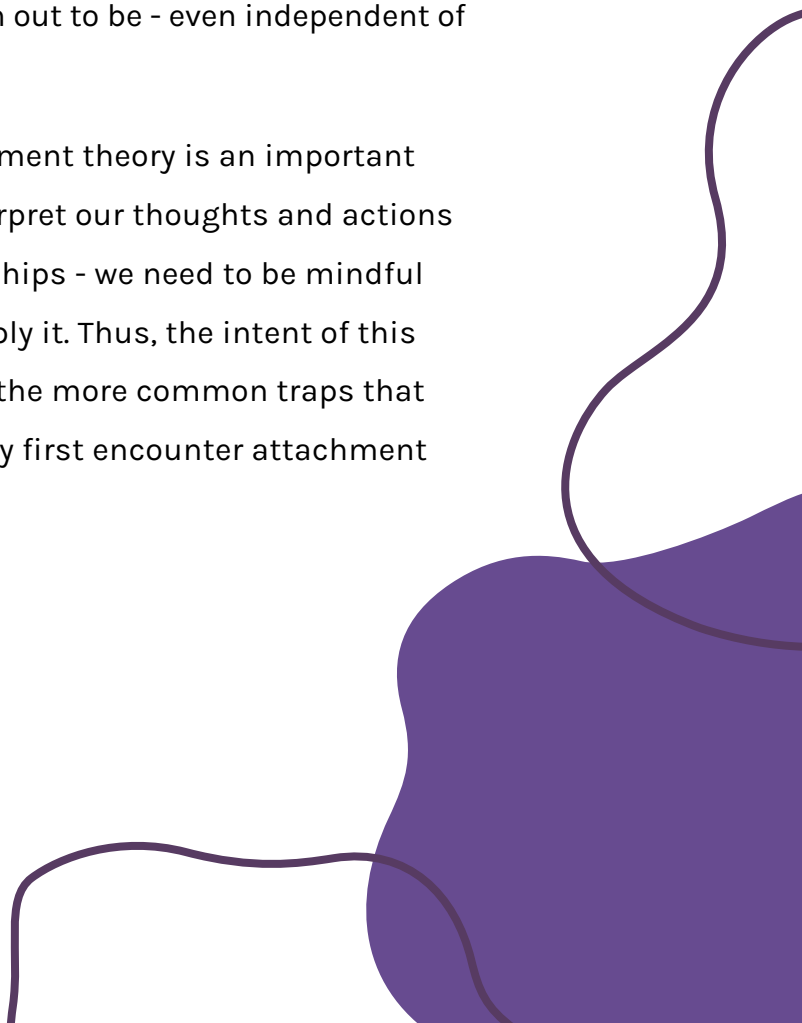
To begin, let's take a look at what you should avoid when first discovering attachment theory and how now not every relationship is an attachment relationship.

What to Avoid When Discovering Your Attachment Style

In recent years, due to an insurgence of interest in positive psychology and the concurrent drive to understand ourselves, many of us have personally identified with the ideas of attachment theory. Perhaps this interest is because we all experience relationship or family issues at some point in our lives, making attachment theory a highly relatable and accessible concept. After all, what if it can provide the much-desired answers to the social, relational, or romantic challenges that we face regularly?

For some of us, attachment theory may be somewhat of a holy grail of answers to persistent behavioral problems. However, it is essential to recognize that attachment issues are not the only factor that can affect our personal development. Social class, gender, ethnicity, and culture are but a few factors that can profoundly influence who we turn out to be - even independent of our attachment bonds.

For this reason, although attachment theory is an important premise that can help us to interpret our thoughts and actions - especially in intimate relationships - we need to be mindful of how we both interpret and apply it. Thus, the intent of this section is to help you recognize the more common traps that people tend to fall into when they first encounter attachment theory and how to avoid them.



MISINTERPRETING OUR ISSUES

We all experience difficulties in our relationships at some point in our lives - to expect otherwise would be folly. We might argue with our partner, feel frustrated that we're not being listened to, misunderstood, under-appreciated, or even outright unhappy in a relationship.

Yet, no relationship is perfect, and nor are the people within it. Just because you have encountered problems in this area in the past does not necessarily mean that you have an attachment problem.

Have you ever heard of a term called *confirmation bias*? It is a tendency to interpret or recall information in a way that supports our views. Whereas confirmation bias is typically associated with preexisting beliefs, it is particularly strongly associated with new concepts that support a desired outcome - especially emotionally charged issues like attachment theory.

Therefore, it might be easy to interpret your life and experiences according to the parameters of attachment theory because it may provide answers to problems that have been plaguing you for a long time. Yet, only one in three people have an insecure attachment style. So, before you jump to the conclusion that you are that one person, try to carefully consider your quiz results and the information contained within this book.



BLAMING OUR CAREGIVER(S)

If you do turn out to have attachment issues, it might not be the best idea to rush into allocating blame to your caregiver(s).

It would certainly be tempting and understanding to place accountability on our caregiver(s) shoulders; doing so can help us shift from self-blame for our actions and explain why we think and act the way we do. What's more, it can help to alleviate psychological distress and validate our feelings.

However, even though blaming our parents can verify our feelings, it is important to understand that if you try to examine your childhood for exactly how your parents rejected or neglected you, you're probably not going to get the answers you're looking for. Attachment styles are typically about the quality of a child's relationship with their caregiver(s), not about what the caregiver(s) said or did. An attachment style is formed based on how caregiver(s) meet a child's needs, and especially around how the child felt like they did.

Behavior is typically learned, so your caregiver(s) may parent in the way that they themselves were parented. However, in the same way that habits can be learned, they can also be unlearned. It may take understanding, effort, and often outside help - but it can be done! Plus, having an insecure attachment style doesn't necessarily mean that your childhood was bad or that your parents didn't take good care of you - they might have done their best considering their personal circumstances.

What's more, ongoing research on attachment and family dynamics shows that focusing on blame without healing the relationship can actually worsen the relationship with the nuclear family, the extended family, and the individual's mental health. So although blame might work for the short term, it probably isn't a good long-term strategy.

BLACK AND WHITE THINKING

It is best to avoid extreme forms of thinking when classifying the attachment styles. This is because attachment could be considered as a spectrum on which people's life experiences can affect where they fall at a current point in time.

Furthermore, continued research into attachment theory suggests that there are two fundamental attachment dimensions: an anxious dimension and an avoidant dimension. Someone can fall highly on either the avoidant or anxious dimensions, and therefore display behaviors typical of either of these attachment styles. However, disorganized attachers typically vacillate between these two dimensions according to their mood and circumstances, and secure attachers usually fall on the low end of either dimension.

Movement through these dimensions can be fluid depending on an individual's current circumstances.

Another way to classify attachment styles is by holding one hand up in front of you, with your fingers straightened. Your hand is now the zone of secure attachment.

Your middle finger represents the highest level of secure attachment - there are no traits of anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment styles present in this level.

The more you move away from your middle finger towards your pinkie finger and thumb, the further away you move from the highest level of secure attachment. However, you're still within the zone of secure attachment. Therefore, it is possible to have traits of an insecure attachment style and still be securely attached.

If we were able to physically add three more fingers on either side of your hand, then we would be adding the two insecure styles of anxious and avoidant. Similar to the dimensions of attachment,

there are different levels of severity for how people fall within these insecure styles; each finger represents how close an insecure individual falls within the secure zone.

What we are trying to demonstrate here, is that attachment styles are not all or nothing. You don't just have it or not. You can manifest traits of a couple of different attachment styles, and that is the beauty of what makes us all individual and unique.

CONSIDER THE OTHER FACTORS THAT AFFECT WHO YOU ARE

Attachment theory deals with the forgotten period of our development - this is because attachment is pre-cognitive. What we refer to as "memory" doesn't typically develop until we are able to talk and communicate. Yet, our formative experiences clearly have an impact on who we turn out to be. This influence is because attachment is a felt-sense; because it occurred before we had explicit cognitions, it formed on what we innately felt inside.

Thus, if you are insecurely attached, then you are acting based on feelings that you are likely not even aware of.

Attachment lives in the heart, not in the head.

However, suppose you are experiencing anxious or maladaptive thoughts based on a clear flow of thoughts rather than on a feeling that you struggle to describe or understand. In that case, you may not have an insecure-anxious attachment style. In a circumstance such as this, you may have other developmental issues - such as Early Maladaptive Schema - which may be affecting your anxious thoughts or actions.

LABELING OTHERS

Did you know that Russians have two distinct words for the color blue? One word describes that spectrum of light blues, and the other, the darker blues. Whereas the English language only has one term to describe blue, native Russian speakers can more quickly distinguish between the two distinct tones because they have separate labels. They understand why it is important not to lump them into one reductive category.

Labeling isn't always a bad thing; we often use it to simplify and resolve the complex environment we regularly struggle to maneuver. However, although it might be tempting for you to categorize or label the people in your life according to your new knowledge of attachment theory - placing them into one of the four attachment styles - it may be unhelpful and unhealthy to do so.

Attachment theory and its subsequent styles were developed in a clinical and standardized setting. Thus, it cannot account for people's unique circumstances and individual traits. Therefore, even though you may have read a lot about it and you understand its concepts quite well, you shouldn't make assumptions about the attachment styles of those around you. It is probably both tempting and understanding to do so - just don't expect to be right!

Even though labeling can be useful, keeping an open mind towards other people and their behaviors can allow you to experience them without bias and experience them for how much they have to offer.

Labels shape our perceptions of other people and how we react towards them; a person is always more than the sum of their attachment traits.

If you do suspect that someone close to you has a particular attachment style - or are concerned about their behavior - then try sharing your enthusiasm for the area and knowledge of your own attachment style. You could also encourage them to become acquainted with the area or see an attachment professional if your concerns are acute.

TRY NOT TO FOCUS ON THE NEGATIVE

In general, we are hardwired to focus more on negative information than positive. This is because negative events tend to have a more significant impact on our brains - an effect called the *negativity bias*. This tendency can have a powerful effect on how we view our world, the people in it, and how we respond to them.

Thus, even though your attachment style is associated with positive traits, and these traits may determine how you interpret your attachment style and its influence on your life, it's essential to understand that you may also be hardwired to focus on your attachment style's negative attributes.

For example, someone with an anxious attachment might be a highly caring and nurturing person by nature. However, finding out that they have an anxious attachment may cause them to focus on how much they have self-sacrificed for other people and create feelings of resentment towards them.

Some of the characteristics of the insecure attachment styles can be viewed and utilized as positive qualities - but, first, it is necessary to not focus on them as purely negative attributes. There are sections and exercises throughout this workbook that can help you to focus on the superpowers of your attachment style.

DON'T TAKE YOUR SELF-DIAGNOSIS TOO SERIOUSLY

The fact that you are reading this workbook right now demonstrates that you have a vested interest in attachment theory - and you may even have one of the insecure attachment styles. However, there is a condition called medical-student syndrome or psychology-student syndrome in which students manifest the symptoms of the condition they are studying. The power of suggestion is very potent, and we want you to be conscious of this while reading this book.

Try not to take your attachment style self-diagnosis too seriously; professionals in the area have spent many years undergoing training in attachment assessment and interventions. It's great that you are interested in this area; your attachment results may help explain why you might think and act the way you do. However, it is important not to overly rely on this self-diagnosis. If you have concerns about your thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as how they may be impacting your quality of life, then it is important that you speak to a medical professional for an accurate diagnosis and guidelines for progress or change.

KEEP YOUR EXPECTATIONS REALISTIC

Lastly, try to keep your expectations regarding healing any potential attachment issues grounded in a reality that works for you.

When you have realistic expectations, you can avoid disappointment, frustration, and anger. Healthy goals can help you focus on what you need to do to make improvements in your life, but you may need further help when attempting to establish them. On the other hand, unrealistic expectations can prevent you from making an effective coping plan.

Treatment cannot be substituted by knowledge alone.

Most sources that you encounter online offer information, not treatment, so if you really want/need to start a process of change, it may be necessary to discuss your concerns with a professional in the area.

TO CONCLUDE:

In summary, attachment theory is likely more complicated than it first appears. Although it offers valuable insight into human development and patterns of behavior, it is important to apply this insight to your life with caution. Having said this, we hope that you enjoy all this book has to offer and that it helps you recognize and understand how your formative years can impact your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Knowledge is power, but it isn't a cure.



Keep in Mind: Our Attachment Styles Affect How We Act in Relationships - But Not Every Relationship!

So far, we have covered how an attachment bond forms between a child and their caregiver(s). What's more, we will soon discuss how the quality of this bond can further affect the other relationships in an individual's life as they mature and develop - such as friendships, workplace dynamics, and especially romantic relationships.

But first, it is essential to acknowledge that although our attachment style can influence how we feel and react in relationships, it does not affect how we behave in all of our relationships. **Not every relationship is an attachment relationship.** Let's examine why:

THE BEHAVIORAL PURPOSE OF THE ATTACHMENT SYSTEM

The attachment system functions as a means for us to get the support and security that we need from the important others in our lives. As we now know, this system is activated when a child perceives a threat to their well-being and senses that their needs are not being met by their caregiver - or attachment figure - during their formative years. When the child perceives an attachment figure as not readily available or responsive to the child, seeking proximity to them fails to alleviate distress, and they don't establish a sense of security. As a result, there is a rupture to the attachment bond, and thus, the child experiences feelings of intense distress.

HOW CAN WE DEFINE AN ATTACHMENT FIGURE?

Naturally, the most common form of an attachment figure is the caregiver(s) with whom we spent the majority of the formative period of our lives. However, our primary caregiver(s) are not the only attachment figure(s) we will have throughout our lives. As children, we can form an attachment bond with a grandparent, an older sibling, a babysitter, or a kindergarten teacher - essentially anyone close to us.

As we grow up, our attachment needs typically evolve and change. Our childhood attachment figures - although often still relevant and important to us - can no longer meet our needs in the manner that we require. Thus, we begin to search for other people who can fulfill our matured attachment needs - usually romantic partners. However, attachment figures don't just have to be romantic partners - they could be a best friend, an employer, or even a religious symbolic figure (such as God). **An attachment figure is any individual to whom we turn for protection or support when we need it.**

Research has shown that the following three traits are characteristic of an attachment figure:

- 1. An attachment figure is someone that we rely on for comfort and soothing during troublesome periods or times of need.**
- 2. During difficult times, an attachment figure provides us with the necessary comfort, protection, support, and relief from what is bothering us. They make us feel safe.**
- 3. Finally, the attachment figure helps us feel safe enough to conquer what is bothering us. They are our secure base from which we can explore goals that aren't related to our attachment needs, and we can turn to them for support if things don't work out.**

Whereas these three attachment figure traits serve to fulfill a need or positive function, attachment figures are also usually associated with a more maladaptive trait: when we are separated from our attachment figure in undesirable ways - real or perceived - we typically experience significant distress, or “separation distress.”

When separation distress occurs, we (even as adults) attempt to restore proximity through protest behaviors such as crying and searching for the attachment figure. If these attempts fail, then we may spiral into feelings of intense anguish, anxiety, and depression. Separation distress typically occurs only in our relationships with our attachment figures - and not in all relationships.

But why do some relationships elicit separation distress and not others?

This distinction occurs because we are able to form two **different forms of relationships** that cater to our **different requirements: attachment relationships** and **affiliative relationships**.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ATTACHMENT AND AFFILIATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

During attachment theory’s conceptualization, Bowlby proposed that we have two separate innate behavioral systems - the attachment system (which we just discussed) and the *affiliation system*. The types of relationships that we form based on these innate systems differ in the following ways:

- The attachment system serves to restore emotional balance and establish a sense of security whenever we feel distressed or need to re-establish closeness with an attachment figure. In contrast, the affiliative system is more concerned with forming cooperative relationships. Therefore, the affiliative relationship focuses on connectedness, mutualism, and reciprocity. Essentially, an affiliative relationship is one in which both partners contribute equally to the partnership, have fun, share ideas, and enjoy time together.
- Attachment relationships are specific to an attachment figure. When we feel distressed or insecure, we turn to a specific attachment figure for support because this relationship has developed over time - there is a unique attachment bond. We might seek contact with this person because of a certain need and attempting to replace them with someone else wouldn't replace the need for the particular attachment figure. In contrast, affiliative relationships are non-specific and less exclusive; we can have many of them consisting of varying lengths.
- Because it takes a relatively long time to form an attachment bond, attachment relationships are typically ardent and persistent over time. As a result, when such relationships end, the people involved in them often experience acute pain and anguish. On the other hand, affiliation relationships can be laid back and short-term.
- Attachment interactions are associated with times of need; therefore, these relationships are characterized by intense emotions, as well as a sensitivity to the attachment figure's emotions. This emotion is typically love - in both child and adult attachment relationships - but can also include the

associated feelings of anger, anxiety, distress, and fear when the individual perceives that the relationship is threatened. In contrast, affiliation relationships are associated with lighter, less intense emotions as these interactions usually occur during fun occasions.

AFFILIATIVE ACTIONS WITHIN AN ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIP

Although attachment and affiliation relationships have fundamental differences, this does not mean they are mutually exclusive. Similar to how not every relationship is an attachment relationship, nor is every action taken around an attachment figure intended to fulfill an attachment function. For example, we may choose to go for a walk with our caregivers, watch a movie with our partners, or play a board game with our siblings, and not expect them to cater to an emotional need.

Sometimes we hang out with someone we have an attachment bond with simply because we want to!

Often, if there aren't any unmet emotional needs or fear of abandonment within an attachment relationship, then attachment issues may never arise within the pairing in the first place. Instead, the relationship is able to function adaptively and reciprocally; both partners can enjoy each other's company and explore their world together without fear of separation or abandonment.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair looking through horizontal window blinds. Her hand is partially visible near her face, and she has a thoughtful expression. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window. A purple decorative shape is in the top right corner.

Your Attachment Style

Photo by Joshua Rawson Harris on Unsplash

Whether you have a secure or insecure attachment style, some of the concepts of attachment theory might feel a little overwhelming in light of the information discussed in Chapter One. You may be concerned that if you have an insecure attachment style - or even just some insecure traits - that you're doomed when it comes to relationships!

Fear not. This is absolutely not the case. One-third of the entire world population has an insecure attachment style (even more, according to our data), and the majority of these people are able to lead happy and fulfilling relationships.

An insecure attachment, or the presence of insecure attachment traits, is not a life sentence. Through understanding, self-reflection, and sometimes outside help, you can take the steps towards more satisfying relationships, personal life, and parenting style. Even a secure attachment can benefit from increased knowledge of why they function the way they do within the domains of their life!

I.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

An insecure attachment style can develop when a child's needs are repeatedly not met – this isn't just a once-in-a-while occurrence but, instead, a caregiver's regular pattern of behavior. More often than not, the child doesn't get what they need. Thus, they learn that this is just the way things are and not to expect differently.

Let's take a moment to appreciate that an attachment style doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the type of people that caregiver(s) are. Instead, attachment is formed around the quality of the relationship between a child and its caregiver(s). For example, if someone has an insecure attachment style, it doesn't mean that their caregiver(s) deliberately did something wrong to them when they were young. Instead, it means that the bond that these caregivers made with their child in their formative years didn't fully satisfy their emotional needs for whatever reason.

If you have an insecure attachment style, the chances are that right now, you're probably racking your brain trying to figure it all out. You might be thinking: *"If my caregiver(s) didn't deliberately do anything wrong, then what happened during my childhood that caused me to think and act the way I do?!"*

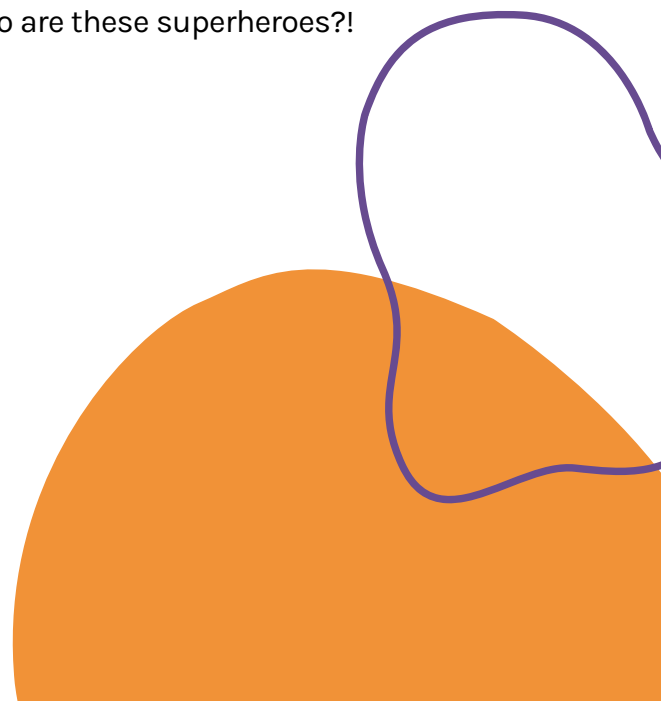
You, and your experiences, are unique. And since we don't have a crystal ball into your childhood, we can't tell you exactly what happened. However, what we can tell you is how each attachment style typically forms - this may help you place your childhood in context and aid you in making sense of some of your thoughts and actions.

Thus, the upcoming chapters will discuss the anxious, avoidant, disorganized, and secure attachment styles in more detail.

However, first, let's consider the steps that caregiver(s) take when raising a securely attached child. After all, sometimes, the best route to understanding our own attachment style is to appreciate the conditions of the ideal attachment form - even if you're securely attached.

How Do Parents Raise Securely Attached Children?

By this stage, you're likely aware of the type of parenting that leads to insecure attachment in children, but what about the actions that caregivers take to raise secure children? Who are these superheroes?!



We'll start by addressing the above myth; parents who raise securely attached children are not superheroes. Nor are they perfect - it's impossible to be a flawless parent 24/7. Whether it's picking your child up an hour late from nursery or leaving them unattended for a few moments with your friend's cherished flatscreen TV - everyone makes mistakes. It's inevitable.

Still, two out of three people are securely attached, which means that two-thirds of our caregivers managed to raise secure children. It can't just be by chance, so how did they do it?

As much as many caregivers would love to claim it, they did not graduate from some "Academy of Stellar Parenting." And most probably didn't consult any parenting books or psychologists in order to become masters of the skill. It just boils down to the fact that most of our caregivers are securely attached adults themselves, so it's intuitive to them to know what they're doing.

Essentially, these caregivers *just knew* how to respond to their children's needs. For those of us who need a little more explanation, here's how they did it.

THE FIVE CONDITIONS FOR SECURE ATTACHMENT

There are five primary conditions for secure attachment (Brown & Elliott, 2016). Ideally, caregivers should aim to fulfill all of them.

1.

THE CHILD FEELS SAFE

Caregivers who raise secure children do their best to make sure that their little bundles are protected. They understand that their children are not made of glass, but they also want them to know that if they are scared or hurt that they are close by. They understand that if their children feel protected, then they feel safe.

For an infant or toddler, a caregiver is their source of safety. Their presence means food, warmth, and protection. If they become separated, then the child understands that these resources are no longer available – distance from their caregiver means danger!

A caregiver is sensitive to their child's wants and needs, but they don't want to smother them with constant attention; a child needs room to breathe and grow. They need to have the freedom to explore their world and blossom into the individual that they are supposed to be. A caregiver enables this by staying close to the child so that they can still feel their comforting presence and know that they are safe.

For example, a child might wander a little more than they realize, only to encounter something that frightens them on their journey – but never fear! Their caregiver is watching from nearby, so they're there to envelop the child in a warm, protective embrace.

Through hugs and kisses, they are telling their little one, “You are safe. You are loved. You are loveable.”

2.

THE CHILD FEELS SEEN AND KNOWN

When a child knows that their caregivers see and understand their needs, then these caregivers are attuned. Attuned caregivers read their baby's cues accurately and respond appropriately. For example, when a child cries and gestures towards their caregiver, they understand that this is their way of communicating that they want to be cuddled, so they pick them up and say, "Oh, does my little one want cuddles?" In this case, the caregiver is tuned-in to their child's needs.

Children of tuned-in caregivers learn that when they need something, that it will be given to them. This feeling of reliability gives them a sense of control over their lives.

Even very early on, the child will learn, "If I signal that I'm hungry, I get fed; If I signal that I'm tired, I am rocked to sleep."

3.

THE CHILD IS COMFORTED

Attuned caregivers are open, warm, and inviting. If something frightening happens, their children know that their caregiver's cuddles will soothe away any feelings of sadness and distress, and eventually, they will be calm and ready to explore again.

The child learns that anytime they are scared or hurt, that this is the routine to make them feel better.

Over time, as the child grows up a little, they develop the skills to manage their own upsets and will eventually learn how to self-soothe.

4. THE CHILD FEELS VALUED

Feeling valued is the foundation for the development of healthy self-esteem.

The process of feeling valued starts in infancy and continues throughout childhood as caregivers continue to express their joy about who the child is as a person, rather than what the child achieves. These caregivers focus on being rather than doing.

These caregivers openly **express delight** to their children about pretty much everything they do, which allows them to develop a sense of worth. They focus on the joys of parenting rather than the chores.

5. THE CHILD FEELS SUPPORT FOR BEING THEIR BEST SELF

Children need to feel supported and encouraged to explore their world joyfully and safely.

To be able to do this, a caregiver needs to have a deep faith in their child's ability, as well as provide them with a constant safety net. Although they are so immersed in their child's life, they still need to be able to give them the space to grow and allow them to develop a sense of independence.

Knowing that Mom or Dad is nearby and won't allow them to come to harm enables the child to explore, discover, succeed, and, inevitably, fail.

Through these little personal journeys of exploration, the child develops a strong, unique, and identifiable sense of self.



Photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

CHAPTER III

The Anxious Attachment Style






Photo by Kyle Nieber on Unsplash

The Anxious Attachment Style



The anxious/preoccupied attachment style (referred to as *ambivalent* in children), is usually formed in the first eighteen months of a baby's life, as a response to the relationship with their caregivers.

How we interpret our childhood can help us to understand how our attachment style developed. If you would like some support  in finding or thinking of your early memories, then the Early Childhood Experience exercise may help.

Although the roots of the anxious attachment style are based in **perceived neglect**, it is essential to understand that the child's caregivers likely did not purposely neglect the child, but instead that the child understood how they acted as not meeting their needs.

There might be many reasons for why the child sees their caregiver's actions this way, but it usually comes down to **inconsistent parenting** - this means that they could be supportive and attentive to their child's needs at times, but on other occasions, they didn't connect with what their child wanted.

For example, sometimes they might run to the child's crib to soothe them when they were upset, but other times they might have decided that the child should cry it out and self-soothe.

This form of inconsistency makes it very hard for the child to make sense of their caregiver's actions.

Basically, what we're left with is a perplexed child. When their caregivers are attentive, the child's world is full and warm, so they feel safe and satisfied. However, they don't know when the tables will turn, and their caregivers will stop being attentive to their needs.

For example, perhaps their caregiver is going away for a few days, and the child responds to this news by becoming clingy and tearful - the child has an emotional need for comfort because they're going to miss their caregiver. What they want is a cuddle and to be reassured that everything is okay. Their caregiver will be home before they know it.

However, what if the caregiver doesn't read the way their child behaves as needing comfort but instead sees them as being attention-seeking? They might choose not to reinforce this "attention-seeking" behavior by ignoring the child or else by punishing them for it. This mismatch between what the child wants and their caregiver's response may cause them to think something along the lines of *"Well, my needs weren't met, so it must mean that I didn't try hard enough. If I keep trying and showing them what I want, then eventually, they'll understand and will take care of me like I need them to."*

Even though there are many reasons why a caregiver may not act in sync with their child's behaviors, one of the more popular theories for why is that they're attempting to feel emotionally nourished themselves.

Essentially, the caregiver is using the child to satisfy their own emotional needs.

What is your interpretation of inconsistent parenting? For help reflecting on this parenting style refer to the Inconsistent Parenting exercise in the workbook.

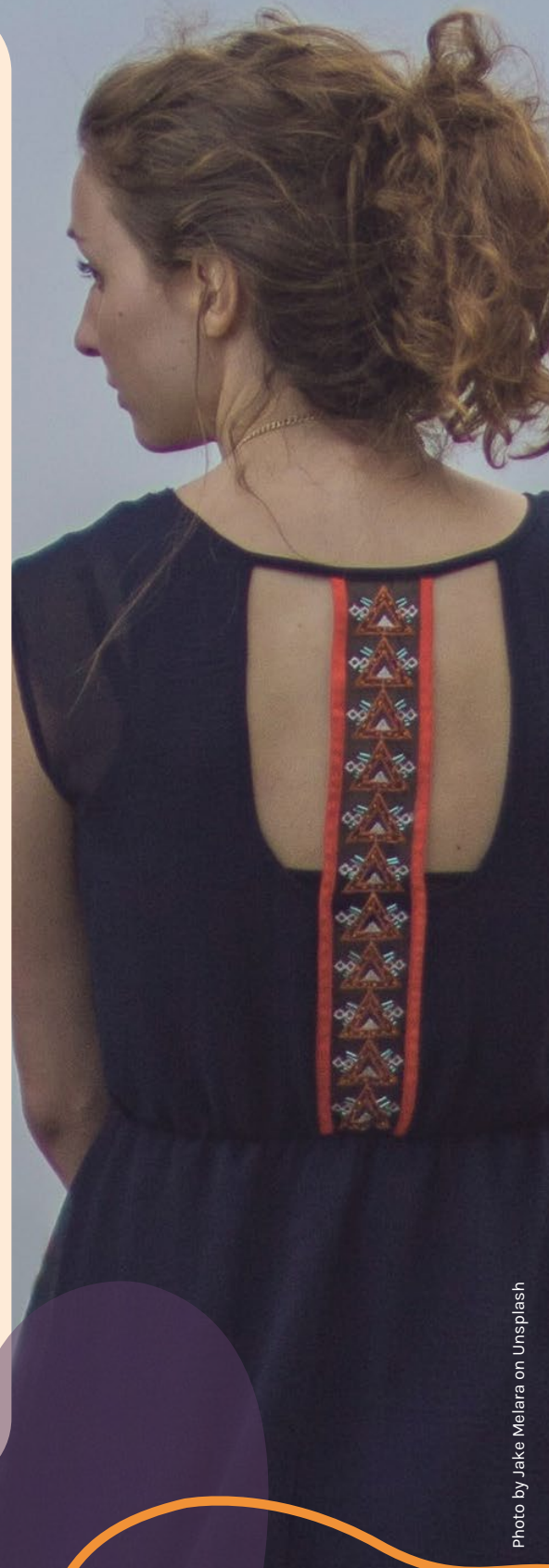


Penny, now 32 years old, grew up with her mother, Alicia. The two lived alone, although Alicia would often have guys stay over for the night. Penny didn't mind, as none of the guys ever stuck around for long or bothered her. In general, Penny had a good childhood.

Yet, growing up, Penny never really felt that her Mom's love was unconditional. There were days when Alicia would cuddle and show affection to her daughter for hours - during these times, Alicia would insist that Penny spend time with her, that they did things together, and that Penny didn't leave her alone.

But Penny became a teenager and started going out with her friends. Sometimes, Alicia was supportive, but at other times, when she felt low, she'd make Penny feel guilty for even leaving the house.

Penny started to notice that she was beginning to fill the parenting role - she spent a lot of her time taking care of her Mom, and when her mom needed a shoulder to cry on, Penny was always there for her. But whenever the tables were turned, and it was Penny who needed support, Alicia was rarely there. Penny noticed this, and it saddened her. She felt lonely. Like her Mom only loved her when she needed her.



Another reason for parenting inconsistently, such as in the above example, is that the caregivers are only supportive and attentive when someone is looking. In other words, they use their child to demonstrate "Look at me! See how great a caregiver I am?" to others. Again, as with Penny, the caregiver is attempting to ensure that their needs are met. Not as much attention is given to the child's. The situation is similar for Bobby, as you will see in the below example:

Bobby is the son of Eric and Dianne. His family is quite wealthy, as both parents spent many years building successful careers. Eric usually works late, so even though Dianne is particularly busy as the manager of a company, she's usually the one who takes care of Bobby.

Dianne always makes time for Bobby in her busy schedule. She goes to the most expensive stores and buys him the best clothes, she drives him to school every day, she bakes snacks every time Bobby goes to a party or a sleepover, and she organizes huge, over-the-top parties for Bobby's birthdays. See? Dianne's a great mom!

At least, that's what everyone on the outside-looking-in thinks. The truth is, when no one is there to see, Dianne rarely picks Bobby up when he cries. When he's distressed, she doesn't reassure him that everything is fine. She usually lets him cry it out in his room and relaxes with a book and a glass of wine.

In these examples, it might seem like Alicia and Dianne are bad caregivers. We instinctively dislike them – don't they just come across as insensitive, self-centered, and self-involved?! But, the reality is that Alicia and Dianne aren't bad people; they just have unmet needs of their own.

Not all examples of inconsistent parenting will sound like the ones above – every situation and person are different – but the reason why a caregiver might behave like this usually stems from how their own needs were met by their own caregiver when they were young. Therefore, it stands to reason that the parents of insecurely attached children may have an insecure attachment themselves.

In the above examples, both Alicia and Dianne were probably anxious/preoccupied adults. Bear in mind – this isn't genetics; it's about teaching children to behave how they themselves were taught.

Therefore, it's reasonable to assume that people usually end up raising their children the same way they were raised themselves, right?

Our emotions can be an excellent indicator of our deep level functioning. For help or guidance with recognizing your emotions,



refer to the Uncovering Your Emotions exercise in the workbook.



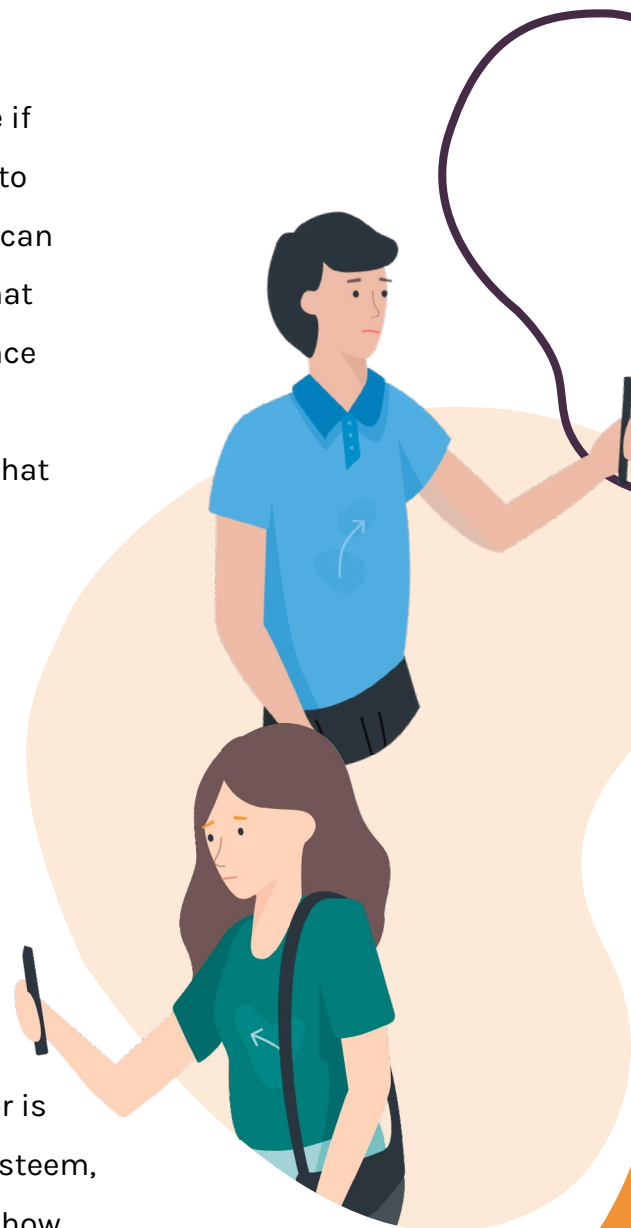
1.1 Anxious Attachment and Self-Development

By now, you're probably aware that securely attached adults have an overall positive view of themselves and other people's intentions towards them. Because their needs were met as a child, they consider themselves to be worthy of love, and they don't fear rejection. Essentially, they have healthy self-esteem.

On the contrary, having an insecure attachment style influences the formation of healthy self-esteem because if your needs weren't met as a child, then you might come to believe that your needs, and thus you, don't matter. This can cause people to repeatedly choose adult relationships that are unsatisfying to them. Thus, they continually experience romantic failure without truly understanding why. When relationships continue to fail, it can reinforce the belief that you are unworthy of love.

Some people with an insecure attachment may even subconsciously behave in a way that sabotages their relationship; hence, this cycle of unhealthy relationships and low self-esteem continues.

But this isn't all bad news! As you already know - our attachment styles are not set in stone, and, therefore, nor is our self-esteem. In this section, we'll discuss what self-esteem, sense of self, and sense of agency are before discussing how to use some self-development techniques to improve your outlook on yourself, your world, and how you fit into it.



SELF-ESTEEM AND ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT

Your self-esteem or self-worth is how you feel about yourself or the opinion that you have about yourself; it is how valuable and worthwhile that you believe yourself to be. Your levels of self-esteem are often due to your experiences, especially those from when you were a child; hence, your attachment style is closely linked to your self-esteem.

For guidance on figuring out whether you have healthy self-esteem, or if this is an aspect of yourself that you need to work on, refer to

 the Unveiling Your Sense of Self-Esteem exercise in the workbook.

Your levels of self-esteem are not related to how capable or successful you *actually* are – you could have an amazingly accomplished career, social life, or love life and still have low levels of self-esteem. Instead, self-esteem is more about how positive you feel about yourself and your life.

In a romantic relationship, because anxiously attached people think that they don't matter, they might tailor their behavior to fit with what they think a partner wants and is more likely to earn their approval. When someone responds positively to their modified behavior, it reinforces the belief that they need to act like someone else, so they continue to stifle their own needs in order to be loved.


As a result, this lowers their self-esteem because they're changing who they really are to be liked by someone else.

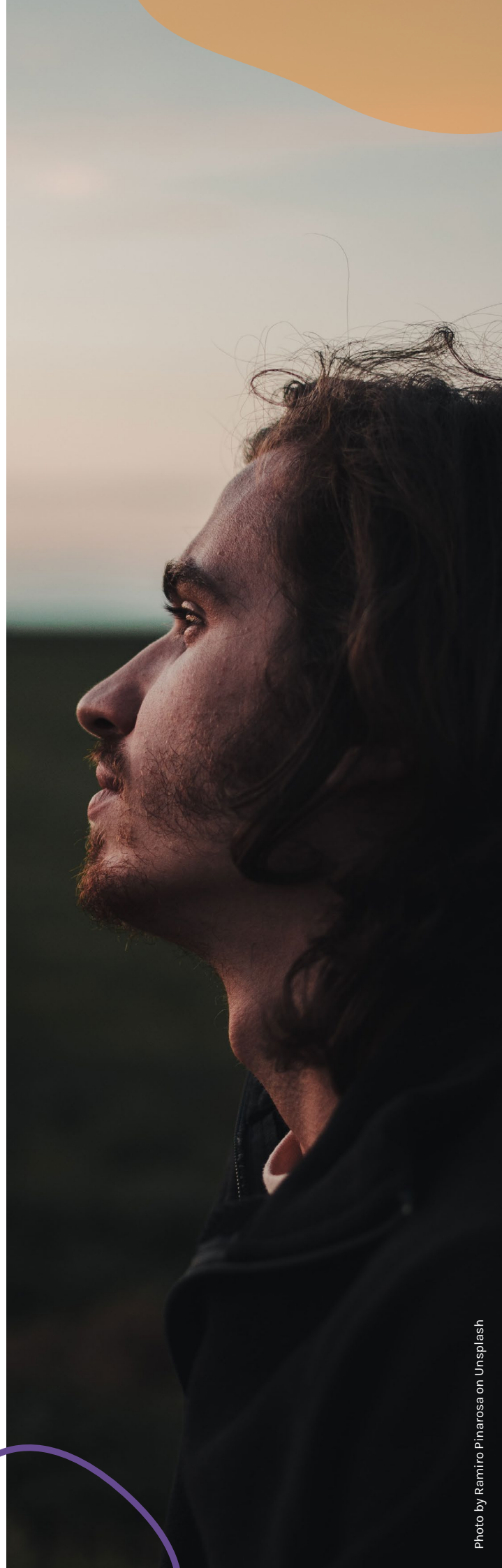
Because of their tendency to people-please, other people usually like anxious attachers – from the outside, they seem pleasant and upbeat.

However, an anxious attacher often struggles to see their own positive points; they're highly critical of themselves, so even though they think highly of others, they might believe they are flawed and not worthy of love.

Because of their low self-esteem and view that they don't matter, they may end up behaving in a way that gets them positive attention so that they feel validated by others. They often think that once a romantic partner gets to know the "real" them that they'll leave because, in their mind, the anxious-attacher is thinking, *"Well, there's nothing special about me."*

Do you ever wonder whether your thoughts about yourself influence your actions and their consequences? A self-fulfilling prophecy is when our beliefs about ourselves result in a specific outcome that confirms those beliefs. If you would like some support in figuring out whether your thoughts and actions result

 in self-fulfilling prophecies, refer to the Self-Fulfilling Prophecies exercise in the workbook.



HOW SELF-ESTEEM AFFECTS YOUR SENSE OF SELF

People with low self-esteem tend to protect themselves by steering clear of any form of a challenge as they see them as inevitable mistakes waiting to happen. On the contrary, someone with robust self-esteem welcomes them as an opportunity to achieve personal growth. Combined with their aversion to tasks that might help them to grow personally, as well as the belief that their opinions and needs don't matter, someone with low self-esteem might never really get to know who they are as a person. They never really establish who they are - they lack a *sense of self*.

A sense of self is your understanding of the characteristics that you think define you. This might be your talents, your likes, and dislikes, your moral code, or your personality traits - all of these things contribute to who you are. Knowing who you are as a person makes it easier to acknowledge your positive traits - the ones that you should be proud of, as well as identify and change the ones that you would like to improve. However, having a vague or ill-defined sense of self makes it difficult to know who you are, so it's tough to understand what it is you want out of life and your relationships.

But here's the good news; we already know how adaptable to our environment our brains are - otherwise, we wouldn't have developed an attachment style so early in life - but this flexibility can have good implications for the future too!


Neuroplasticity is our brains ability to adapt to our environment. When we learn something new or try to make novel habits, our brains make new connections between their neurons.

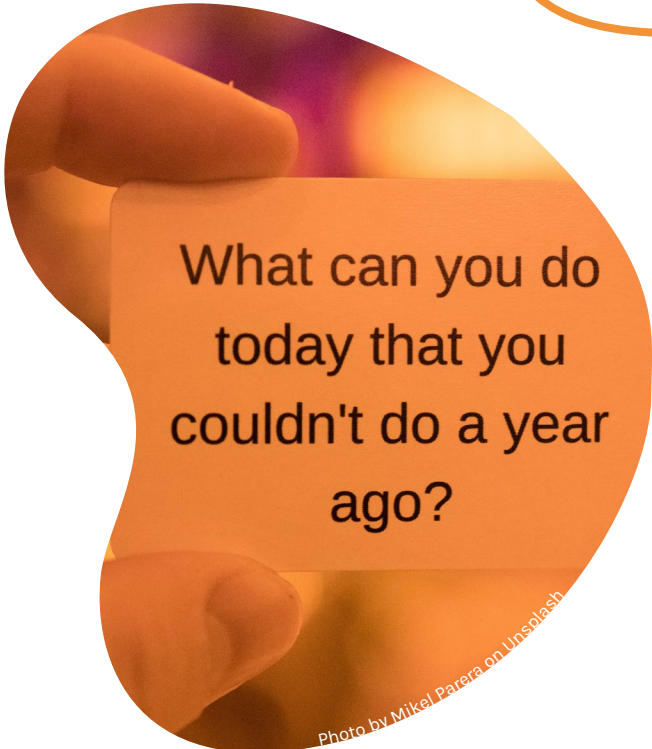


Photo by Toa Heftiba on Unsplash

This happens naturally every day as we adapt to different situations, but it's also something that we can encourage and promote. Essentially, from the day we are born until the day we die, our brain rewires itself in response to what we need it to do.

This extraordinary ability means that you can develop a strong sense of self and use it to build your self-esteem. Using self-development techniques, you can hone your talents, interests, and goals and use them to grow in regards to who you are as an individual and increase your sense of self and self-esteem. Ultimately, self-development helps you to create an *authentic sense of who you are* – to feel content in your own skin and reach your full potential and happiness level in life.

-  The Self-Development techniques in the workbook may help you to figure out a sense of who you truly are.



What can you do
today that you
couldn't do a year
ago?

Photo by Mikel Pereira on Unsplash

WHAT IS A SENSE OF AGENCY?

A sense of agency, sometimes known as self-agency, is the feeling of control that you get over your actions and their consequences. When you complete an action voluntarily, you tend to feel as though you are in charge; the action isn't just happening to you – you chose to do it. You affect your environment, and even more importantly, you build a mental image of yourself and how you impact your environment.

Someone with a strong sense of agency knows that they can influence the people and objects in their environment to get the kind of reaction that they want – for example, when a little boy uses his favorite action figure to knock down some Lego buildings, he knows the cause and effect of his actions.

Essentially, having a sense of agency means that you feel like you're in the driving seat when it comes to your choices and actions.

On the contrary, someone with a poor sense of agency might believe that they are powerless in their world – they think that things just happen to them and they have no control over it. *The world is happening to them.* For example, think of a voodoo doll; someone else is inflicting pinpricks on the doll and putting it in all sorts of predicaments. It has no control over what is happening to it. Someone with a poor sense of agency might see themselves as similar to the voodoo doll; they feel like they have little to no control over their environment and other people's actions in it.



By now, you've probably come to predict that your sense of agency is affected by your attachment style; similar to low levels of self-esteem, having an anxious attachment style may leave you more susceptible to having a poor sense of agency. As a child, someone with an anxious attachment might have felt like they exerted very little control over their caregiver's actions, so they tried to act out in attention-seeking ways to get a consistent reaction regarding their needs. As an adult, anxious attachers often spend so much of their time aiming to please their loved ones and avoid rejection, that they end up self-sacrificing to the extent that they lose their sense of agency.

Therefore, as an anxious attacher, you might feel like the world is happening to you rather than you're having an impact on it. Thus, in order to live a fulfilled life and have happy relationships, you may need to improve your sense of agency.

Although there is no replacement for professional guidance and support, some of the following self-development techniques may help you to build your sense of agency:

Manage outside influences

Sometimes, having a low sense of agency comes from too many distractions. Think about what stimuli you let into your mind, especially when you're engaging in tasks that truly matter to you. For example, if you're reading a piece of poetry, then it might not be helpful to have your phone on the table in front of you - it's bound to distract you and interfere with your ability to focus.

Perhaps practice meditation or mindfulness to avoid becoming overstimulated - you'll find that you'll more easily tune into your sense of self and increase your agency as a result.

Be curious about your world

Never stop learning about everything that life has to offer - people with a strong sense of agency are eager to learn and expand upon who they are. To see yourself as a learner, no matter what age you are, opens up doors to different elements of your world. You could take a class or learn from new and interesting people... not all of your characteristics are set in stone, remember? You can recognize that you're a work in progress and therefore capable of growth and change.

Act on your decisions

We're all guilty of saying we'll do something and not following through. Still, people with a low sense of agency are particularly prone to procrastinating, obsessing over the small details, or ruminating about the possibility of making mistakes. They lack self-esteem and confidence, so they might be risk-averse. Remember that you don't have to be 100% sure about something to move forward with it - having a strong sense of agency means taking responsibility for your life, including the mistakes that you make. So, whereas you might not be confident that you're making the right choice, if you try to wait until you're 100%, then you'll never make any important decisions.

Choose your company carefully

There's an old saying: "If you go to bed with the dogs, you'll rise with fleas." This isn't to say that some of the people in your life are dogs! But it is important to acknowledge that the people we choose to let in our lives often affects how we feel about ourselves and the activities we engage in. Ask yourself whether the people that you associate with consider your voice or whether you go along with activities that are contrary to your values. This goes for romantic relationships too.

Trust your gut

We're all familiar with the feeling in our gut when it's telling us not to trust someone or something, but did you know that you can also use your gut to increase your sense of agency? Using your gut feeling to help you make important decisions can be a boost to your confidence and creativity – as long as you don't confuse it with bias! To start tapping into your gut feeling, just try slowing down, take deep breaths, and check-in with how you feel rather than making snap decisions.

You actually have more than one type of gut feeling; strategic intuition is a more “intentional” form of gut thinking which can help you find solutions to more significant problems. You might choose to use tools such as meditation or other relaxation techniques to help you to access this kind of intuition. Expert intuition happens when you develop a skill after years of practice, and you no longer need to focus on every detail of it fully – you develop a sense of mastery which means that you can trust in your trained instincts with confidence.

The section **The Next Step – Therapies and Alternative Approaches** towards the end of this book has more information about meditation and mindfulness should you want to find out more.




LET'S QUICKLY SUM IT UP

People with an anxious/preoccupied attachment:

- Feel less than others; feel like they are just not good enough
- Feel unworthy of love
- Feel like everyone else is better
- Seek external validation and reassurance
- Seek attention and approval from others
- Fear that others will reject and leave them (for someone better, or once others get to know the "true" them)
- Overthink and analyze the meaning of everything (even the insignificant details) that people around them say or do
- Desperately try to prevent rejection and criticism
- Self-sacrifice and put others first
- Are caring and kind, but often at the cost of their own well-being
- Might have a hard time making decisions
- Are careful and pay a lot of attention to details

Which of your personality characteristics can you identify as potentially being a product of your attachment style? [The Identifying](#)

 [Your Personality Characteristics exercise in the workbook](#) may help if you need some guidance in identifying these characteristics.

Anna is 28 years old and is known to be a sweet girl who has always done her best to do the right thing; she listened to her parents as a child, she was an A+ student at school, and she graduated from a prestigious university before beginning a successful career in marketing.

Not only is she always kind to everyone, but Anna is intelligent and ambitious, and she never does anything in a manner that could be considered sloppy. Her excellent attention to detail makes her a valuable asset at the agency where she works.

People love Anna. The only problem is that she doesn't love herself.

Anna has never felt good about herself, despite all her achievements. She's never felt pretty enough, smart enough, or talented enough.

She has just always seen herself as "not good enough." Deep down, she feels unworthy of love and respect.

Anna feels inferior to others – she sees all her friends and work colleagues as more competent, more beautiful, and more worthwhile than her. Oftentimes, she spends her evenings over-analyzing herself and her life, thinking things like: *"I shouldn't have said that. That person is bound to think I'm an idiot now", "I probably could have done more today. I bet everyone else in the office achieved so much more than me,"* and *"I wish that I was as beautiful as my friends. I look so plain in comparison."*

Anna puts a lot of effort into being liked by others. She enjoys having people pay attention to her and, hopefully, admire and

praise her! On weekends, Anna goes to bars and parties. She flirts with guys she doesn't really like, but the way they look at her and give her compliments makes her feel good about herself.

Anna also goes out of her way to be kind, helpful and caring towards others, and people appreciate all her efforts – it makes them feel good about themselves. The thing is, Anna will satisfy everyone else's needs, even if it means that she has to go without...

But she's reliable Anna – if anyone ever needs her, she's always there!

Anna is a pretty perfect example of someone with an anxious/preoccupied attachment style. On paper, an anxious attacher might seem to be impressive – but that doesn't mean much if they can't see it for themselves.



Photo by Jayson Hinrichsen on Unsplash

People with an anxious attachment can't see the wood from the trees when examining their negative points, but they think highly of everyone else. It's for this reason that they need to be constantly reassured that they are worthy – they don't believe it about themselves, so they seek evidence from others. This might look like fishing for compliments, wearing skimpy clothes, or seeking approval for being self-sacrificing. Yet, it doesn't matter how much praise and positivity that they get from other people, an anxious attacher is still unconvinced that they deserve to be loved.

When an anxious attacher meets someone new, they often think that the other person is only interested in them because they haven't gotten to know them yet.

They believe that as soon as they start to let their true personality shine through that this new person will lose interest and leave. They think that they are not good enough to keep someone's attention in the long run.

Anxious/preoccupied people tend to compare themselves to others, which typically confirms their belief that everyone else is better than them. This is particularly the case in this age of social media – we see everyone's "filtered" versions of their lives rather than the real-life less than perfect scenarios. Still, an anxious attacher immediately compares their life to this unrealistic projection.



Adults with an anxious/preoccupied attachment style tend to be suspicious of their romantic partners. After all, if their belief about themselves is that they're not good enough, then they would easily believe that the special person in their life would leave them for someone better.

For this reason, they subconsciously become highly vigilant in the search for clues that might signal the threat of rejection or abandonment. Cool body language, looking distracted, or having close friendships with people of the opposite sex might seem threatening to an anxious/preoccupied person. Thus, they may spend hours interpreting meaningless cues from the people around them.

People with an anxious/preoccupied attachment style are the epitome of a classic overthinker.

Because they expect to be abandoned, anxious attachers would do anything to avoid it. They tend to cater to everyone else's needs first, even if it means that they have to sacrifice their own. In order to be liked, as well as to avoid confrontation, they'll agree with everyone else.

By now, you might be starting to see a strong pattern in the personality and actions of someone with an anxious/preoccupied attachment. Let's have a look at how it can affect other domains.



Reflection

Some of the information that we have gone through so far might feel upsetting or triggering to you. We encourage you to take a few minutes to tune in to the feelings and emotions that you might be experiencing (fear, anger, pride, sadness, etc.), as well as any changes that you notice within your body (discomfort, slight pain, increased heart rate, etc.). Now is not a time for judgment, but instead a kind and understanding moment of observation of yourself.

III.

FRIENDSHIPS & SOCIAL GROUPS

Every friendship dynamic is different, but your attachment style likely affects how you relate to your friends. Remember, your first experience of relationships lacked appropriate responses to your need for proximity. Thus, the following are behaviors that you may recognize in yourself if you have an anxious attachment style. You may even recognize them in some of your friends!

Anxious attachers tend to become overly clingy and obsess about how they might be coming across to their friends.

Thus, you may struggle with anxiety over your friendships which can manifest as actions such as looking for constant reassurance from friends that they care about you, that they aren't mad at you, and that they value your friendship as much as you do theirs, etc. If a friend fails to reassure you as much as you need, you may end up taking this as a form of rejection and blame yourself for their actions.

When initiating friendships, as an anxious attacher, you may quickly develop a sense of "falling in love" with a new person - you might see them as exciting and impressive. Because someone with this attachment style often feels a strong need for emotional closeness in their relationships, you may divulge personal information quickly to forge a close, intimate bond with others. However, when you do establish a close friendship, you may end up sabotaging it by becoming too demanding of their time. You might also obstruct the relationship by creating conflicts

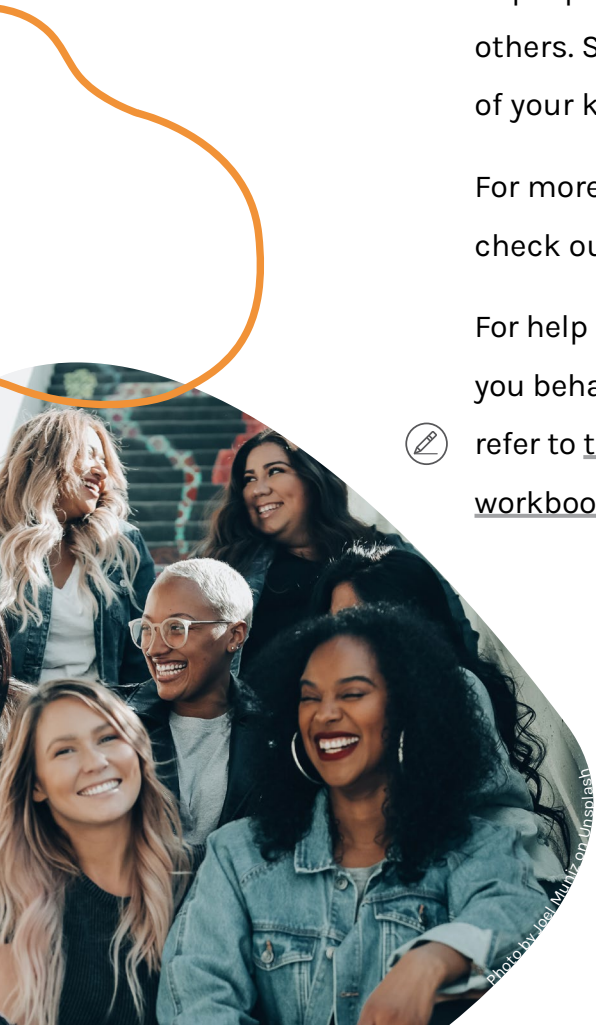
in your head. For example, if someone doesn't text you back immediately, you might assume that they're mad at you and become overly upset and emotional in response.

Having an anxious attachment style might also make you prone to jealousy with your friends, as you may feel threatened by new relationships and newcomers in your social group because you're uncertain about what it might mean for your friendship. Understandably, behaviors characteristic of this attachment style can create interpersonal issues in social circles as your insecurities may be interpreted as demanding, clingy, or controlling.

It's not all bad news, though; as an anxious attacher, you're more likely to be a good friend to others as you're supportive and thoughtful. People likely see you as the caretaker within the group that they feel safe turning to. However, as you may worry that people won't really like you for who you honestly are, you might try to people-please and sacrifice your wants and needs for those of others. Sometimes this may lead to other people taking advantage of your kind and sacrificing nature.

For more information on your strengths in the area of friendship, check out the section on superpowers at the end of this profile.

For help in determining how your current social groups operate, how you behave within them, and what you need from your friendships, refer to the Friendships and Social Groups exercises in the workbook.



III. INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

PEOPLE WITH ANXIOUS/PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT LOVE BEING IN RELATIONSHIPS

They gravitate towards intimacy, seek emotional closeness, and value feeling connected to the other person in the relationship. Being single typically does not appeal to an anxious attacher in the slightest.

From an outsider's perspective, it might seem like such people are made to be in a relationship. And this is true...to an extent. They can be great partners - caring, supportive, kind, and selfless.

But remember - anxious attachers selflessly tend to put their partners' needs first, but this can come at a price.

- ✎ Use the Intimate Relationships exercise in the workbook to reflect on how your anxious attachment style has affected your intimate relationships; what they meant to you and the role that you played within them.



Anna, the 28-year-old marketing agent from our previous example, was always selfless in her relationships. Last year, she dated Nick, and she was smitten. Anna adored Nick - he was her “better half,” and she looked upon him with admiration and delight.

Whenever Nick needed Anna, she dropped whatever else she had going on to be there for him. If he was distressed, she swallowed her own problems so that she could comfort him.

She even made sure that they always did what Nick wanted: they went to his favorite restaurants, watched the TV shows he loved, and played the video games that he liked for hours on weekends (even though Anna hated video games).

Anna felt a bit down at times, but she didn’t want to bother Nick with her complaints. Instead, she swallowed her problems and just kept everything to herself. After all, the last thing she wanted was for him to get sick of her and leave.



Perhaps on the surface, everything might look fine with Anna and Nick's relationship. But it's clear that there's another side to the story.

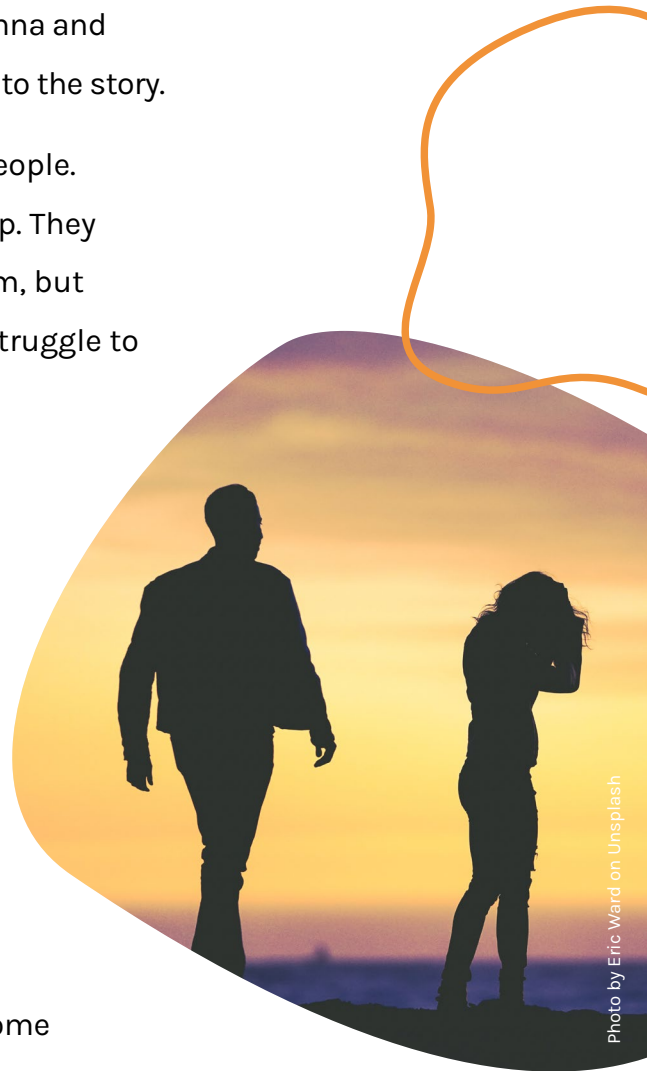
Anxious attachers are undoubtedly loving and caring people. But, unfortunately, they doubt their role in a relationship. They desperately want to believe that their partners love them, but they're so convinced that they're not lovable that they struggle to understand what the other person sees in them.

This causes them to worry that the relationship that they value so much will end. They believe that their partners will inevitably leave them for someone better.

An anxious/preoccupied adult can become obsessed with their partner's actions. They become suspicious, analyzing words and behaviors for any sign that their partner might leave them. If they are given any clue that there is an actual threat of abandonment, they may become obsessive, aggressive, manipulative, and extremely jealous. They so dearly want to maintain their connection with their partner that they start to behave clingy and needy in a vain attempt to reconnect.

The problem with acting needy and clingy is pretty obvious - the more that an anxious attacher tries to hold on to their partner, the more the partner feels smothered and experiences the need for separation. In their attempts to seek closeness with their loved ones, the anxious attacher usually ends up driving them away.

We can see it in action below in the case of Anna and Nick:



Around eight months into their relationship, Nick started a new job. He was fortunate to meet many new and interesting people there and to get to know his new team. Nick regularly spent his evenings hanging out with them. This often involved going to bars and parties on evenings and weekends.

At first, Anna seemed content enough. She was pleased for Nick and listened to his stories, often feigning excitement to keep him happy. However, it wasn't long before her anxiety started to build.

Anna missed Nick being as available to her as he was before the new job. She stayed up late, waiting for him to text or call, and couldn't fall asleep until he got home because she was so stressed and worried.

Anna's heart was breaking. She was terrified. Jealous of Nick's new friends, Anna was convinced that Nick would fall in love with one of the smarter, prettier, funnier ladies on his team. Deep down, she knew that it was all her fault – she just wasn't good enough for Nick.

Another week passed. Anna was obsessively stalking Nick's social media accounts, as well as those of his new work friends. She questioned him constantly about his colleagues, asking whether or not they had boyfriends or husbands. Anna had also been bugging Nick to spend more time with her. She could see that he was becoming frustrated, but she couldn't help herself.



Soon, all that Anna and Nick did was fight. Their arguments became big, and they screamed themselves hoarse before ignoring each other for days. Eventually, Nick moved out and cut contact with Anna. To this day, she is still struggling with the break-up, as she felt that she could have handled it so much better than she did.

In situations like this, anxious attachers like Anna might find it hard to let go and move on with their lives after a failed relationship.

Even in more extreme cases, such as in an abusive relationship, an anxious attacher might hope for the best and believe that their partner can change instead of being able to move on with their life to greener pastures.

Again, remember that adults with an anxious/attachment style typically tend to think that they are not good enough – even in an abusive relationship, they think that they did something to inspire hurtful behavior in the other person. If they do better, then it won't happen again.

What's more, an anxious attacher may be scared of never finding another love, so even if it means staying in an unhealthy relationship, they're convinced that it's better than being single.

Despite some of these issues, anxious attachers have the potential to be excellent romantic partners. For more information on your strengths in the area of intimate relations, check out the section on superpowers at the end of this profile.

3.1 Potential Triggers in Relationships

Don't be mistaken - people with anxious attachment don't act clingy or needy all the time. Nor do they seek attention 100% of the time. Instead, these behaviors are "triggered" when an individual perceives that their relationship is threatened.

Consider the story of Anna and Nick's relationship;

You can see how Anna's anxious attachment style didn't interfere with the relationship until her attachment system was triggered; Nick's new friends and the fact that he spent so much time away were seen as a threat to their relationship, so Anna's fear of abandonment started to spiral out of control.

Let's take a look at more potential triggers for anxious/preoccupied adults - you could try to think if any of these have applied to you in the past:

- Your partner seems distant.
- Your partner forgets important events, such as your anniversary or your birthday.
- Your partner flirts with someone else.
- Your partner fails to compliment you on something different, such as a new hairstyle or dress.
- Your partner comes home late.
- Your partner says they are too busy to meet you for dinner.



If your attachment needs are triggered, you might respond by feeling a strong need to connect with your partner. How do you think you might have reacted to being triggered in the past?

Here are some possibilities:

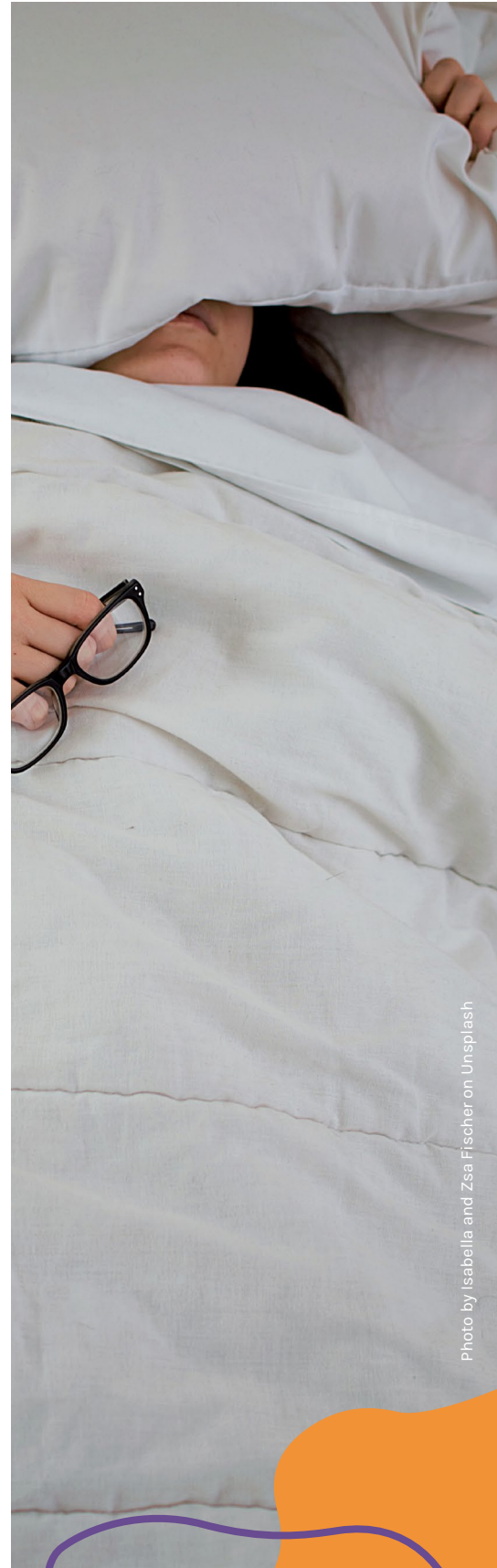
- You think obsessively about your partner.
- You lose sleep worrying about the relationship.
- You feel depleted.
- You feel empty when your partner ignores you.
- You become obsessed with the thought that your partner has found someone else.
- You refuse to pick up the phone when your partner calls, and you don't return text messages.

In rounding up this section, it might be a worthwhile activity to make a note of your personal triggers, as well as how you typically respond to them.

Also, try to think of your previous relationships and the reasons why they didn't work out with regard to your attachment style, as well as the possible reasons outside of your attachment style.

Remember, your partner and their attachment style play an equally important role in the way that the relationship played out.

If you would like to, or need guidance in identifying your personal triggers in an intimate relationship, then refer to the Identifying Your Personal Triggers in a Relationship exercise in the workbook.



3.2 Attachment Style Partnership Pairing

ANXIOUS-ANXIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

In the movie *The Glass Castle*, based on Jeannette Wall's memoir, there's a violent glass-throwing scene involving Rose Mary (Naomi Watts) and her husband Rex (Woody Harrelson). Rose Mary infuriates Rex so much that he ends up throwing her out of the second-floor window. In the next scene, they're rolling in bed, laughing and kissing.

In a relationship, two anxious people can be both passionate and volatile. Like Rose Mary and Rex, some couples love to fight, threaten each other with a break-up, but then kiss, hug, and hop into bed together to avoid being abandoned.

Anxious-anxious couples are the classic hot-and-cold partners: one day, they are attentive and loving, and the next day they ignore each other.



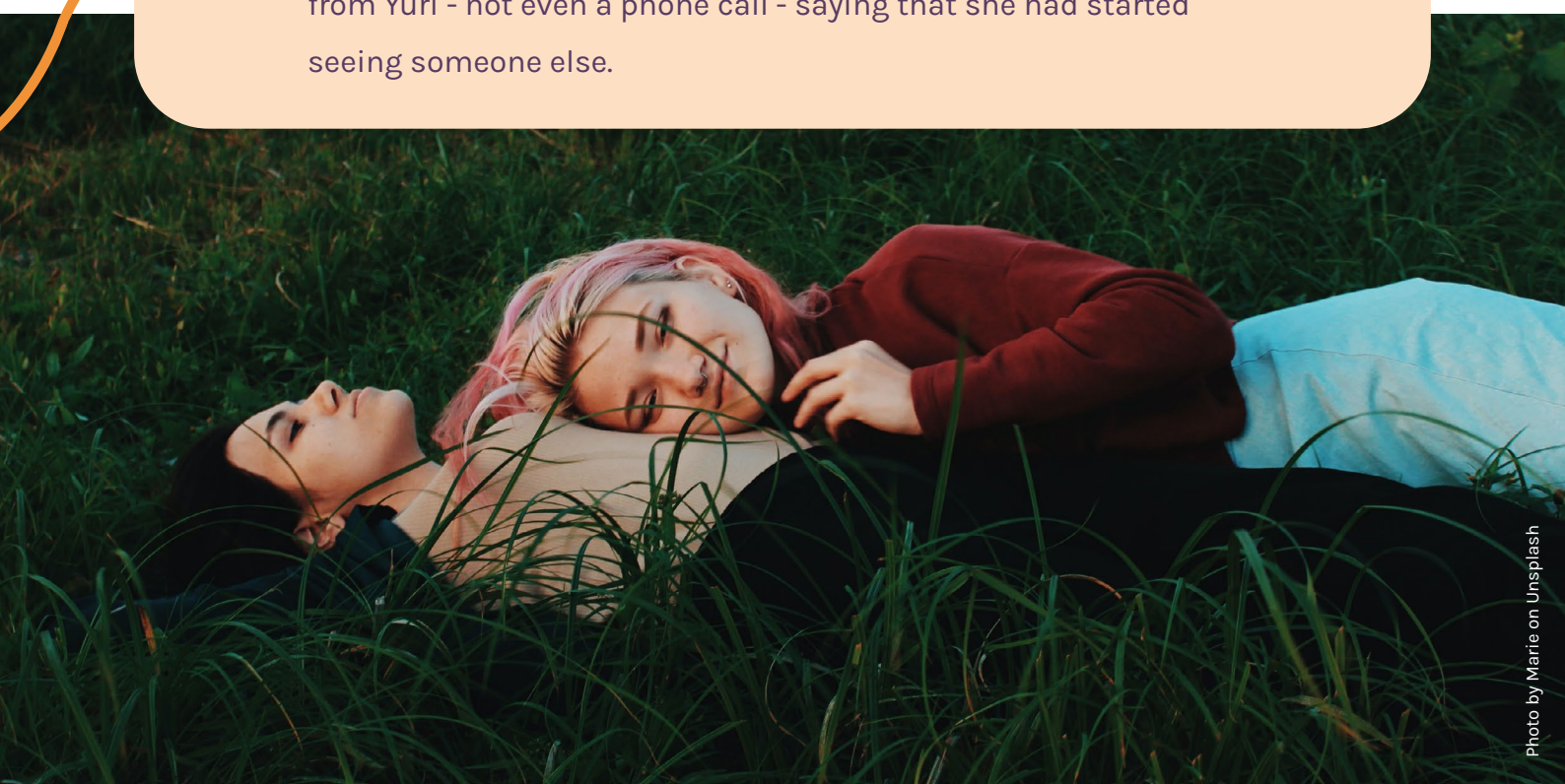
ANXIOUS-AVOIDANT RELATIONSHIPS

Yamishe, a 34-year old IT specialist, always falls for avoidant types. Recently, she had the best date she'd ever had. It was a fix-up with a woman called Yuri, with whom she felt instant connection and attraction. During the date, Yuri expressed her desire to be in a committed relationship. Yamishe was delighted – it gave her the confidence that Yuri would be serious about her and their potential future relationship.

After four weeks of frequent, daily contact, Yuri disappeared for days without any notice. She didn't answer Yamishe's texts or calls. When Yuri finally picked up the phone, she apologized and explained that she was just "busy."

Yamishe was devastated. Yet, her desire for closeness was in full swing. Desperate to see Yuri, she agreed to let her come over.

Two hours later, Yuri still hadn't arrived. Yamishe downed a few glasses of wine, fell in a heap on her bed, texted Yuri twenty times, and cried herself into a stupor. The next day, she received an email from Yuri - not even a phone call - saying that she had started seeing someone else.



Relationships between anxious and avoidant attachers often end up in disaster. But why?

The main issue with such relationships is that one of the partners (the anxious-preoccupied one) seeks closeness and the other one (the avoidant-dismissive one) wants distance. The avoidant's desire for space triggers the anxious attacher's fear of abandonment, so they cling to their partner and challenge them on their need for distance. This causes the avoidant attacher to withdraw even further, making the anxious attacher cling even more.

So, unfortunately, both partners end up getting hurt; one becomes quiet and flees, and the other yells and pushes. Eventually, the avoidant attacher feels forced to leave.

This kind of relationship can be tough to break off – as we established earlier, an avoidant attacher tends to try to hold on to a relationship.

The characteristics of their attachment become triggered by separation, so they might desperately try to get closer to their ex in a vain attempt to calm their nerves. In some extreme cases, this might lead to stalking.



ANXIOUS-SECURE RELATIONSHIPS

If you're an anxious attacher, then you might need someone patient and understanding about what makes you tick – possibly someone like Finn Hudson from *Glee*. Finn, Rachel Berry's on-screen boyfriend, has endless patience with Rachel's schtick. He puts up with her constant cries for attention, as well as her demands that he should quit the football team so other girls don't flirt with him.

Don't be mistaken – not all anxious attachers are like Rachel Berry. Obviously, her character is written for drama, but she's still a cookie-cutter example of an anxious attacher!

A securely attached person is the ideal personality type for an anxious attacher; they're able to form healthy relationships because they're comfortable with letting their guard down. This means that they're naturally able to provide the intimacy and reassurance that an anxiously attached person craves. In time, an anxious attacher would even be able to relax into the relationship because of the stability that a securely attached partner provides.





Isabella's long term boyfriend, Dan, is securely attached. Isabella is a likable, friendly, and social person. She's known for always having a smile on her face. But Isabella's also a chatterbox, and her constant need for attention keeps her chirping away.

Easy-going and somewhat introverted, Dan seems unfazed by Isabella's chattiness, and he often makes a loving joke about what a chatterbox she is. His obvious delight in Isabella makes her feel like he is genuinely appreciative of her, and she feels free just to be herself.

From the first date on, Dan made her feel at ease. She doesn't worry that her boyfriend will see her as needy and controlling if she wants to spend more time with him (as she did in her previous relationships). "And," Isabella laughs, "he texts me back quickly, so I don't have to feel anxious."

3.3 Dating Online and in Person

Tanya, a 32-year-old dental hygienist, has been single for seven years following a stormy four-year marriage. Tanya is a knock-out with long, thick, wavy auburn hair and big blue eyes. She has no trouble getting a date, mostly from bars. But Tanya is aware that, as she says, “*most guys just want to get into my pants.*” Tanya has one goal in life: to get married to someone who appreciates her and have a family with four kids - three girls and a boy.

Tanya tried online dating in the hopes of finding someone more interested in marriage and kids than the guys she meets in bars. Of course, she was inundated with messages, but they were mostly from “losers.”

Although, one guy - a financial consultant - sparked her interest. For some reason, it took two months of phone calls and emails before they finally met up for a drink at a local bar. They seemed to hit it off immediately - they spent some time talking about Peru, where they had both traveled, and there were no uncomfortable silences. Tanya felt pretty confident that it went well.

Yet, after the date, the financial consultant never called Tanya. Nor did he answer the series of texts that she sent him for over a week. She started to feel sorry for herself, obsessing about how lonely she was and how she desperately wants to meet the man of her dreams.

Tanya’s unsuccessful romances probably happened because she repeatedly pairs with incompatible matches; and because she herself is an insecure, anxious attacher.

The dating landscape of recent years is a new and often tough-to-navigate landscape. The constant evolution of smartphones and dating apps means that the potential to meet the right person rests in the palms of our hands. However, how do we traverse the masses of people who also wish to avail of the convenience of online dating to best ensure our chances of meeting a compatible partner?

Using your knowledge of your attachment style and its compatibility with the other styles may increase your chances of meeting an appropriate match.

Although there is no surefire way of determining someone's attachment style through an app or on the first meet-up, keeping an eye out for certain attachment traits may help you determine whether a potential partner is a good fit for you.

Try to keep in mind, however, that even if you're not technically compatible with another attachment style, this doesn't mean that a fledgling relationship is doomed to fail. We all have individual differences that affect how we behave within relationships.

Therefore, if there is enough of a spark between two people, then it is entirely possible to overcome the challenges presented by attachment traits through either personal or professional work. After all, we have to believe that love can conquer all!

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS SECURELY ATTACHED:

Someone with a secure attachment style is the perfect match for someone with an anxious attachment style. This compatibility is primarily due to a secure attacher's early bond with their attachment figure(s); their need for security, proximity, and affection was met by their caregiver(s) during their formative years. As a result, someone with a secure attachment can effectively regulate their own emotions as well as those of others, typically has a positive outlook on themselves and others, and desires a healthy amount of affection and intimacy.

For all of these reasons, a secure attacher can meet an anxious attacher's emotional needs and help them balance their emotions and feel secure within a relationship.

So how can you tell whether someone is securely attached either online or in person?

ONLINE

You can tell whether someone has a secure attachment style through a dating app based on their messages and manner of communication. For starters, their profile will have their essential information, but probably won't over divulge too much. However, if they're interested in you, someone with a secure attachment won't hesitate to connect.



A secure attacher will likely ask questions about you rather than just speak about themselves. This is because they are interested in who you are as a person. Furthermore, they will also probably maintain a steady stream of messages without being too persistent or disappearing for days on end. Although they will be direct with you in your interactions with each other, they won't overshare personal information. This doesn't mean that someone with a secure attachment won't open up more in time, but they won't do so too early in the relationship.

IN PERSON

Like meeting through an app, when you meet a secure attacher face-to-face, they will not continuously talk about themselves but will instead be interested in getting to know who you are as a person. Thus, they will ask you personal questions about your life and share personal information about themselves within reason. The secure attacher will be open, warm, and friendly. If they're interested in you, they will communicate that through their conversation and non-verbal communication, such as open body language and steady eye contact.

Furthermore, as the date progresses, you may be able to glean information about the individual's past relationships. If they are securely attached, they may have had a couple of long-term relationships, but may also have spent periods of time alone. This pattern is due to a secure attacher's comfort both in a relationship and by themselves.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS ANXIOUSLY ATTACHED:

You might be more likely to match with someone with an anxious attachment style over any other on a dating app. This is because - according to statistics - anxious attachers are more likely to use online dating than the other attachment styles. There are some pros and cons of being anxiously attached and pairing with someone who has the same attachment style. For example, anxious-anxious relationships are the typical “hot and cold” romances: you both desire love and fear rejection, so the relationship can be passionate on the one hand, but potentially explosive on the other.

However, the fact that you both desire physical and emotional proximity means that you may fulfill each other’s needs.

But bear in mind - to preserve or improve the relationship, you may need to find a balance and work on your attachment triggers to foster security in the relationship. So how can you tell whether someone is anxiously attached either online or in person?

ONLINE

Anxious attachers may masquerade as secure attachers initially during an online conversation as their first impressions are that of a chatty and open person. However, it likely won’t take long for their anxious attachment traits to burgeon; instead of asking questions about you, an anxious attacher often talks about themselves in order to impress you and reduce the risk of rejection. They may also attempt to forge intimacy and closeness within the relationship by divulging personal information too early.



Photo by Samson U Kay

IN PERSON

Similar to making a connection with an anxious attacher online, when you meet them in person, they may focus primarily on talking about themselves. Thus, pay attention to whether they ask you questions about yourself or whether the focus of conversation remains on them. What's more, their anxious attachment style may manifest in non-verbal ways, such as fidgeting, attempting to stand or sit too close, or maintaining too much eye contact in an attempt to seek connection and acceptance.

Remember, as a fellow anxious attacher, you might experience a sense of “love at first sight” with someone else with this attachment style. However, this initial stage might fade quite quickly, so try to get to know the other person beyond the surface level before making any significant commitments to them.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE HAS AN AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT:

Anxious and avoidant attachers aren't usually considered the “perfect match.” The anxious person desires intimacy and closeness, but the avoidant attacher feels unsafe in intimate situations and, thus, prefers to establish boundaries and avoid displays of affection.

As a result, the anxious attacher's fear of abandonment may end up triggered, and they may push for increased closeness, only driving the avoidant attacher further away.



Still, a successful, happy relationship is entirely possible between an anxious and an avoidant attacher - it might just be the case that some compromises need to be made, as well as potentially some personal and professional work. So how can you tell whether someone is avoidantly attached either online or in person?

ONLINE

The avoidant style is relatively easy to identify through app dating compared to the other attachment styles. For example, they may be somewhat reserved during the early stages of your connection and perhaps not message too much, or resist opening up regarding personal information. What's more, when you do talk/message, they may focus on non-personal topics such as films or books that they enjoy, their job, or sports that they play.

Also, if an avoidant attacher loses interest in the relationship, they may back off by not messaging or "ghosting" you. This disappearing act can happen quite suddenly, in particular, after an emotional breakthrough or disclosure.

IN PERSON

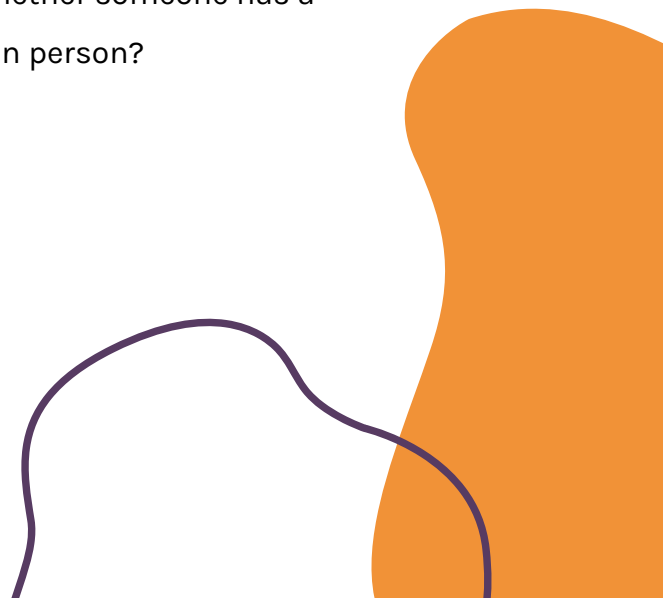
Much of an avoidant attacher's behaviors in person will be similar to those through app dating; they will resist intimate or emotional disclosures. However, in person, an avoidant attacher will not only be closed off in their verbal communication, but also their non-verbal; they may be quite closed and reserved in their body language and have difficulty maintaining eye contact. For example, they may look at your chin or mouth as a strategy to avoid another person's gaze.

Remember - as an anxious attacher, you may attempt to increase closeness by trying to push an avoidant attacher's boundaries through probing too much or forcing eye contact. These actions may cause the avoidant attacher to feel unsafe, and they may retreat from the connection.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE HAS A DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT:

Since someone with a disorganized attachment may vacillate between the anxious and avoidant dimensions of attachment depending on their mood and circumstances, they may be prone to unpredictable behaviors and difficulties regulating their emotions. Because of their chaotic formative period, they both strongly desire and fear intimacy and emotional closeness. As an anxious attacher, this unpredictability could be challenging to manage, as you may fight to control any risk of abandonment and attempt to maintain closeness. Thus, both partners might lack trust in each other and act hypervigilant towards any perceived threats to the relationship.

Again, a successful and loving relationship between two people with these attachment styles is not impossible; however, professional support may be required to process previous trauma or instability issues. So how can you tell whether someone has a disorganized attachment, either online or in person?



ONLINE:

On a dating app, someone with a disorganized attachment style typically leans towards more anxious patterns of behavior because of their innate desire for connection. Therefore, they are likely to disclose personal information quite quickly in an attempt to establish a close and intimate bond with the other person. They may also talk about themselves a lot and not ask questions about the person they matched with. However, if things progress too quickly, they may back off and “ghost” the other person, meaning they may stop messaging without any clear reason.

IN PERSON:

A disorganized attacher is as likely to vacillate between anxious and avoidant traits in person as they are online. Thus, they may alternate between both styles depending on their mood and circumstance. For example, when you first meet them, the disorganized attacher might be eager to connect and talk a lot about themselves. They may hold eye contact and attempt to sit or stand in close proximity. Alternatively, they may just as easily be uncomfortable disclosing personal information, be withdrawn in their body language, and avoid eye contact by looking at your mouth or chin. It can be challenging to determine which traits a disorganized attacher will manifest on a particular day.



3.4 Attachment in the Bedroom

By this point, you're probably aware of how anxious/preoccupied people behave in relationships, so now it's time to see how they typically act when it comes to one particular part of relationships.

Let's talk about sex. Can your attachment style influence your sex life? And if so, how?

First thing's first - attachment absolutely does influence your sex life.

Think about it. Sex bonds two people. It creates intimacy and an emotional connection. On the one hand, it's how we tell someone, "Hey - I think you're hot!", but on the other, it expresses our love for them. And all of these factors connect to our attachment system.

By the way, when referring to your sex life, we're not just talking about the actual physical act of love-making. We're talking about your outlook on it, the way you think and feel about it, and the ways that you use sex to meet your emotional (not sexual) needs.

This is what we'll be covering in the following section.

HOW DOES ANXIOUS/PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT AFFECT YOUR SEX LIFE?

Having an anxious/preoccupied attachment might affect your sex life in a couple of ways.

To begin with, this attachment style is associated with low self-esteem and a tendency to view yourself in a negative light. This means that anxious attachers are often insecure about how they look – they might see themselves as unattractive and undesirable. They might even not want their partners to look at or touch them due to their feelings of discomfort about their appearance. Naturally, such insecurities can harm your sex life. After all, how can you enjoy sex if you're too busy critiquing your looks and feeling bad about yourself?

Second, it's not uncommon for anxious attachers to doubt their partners. They might question whether a partner loves them, as well as their level of commitment to the relationship. Again, this is a pretty big barrier to being able to relax and enjoy sex.

Not to generalize, but studies have even suggested that anxious attachers might be dissatisfied with their sex lives because they tend to speak negatively about sexual activities.

Right now, you're probably thinking, *"Why would someone who clearly dislikes sex so much ever even do it?"*

Let's pause for a moment to clarify something; having an anxious/preoccupied attachment style doesn't mean that you don't like sex. You might have a great partner and a fantastic sex life and be completely satisfied with it. We genuinely hope that this is the case for you.



Photo by Dainis Graveris on Unsplash

But there are people out there that don't enjoy sex with their partner. Perhaps sex itself is too infrequent, too long, too short - whatever. The reason itself doesn't actually matter. The point is that these people still have sex with their partners. Now, why would they do that if they don't like it?

Although there are many reasons why people engage in sex, insecurely attached adults might do so to satisfy their purely emotional needs. **They're trying to make up for their belief that they lack love and security in life.**

On the one hand, anxious/preoccupied people might seek sex to provoke their partner's attentiveness, availability, and caregiving behaviors. In other words, they might use sex to manipulate the partner into paying attention to and taking care of them.

On the other hand, adults with this attachment style might also use sex to re-establish their connection with partners. Sex might be an antidote to worries about being rejected or abandoned - it gives them a sense of closeness and reassurance. It makes them feel more secure in their relationship.

IV.

ATTACHMENT AND PARENTING

One of the most significant predictors in our own parenting style is the attachment style that we developed with our own caregivers – after all, it influences how we act in the important relationships in our lives, and our relationships with our children are no exception. However, even though you may be prone to repeating the behavior that your caregivers exhibited, it doesn't mean that you actually will – **you are not doomed to repeat the past.**

How you understand and make sense of your childhood, as well as your behaviors in your adult relationships, can be an even bigger predictor of what kind of parent you might be. At any stage in life, you have the power to adapt and change your attachment style – it may take self-reflection, understanding your past, empathy towards yourself and your experiences, and sometimes external support, but in the end, you can become a parent with a healthy and nurturing outlook towards your child.

No parent is perfect - you'll inevitably make mistakes, but if you enable yourself to repair any ruptures in the relationship, then your child is likely going to grow up with a secure attachment!

4.1 What to Watch out for When Parenting With an Anxious Attachment Style

Because someone with an anxious attachment style might have grown up in an environment where their caregivers were inconsistent - sometimes they were there for them, sometimes they were not - they may feel as though their emotional needs weren't met. For this reason, it is possible that an anxious attacher might subconsciously look to their children to meet their emotional needs instead of being consistently there to meet theirs. This might look like an **emotional hunger** - a strong emotional need created by a lack of attention in childhood. This may end up draining the child's resources and leave them feeling clingy or needy around their caregiver, as they are fighting to have their emotional needs met.

For these reasons, if you are aware that you have an anxious attachment style, you must remain vigilant about your attachment behaviors - make sure that you don't use your child to make you feel loved or better about yourself.

Pay attention to any inconsistencies in your behavior towards them and evaluate how dependent you are on your child to meet your emotional needs. Understanding is the first step to breaking the cycle.

4.2 How to Raise Your Child to Have a Secure Attachment

If you can remember, for a child to develop a secure attachment, they need to develop in an environment in which they feel **safe, seen and known, comforted, valued, and support for being their best self.**

It's important to create a compassionate and warm environment for the child, one in which their caregiver can self-regulate their own emotions and reactions to upsetting stimuli. Doing so will help to pass on these skills to their child as they learn through modeling and observation. It's also essential to view a child as an individual so that you are comfortable with them exploring; children with a secure attachment see their caregiver as a safe base from which they can explore their world with confidence. They are satisfied with the knowledge that their caregiver is nearby, and they have someone to turn to if they get scared. This facilitates the belief that other people will be there for them.



Photo by Caroline Hernandez on Unsplash

V. ATTACHMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

It's not just family, friends, and romantic relationships that can be affected by your attachment style - you might be more naturally inclined to act a certain way in the workplace, too, for both the positive and negative!

Tony, an anxious attacher, recently got a fantastic job offer as a journalist for a popular British magazine. Having just recently graduated from university in Germany, he'd never been to London. A bit nervous but excited, he packed his bags and got on the plane.

Everyone in his new workplace was super impressed with Tony's work ethic, and they helped him out while he got to know the ropes. In his first few weeks, Tony quickly became everyone's favorite person; his boss loved him, and his colleagues gladly hung out with him on lunch break and invited him out after work. Plus, Tony was pleasant to everyone - he never caused any drama or trouble.

A couple of months went by, and Tony was working day and night - harder than he'd ever worked before. He knew that he was improving and felt proud of himself. Yet somehow, no one else seemed to notice how good he was getting.

Tired and moody, Tony started to feel like he was being taken for granted. His boss wasn't that nice anymore - maybe he only wanted to make a good impression initially and is now showing his true colors? His colleagues didn't want to help him out so much anymore either - did they expect him to know everything already?

The young journalist missed the attention and friendliness of his new team. He needed their guidance, and most of all, he needed to know that they still liked him - that he was one of them.

Unfortunately, as time went by, Tony continued not to get the reassurance that he needed. Negative feedback upset him and threw him off his game. His work, too, got sloppy; he couldn't focus, he couldn't make decisions, and he couldn't come up with any new creative ideas.

Tony wasn't happy. He started applying for other positions in London, and soon, he quit the job at the magazine. He just couldn't take it anymore.



Photo by Tim Coulton Unsplash

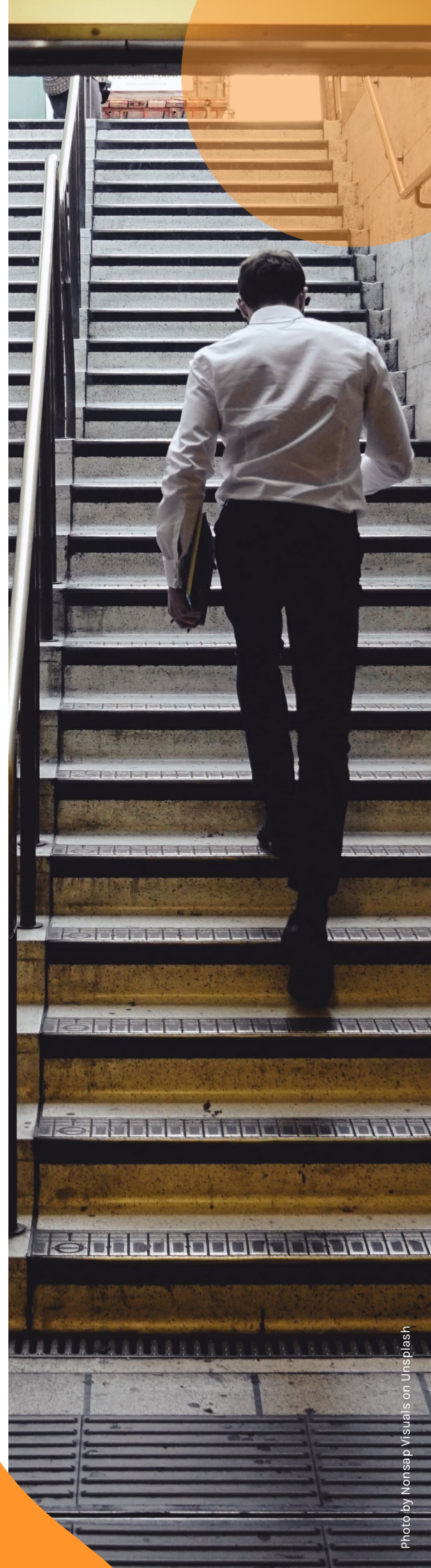
Does this mean that everyone with an anxious/preoccupied style will experience issues in the workplace?

Of course not. Many with this attachment style will never encounter a problem at work. Still, for those that do, there might be several reasons why – perhaps there are specific circumstances such as moving to a new country or starting a challenging position. Essentially, your environment can trigger your attachment system. Tony yearned for connection and approval. As a result, he spiraled down the anxious/preoccupied rollercoaster and eventually gave up.

Maybe if Tony had approached his career path a little differently, then he might have gotten a different result. If he had taken on an entry-level position back home, then he would probably have felt more secure. It's all about recognizing yourself and your patterns.

You might recognize some (or many) of these characteristics in yourself. Perhaps take a moment and make a mental note of the symptoms that you do.

Now, let's look at some of the more typical characteristics of anxious/preoccupied employees in the workplace.



5.1 What Are the Typical Characteristics of Anxious Employees?

The following information is based on the findings of studies that examined anxious attachers' behaviors in the workplace.

We have separated the characteristics of anxious attachers in the workplace into two types; potential difficulties and challenges and positive characteristics or *superpowers*.

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES & DISADVANTAGES

By this stage, we're aware that people with an anxious/preoccupied attachment tend to experience low self-esteem and high levels of insecurity and self-doubt.

In comparison to romantic relationships where this type of person may seek approval from their partner, in the workplace, it is colleagues, supervisors, and bosses who become the source of positive feedback.

Fitting in and being universally liked in the workplace are priorities for an anxious attacher. To achieve this, they might try to people-please and may actively avoid confrontation by conforming with the group's wishes – even if they disagree with them.

What's more, fear of negative feedback may cause an anxiously attached employee to rely heavily on supervision and their team to complete tasks successfully. This, in combination with clingy tendencies, can end up driving colleagues away.

Because anxious individuals set such high personal standards for themselves, they can become easily dissatisfied with their occupation if they feel like they're not achieving goals as quickly as they would like. This leads to the risk of burnout and drop-off from the job.

The following are the *potential difficulties and challenges* that an anxious/preoccupied adult may encounter in the workplace:

- 1. Preoccupation with being accepted by the group and seeking approval**
- 2. Strong fear of rejection and negative evaluation**
- 3. Conformity to group wishes**
- 4. Overwhelming desire for interpersonal closeness & investment in social relationships**
- 5. Negative expectations regarding the leader's behavior**
- 6. Less ability to work independently & over-reliance on the supervisor/leader**
- 7. Hypersensitivity to feedback**
- 8. Feeling under-appreciated and dissatisfied**
- 9. Higher burnout levels**
- 10. Counterproductive work behavior and turnover intentions**

For information on your potential strengths in the workplace, check out the next section on the superpowers of the anxious attachment style.



VI. SUPERPOWERS

For every negative, there is a positive, and this is certainly the case for people with an anxious attachment style!

In fact, thanks to their sensitive nature, anxious attachers often operate as the guardians or “sentinels” of the workplace. This trait means that they are typically more alert and better able to detect threats in their environment than others. Someone with the anxious attachment style also probably won’t delay before reporting potential danger, which may save workplace resources.

Their high personal standards and their need for approval from others may cause them to be reflective of their performance and address any shortcomings that may affect their work. What’s more, when a stressful work situation triggers an anxious attacher’s fight or flight response, their need to please often causes them to fight instead of fleeing. Thus, they are more likely to fight for a positive outcome for themselves and their work team. I’m pretty sure most employers would embrace the opportunity to hire someone so keen to improve themselves and their performance!

Lastly, I think it’s pretty obvious that an anxious employee would probably be the last person in the workplace that you would expect to create trouble. They want to be liked and to be seen positively, not as the office trouble-maker.

Here are the superpowers that an anxious/preoccupied adult may bring to the workplace:

- 1. Better at detecting and responding to risks**
- 2. More accurate in detecting deceit**
- 3. Create less friction in the workplace**
- 4. More alert to their potential deficiencies and hyper-vigilant about seeking ways to improve**

However, the workplace is not the only domain in which someone with an anxious attachment style has superpowers. The following are the superpowers of the anxious attacher in relationships and friendships.

RELATIONSHIP SUPERPOWERS

- Anxious attachers fall in love easily and do their best to hold on tight to this love. Therefore, they will put a lot of effort into maintaining their relationships to ensure that they stay strong and infallible.
- People with an anxious attachment tend to put their partners on a pedestal and hold them in high regard. As a result, they are often able to help their partners see themselves in the same way. This ability may even help a partner with low self-esteem or a poor sense of self to put themselves into perspective - if someone else can see them in this manner, then there must be some truth in it!
- Anxious attachers are highly attuned to their partner's needs and sensitive enough to detect what their partner desires. What's more, they are usually willing to provide it for them.

FRIENDSHIP SUPERPOWERS

- Anxious attachers often love a newcomer to a friend group. Because they crave attachment and closeness with others, they may hope to forge a close friendship as soon as possible, and thus, will be welcoming and warm to a potential new friend.
- Someone with an anxious attachment is typically hypervigilant towards their friends' behaviors. As a result, they often notice when their friends are feeling down and are capable of being supportive and nurturing towards them. Consequently, an anxious attacher is often perceived as the "caretaker" of their friend group.
- Like the other relationships in their life, an anxious attacher is willing to work hard to maintain their friendships. Anxious attachers often worry that they might upset their friends. Thus, they strive to maintain contact with their friends and keep them happy - even when they have to compromise their own needs and wishes.

6.1 Identifying Your Superpowers

By this stage, you have learned about your attachment style in-depth, your personal characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, the way you engage in relationships by identifying your triggers, your needs, and your soothing mechanisms. In more detail, you continued to learn about different types of scenarios for dating and behaviors in the workplace.

If you would like some help with identifying your attachment related personal superpowers, then refer to [the Identifying Your Superpowers exercise in the workbook](#). You could even try reconsidering ones that you previously thought of as weaknesses as potential strengths!

CHAPTER IV

The Avoidant Attachment Style






The Avoidant Attachment Style

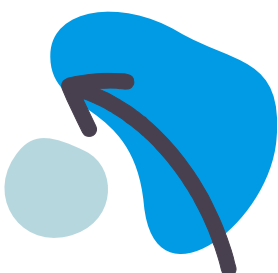
Photo by Seven Shooter on Unsplash

The avoidant attachment style (referred to as anxious/avoidant in children) is usually formed in the first eighteen months of a baby's life due to their relationship with their caregivers.

How we interpret our childhood can help us to understand how our attachment style developed. If you would like some support in finding  or thinking of your early memories, then [the Early Childhood Memories exercise in the workbook](#) may help.

Although the roots of this attachment style are based on **perceived rejection**, it is essential to understand that the child's caregivers likely did not purposely neglect the child, but instead that the child understood how they acted as not meeting their needs.

Perceived rejection is usually the result of **emotional unavailability**; this type of caregiver will likely go out of their way to avoid emotion and intimacy, and they often don't understand what their child wants or needs. They might act cold and reserved and back off when their child reaches out for support, reassurance, and affection.



As a result of perceived rejection, a child **shuts down their attachment system**. How come?

Well, imagine that there is only one person in the entire world who can give you food. You are entirely dependent on that person for survival because, of course, without food, you'd die.

Naturally, you get hungry, and you ask that person for some food.

They might give you a little, but it's not enough to fuel you. Sometimes, they don't give you any at all.

So, what do you do? You ask again and again until you're so starving that you can't think about anything else.

At some point, your body starts adapting to starvation. Your stomach shrinks, your hormone levels change, and you feel less and less hungry with time. Your digestive system practically stops functioning.

What's happening here is that you're learning how to survive in the harsh conditions of your environment.

Well, the same kind of thing happens to children who grow up with emotionally unavailable parents.

At first, the child is hungry for love and intimacy. But they don't get any. Or if they do, it's not nearly enough to satisfy their hunger. So, their attachment system adapts to this starvation of affection by shutting down. The child has learned to survive without the affection that they naturally crave.

What is your interpretation of rejection? For help reflecting on this form of parenting please refer to [the Perceived Rejection exercise in the workbook](#).



Jason, now 35 years old, grew up in what seemed like a great, prosperous family. His father, Mike, was a pretty famous musician, and his mom, Kate, worked as a crime reporter. However, both parents had forgotten what it meant to be vulnerable - they were forced to toughen up early in life. Mike learned how important it was to maintain his image of a hardcore rockstar at a young age, and Kate was jumping from one crime scene to another since she was 21.

Despite their differences, Kate and Mike got on well with each other, and at some point, they decided to have a baby - Jason.

Since the moment Jason was born, he cried and cried, day and night. He drove his parents crazy. The more he cried, the more they left him alone in his room. And the more time he spent alone, the louder and more desperate his screams became.

As the toddler got a bit older, he began to speak and cry less. But it seemed like the toddler's attempts at speech were as annoying to Kate and Mike as his crying. They hated it when he babbled like a baby. Why couldn't he just make sense when he spoke? They hated it when he was laughing loudly and uncontrollably. Why did he have to make a scene every time he thought something was interesting, or funny, or exciting?



They told Jason to act more mature, to stop squeaking and giggling like an infant. And most of all, they demanded that he stop complaining and whining. Jason was four years old at that time.

As a good kid would, Jason listened to his parents. At some point, he became quiet. He played in his room, alone, for hours. His face was expressionless, and it seemed like he didn't care when someone came into his room. He wasn't drawing attention to himself, and he didn't annoy his parents by making any "scenes." His little brain had learned that his emotions and needs were not important and were not going to be taken into account by anyone around him.


As sad as Jason's story is, it tells us a lot about this type of caregiver. They don't just avoid expressing their feelings, but may also look down on and disapprove of displays of emotion from their children. It doesn't even matter if their emotions are positive or negative; the caregivers can become angry and try to stop the child's behavior by telling them to toughen up.

What's more, the caregivers of avoidant children can become easily overwhelmed by an emotional situation and look for a way out.

It is in these moments that children are most aware of their caregivers' unavailability. For example, if a child approaches a parent for a soothing cuddle and they aren't given one, they see it as a door being shut in their face.

It's not difficult to understand how being raised in an environment like this can cause avoidant attachment. In many cases, the caregivers have an avoidant attachment style themselves and unintentionally pass it on to their children.

Therefore, it's reasonable to assume that people usually end up raising their children the same way they were raised themselves.

As a result of this form of parenting, a child with the avoidant attachment style may have a number of unmet emotional needs. If you  would like some support in identifying these needs, please refer to [the Unmet Needs exercise in the workbook.](#)



Reflection

Some of the information that we have gone through in this section might feel upsetting or triggering to you. We encourage you to take a few minutes to tune in to the feelings and emotions that you might be experiencing, as well as any changes that you notice within your body. Now is not the time for judgment, but instead a moment when you should be kind and understanding towards yourself.

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

In general, people like and quite admire Jenna. She's fun and easy-going, and she doesn't expect or demand anything from anyone. Ambitious, intelligent, and self-confident, Jenna is a true representation of a strong and independent woman.

The thing is, Jenna has always been a lone wolf. In high school, she only chose the sports she could play alone, not in a team. In college, she preferred to study in her dorm room rather than go to the library with the rest of her classmates. And now, at work, she usually takes on the cases that she can handle on her own.

Jenna enjoys being strong and independent. She feels self-sufficient and doesn't need others to approve of her or validate her worth. She knows how valuable she is. After all, she's worked so hard to get where she is now. She's confident that she deserves her success.

Another thing that makes Jenna stand out from the crowd is her ability to always "keep her cool" in front of others; she never shows vulnerability, impulsivity, or weakness. She's always disciplined and together.

Even though Jenna doesn't talk much about herself, people are impressed by her. Yet, nobody's ever managed to break through the surface and truly get to know her.

Jenna is a stereotypical avoidant adult; she is independent, tough, and self-sufficient. She learned at a young age to rely on herself and not on others.



Do you ever wonder whether your thoughts about yourself and the world influence how you act? A self-fulfilling prophecy is when our beliefs about ourselves result in a specific outcome. If you would like some support in figuring out whether your thoughts and actions result in self-fulfilling prophecies, refer to [the Self-Fulfilling Prophecies exercise in the workbook](#).

Avoidant adults generally avoid emotional closeness and tend to hide their feelings when faced with a potentially emotional situation.

Even though avoidant adults might be social and fun to be around, they like to have their own space and rarely share their private thoughts and feelings with others. This can make them seem like they've got it all together and in control of all aspects of their lives. This type of person is more likely to invest time and effort in their careers as it means that they're less likely to be dependent on others.


As you can see, there's a pretty clear pattern in the way avoidant adults behave.

LET'S SUM IT UP.

People with avoidant/dismissive attachment:

- prefer to stay distant and tend to pull away as soon as someone tries to get close
- are uncomfortable opening up to others and expressing private thoughts and feelings
- might seem distant and aloof and tend to minimize their emotional expressions
- see themselves as self-sufficient
- find it hard to get close to, trust, and rely on others; they prefer to rely on themselves

Which of your personality characteristics can you identify as potentially being a product of your attachment style? The

 Identifying Your Personality Characteristics exercise in the workbook may help if you need some guidance in pinpointing these characteristics.



1.1 Avoidant Attachment and Self-Development

By now, you're probably aware that securely attached adults have an overall positive view of themselves and other people's intentions towards them. Because their needs were met as a child, they consider themselves worthy of love, and they don't fear rejection. Essentially, they have healthy self-esteem.

On the contrary, having an insecure attachment style influences the formation of healthy self-esteem because if your needs weren't met as a child, then you might come to believe that your needs, and thus you, don't matter. This can cause people to repeatedly choose adult relationships that are unsatisfying to them, so they frequently experience romantic failure without truly understanding why. When relationships continue to fail, it can reinforce the belief that you are unworthy of love.

Some people with an insecure attachment may even subconsciously behave in a way that sabotages their relationship. Hence, this cycle of unhealthy relationships and low self-esteem continues.

But this isn't all bad news! As you already know – our attachment styles are not set in stone, and, therefore, nor is our self-esteem. In this section, we'll discuss what self-esteem, sense of self, and sense of agency are before discussing how to use some self-development techniques to improve your outlook on yourself, your world, and how you fit into it.



SELF-ESTEEM AND AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

Your self-esteem or self-worth is how you feel about yourself or the opinion that you have about yourself; it is how valuable and worthwhile that you believe yourself to be. Your levels of self-esteem are often due to your experiences, especially those from when you were a child. Hence, your attachment style is closely linked to your self-esteem.

Your levels of self-esteem are not related to how capable or successful you actually are – you could have an amazingly accomplished career, social life, or love life and still have low levels of self-esteem. Instead, self-esteem is more about how positive you feel about yourself and your life.

Some people with avoidant attachment have a strong sense of personal value - they know what they want and deserve and are in control of their lives. However, it might be surprising to learn that avoidant attachers often struggle with low self-esteem.


From the outside looking in, it might seem like they have an overly favorable view of themselves and a primarily negative one of others. Still, a lot of the time, this projection of confidence is actually a defense mechanism designed to protect their fragile self-esteem.

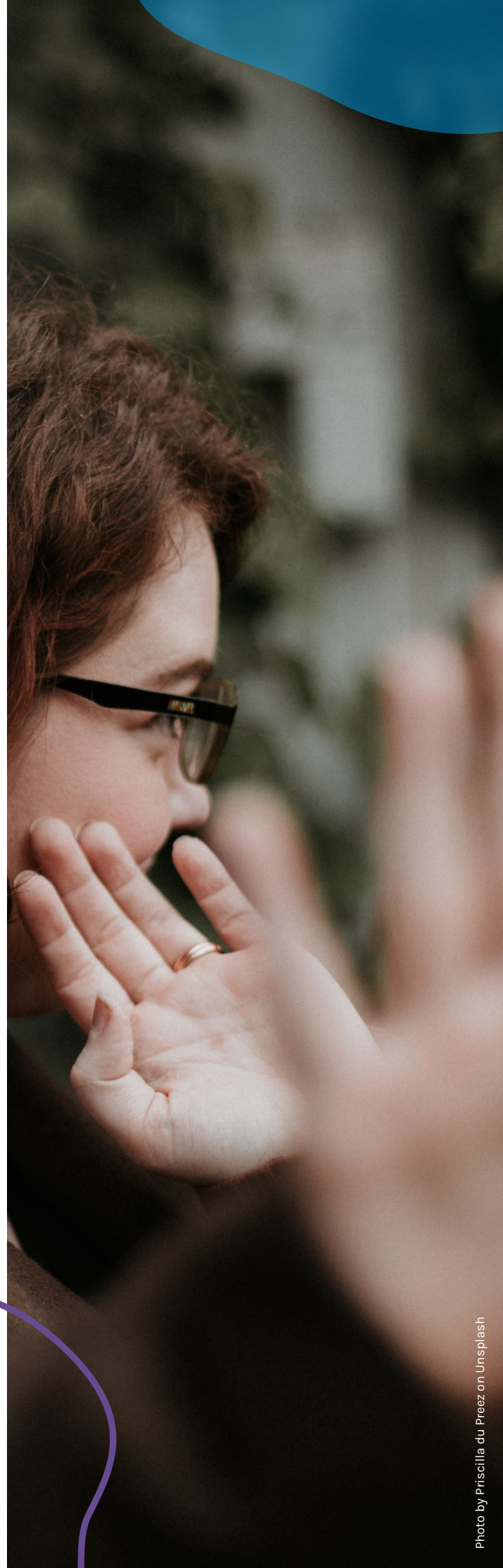
Because an avoidant attacher is so protective of their self-esteem, they may react angrily to any threats to it, or else retreat and avoid any potential slight to their self-image.

An avoidantly attached person's need for emotional space might even stem from their low self-esteem; they have a strong desire to belong, but they expect to be rejected by those they love, so they suppress their urge.

What's more, because of their childhood view that their needs don't matter, someone with an avoidant attachment may feel unworthy of healthy romantic relationships as an adult. This often results in them sabotaging their relationships before a romantic partner can reject them.

To determine whether you have healthy self-esteem, or if this is an aspect of yourself that you need to work on, refer to

 the Unveiling Your Sense of Self-Esteem exercise in the workbook.



SENSE OF SELF AND AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

People with low self-esteem tend to protect themselves by steering clear of any form of a challenge as they see them as inevitable mistakes waiting to happen. On the contrary, someone with robust self-esteem welcomes them as an opportunity to achieve personal growth. Combined with their aversion to tasks that might help them personally grow and the belief that their opinions and needs don't matter, someone with low self-esteem might never really get to know who they are as a person. They lack a *sense of self*.

A sense of self is your understanding of the characteristics that you think define you. This might be your talents, likes, and dislikes, moral code, or your personality traits – all of these things contribute to who you are. Knowing who you are as a person makes it easier to acknowledge your positive traits – the ones that you should be proud – and change the qualities that you would like to improve. However, having a vague or ill-defined sense of self makes it difficult to know who you are, so it's tough to understand what you want out of life and your relationships.


But here's the good news; we already know how adaptable to our environment our brains are – otherwise, we wouldn't have developed an attachment style so early in life, but this flexibility can have promising implications for the future too!

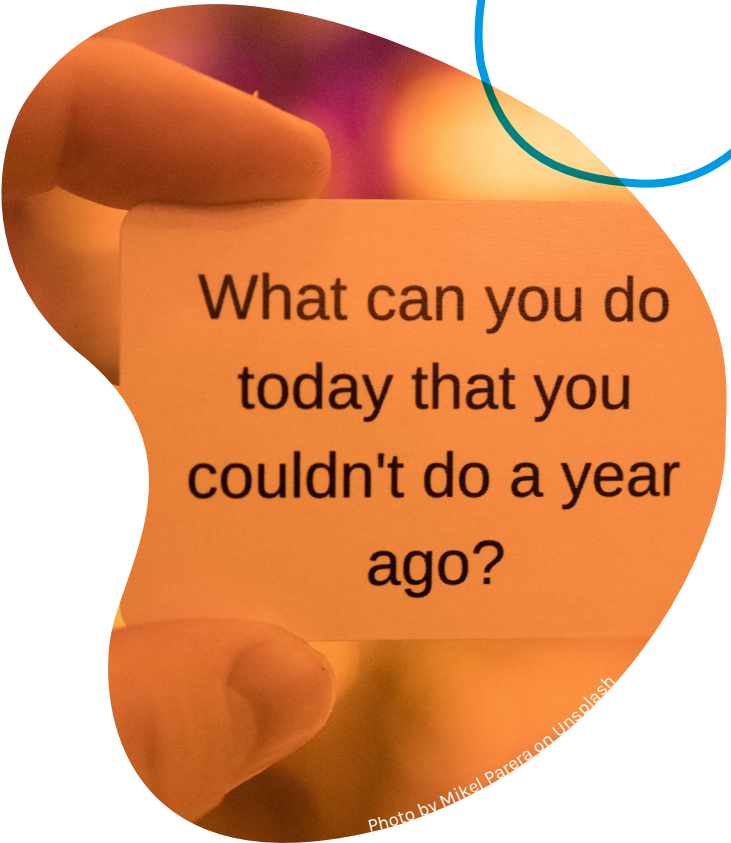
Neuroplasticity is our brains ability to to adapt to our environment. When we learn something different or try to make novel habits, our brains make new connections between their neurons.



Photo by Toa Heftiba on Unsplash

This extraordinary ability means that you can develop a strong sense of self and use it to build your self-esteem. Using self-development techniques, you can hone your talents, interests, and goals and use them to grow regarding who you are as an individual and increase your sense of self and self-esteem. Ultimately, self-development helps you to create an authentic sense of who you are - to feel content in your own skin and reach your full potential and happiness level in life.

-  The Self-Development exercises in the workbook may help you to develop a true understanding of who you are as an individual.

A hand is shown holding a piece of paper with a question. The background is a warm, orange-toned image of a hand holding a paper. There are decorative wavy lines in purple and blue on the left and right sides of the page.

What can you do
today that you
couldn't do a year
ago?

Photo by Mikel Parera on Unsplash

SENSE OF AGENCY AND AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

A sense of agency, sometimes known as self-agency, is the feeling of control that you get over your actions and consequences. When you complete an action voluntarily, you tend to feel as though you are in charge; the action isn't just happening to you – you chose to do it. You affect your environment, and even more importantly, you build a mental image of yourself and how you impact your environment.

Someone with a strong sense of agency knows that they can influence the people and objects in their environment to get the kind of reaction that they want. For example, when a little boy uses his favorite action figure to knock down some Lego buildings, he knows the cause and effect of his actions.

Essentially, having a sense of agency means that you feel like you're in the driving seat when it comes to your choices and actions.

On the contrary, someone with a poor sense of agency might believe that they are powerless in their world – they have no control over it. *The world is happening to them.* For example, think of a voodoo doll; someone else is inflicting pinpricks on the doll and putting it in all sorts of predicaments. It has no control over what is happening to it. Someone with a poor sense of agency might see themselves as similar to the voodoo doll; they might feel like they have little to no control over their environment and other people's actions in it.



By now, you've probably come to predict that your sense of agency is affected by your attachment style; similar to low levels of self-esteem, having an avoidant attachment style may leave you more susceptible to having a poor sense of agency. As a child, someone with an avoidant attachment might have felt like they exerted very little control over their caregiver's actions, and they shut down their emotions because any emotional displays were perceived negatively. Their strong desire to avoid rejection and be independent might mean that they are not in tune with their needs and who they really are as people; they may have lost their sense of agency.

Therefore, as an avoidant attacher, you might feel like you're having an impact on your world, but it might not be the impact that your true self would choose to make.

Thus, to live a fulfilled life and have happy relationships, you may need to improve your sense of agency.

Although there is no replacement for professional guidance and support, some of the following self-development techniques may help you to build your sense of agency:

Manage outside influences

Sometimes, having a low sense of agency comes from too many distractions. Think about what stimuli you let into your mind, especially when you're engaging in tasks that truly matter to you. For example, if you're reading a piece of poetry, then it might not be helpful to have your phone on the table in front of you - it's bound to distract you and interfere with your ability to focus.

Perhaps practice meditation or mindfulness to avoid becoming overstimulated - you'll find that you'll more easily tune into your sense of self and increase your agency as a result.

Be curious about your world

Never stop learning about everything that life has to offer - people with a strong sense of agency are eager to learn and expand upon who they are. To see yourself as a learner, no matter what age you are, opens up doors to different elements of your world. You could take a class or learn from new and interesting people...not all of your characteristics are set in stone, remember? You can recognize that you're a work in progress and therefore capable of growth and change.

Act on your decisions

We're all guilty of saying we'll do something and not following through. Still, people with a low sense of agency are particularly prone to procrastinating, obsessing over the small details, or ruminating about the possibility of making mistakes. They lack self-esteem and confidence, so they might be risk-averse. Remember that you don't have to be 100% sure about something to move forward with it - having a strong sense of agency means taking responsibility for your life, including the mistakes that you make. So, whereas you might not be confident that you're making the right choice, if you try to wait until you're 100%, then you'll never make any important decisions.

Choose your company carefully

There's an old saying: "If you go to bed with the dogs, you'll rise with fleas." This isn't to say that some of the people in your life are dogs! But it is important to acknowledge that the people we choose to let in our lives often affects how we feel about ourselves and the activities we engage in. Ask yourself whether the people that you associate with consider your voice or whether you go along with activities that are contrary to your values. This goes for romantic relationships too...

Trust your gut

We're all familiar with the feeling in our gut when it's telling us not to trust someone or something, but did you know that you can also use your gut to increase your sense of agency? Using your gut feeling to help you make important decisions can be a boost to your confidence and creativity – as long as you don't confuse it with bias! To start tapping into your gut feeling, just try slowing down, take deep breaths, and check-in with how you feel rather than making snap decisions.

You actually have more than one type of gut feeling; strategic intuition is a more “intentional” form of gut thinking which can help you find solutions to more significant problems. You might choose to use tools such as meditation or other relaxation techniques to help you to access this kind of intuition. Expert intuition happens when you develop a skill after years of practice, and you no longer need to focus on every detail of it fully – you develop a sense of mastery which means that you can trust in your trained instincts with confidence.

The section **The Next Step – Therapies and Alternative Approaches** towards the end of this book has more information about meditation and mindfulness should you want to find out more.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Strengths:

- You're capable of taking care of yourself
- You're tough and emotionally stable
- You don't seek attention and external validation
- You don't rely on the opinions or preferences of others: you

make decisions based on your evaluation of the situation

- You know your worth and don't get shaken by criticism
- You're easy-going and fun to be around
- You can be social and maintain many contacts if you decide to
- You don't demand or expect others to do things for you
- You're hardly ever moody or fussy and you rarely feel let down by others

Weaknesses:

- You are not comfortable with emotional closeness
- You don't let people in; it's hard for people to get to know you
- You don't trust people in general; you think negatively of them
- You lack awareness of your inner world - your emotions, needs, and fears
- You present a false self to the world
- You don't let others be there for you and show you that they care about you/love you
- You don't let others enter your space, and you back off and distance yourself from them when they do so
- You suppress your emotional experiences

We all have strengths and weaknesses, and some of these can be attributed to our attachment style. For support in uncovering your strengths and weaknesses, as well as how they have affected your life, please refer to the Discovering Your Strengths and Weaknesses exercise in the workbook.



II.

FRIENDSHIPS & SOCIAL GROUPS

Every friendship dynamic is different, but your attachment style likely affects how you relate to your friends. Remember, your first experiences of relationships may not have met your desire for emotional closeness. As a result, you may have certain subconscious expectations of how other people will meet your needs. The following are some behaviors that you might recognize in yourself if you're avoidantly attached - you may even recognize some of your friend's characteristics!

Someone with an avoidant attachment style typically prefers surface-level social bonds with others.


Sometimes an avoidant attacher may be outgoing and social, but they can also be reserved and may not crave social interaction as much as other people. They often place work and personal projects ahead of the friendships in their life.

This isn't to say that they don't have friends - they do. But because they're more likely to struggle with trust and intimacy, they may balk at someone trying to get to know them too personally. This can prevent them from making deep connections with friends. Avoidant attachers prefer many acquaintances to a couple of close friends, as this way they can maintain a comfortable distance.

Regarding social support, avoidant attachers prefer to be independent and not ask for help from others, even if they need it. They also may look down on others for being emotionally open or dependent on others. Someone with this attachment style may even come across as arrogant, but this is typically a defense mechanism for a fragile sense of self-esteem.

For more information on your strengths in the area of friendships, check out the section on superpowers at the end of this profile.

For help in determining how your current social groups operate, how you behave within them, and what you need from your

 friendships, please refer to the Friendships and Social Groups exercise in the workbook.



III.

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

3.1 General Profile

Miguel, an ambitious 29-year-old software developer, is quite popular with the ladies. Tall, dark, charming smile, and with cheekbones that could cut glass, he attracts women easily and has no problems dating. Yet, his relationships rarely last past the initial “lust” stage.

At first, Miguel’s dates are always drawn to him by his great looks and “edgy” character - tough, independent, and confident. They date him for a month or two, only to find out that Miguel lets them be around, but he doesn’t let them in. It doesn’t matter how much time passes, he never shares his thoughts and feelings, and he doesn’t particularly care about the women’s thoughts and feelings either.

Usually, a partner notices that the relationship is going nowhere and that she and Miguel are not growing closer. She starts small by asking him what’s wrong. Eventually, she becomes desperate to break through his façade, so she pushes more forcefully, doing things like pressuring Miguel to meet her parents, move in with her, cancel his “boy’s night out,” and so on.

From this point on, it typically takes about 3 to 4 weeks until Miguel is back on his Tinder profile, single and looking for some fun. When his friends ask him why he dumped his latest girlfriend, he gives a pretty straightforward explanation. Sometimes, he says

that the girl was too boring or lazy, and other times, he claims that a particular habit or physical trait of hers was bothering him, and they were “*apparently, just not a good fit.*”

He ends by smiling and saying something like, “*I’m better off single, anyway. Who needs relationships?*”

Just like Miguel, the avoidant type tends to believe that they don’t have to be in a relationship to feel complete. Emotional intimacy just isn’t their “thing,” and thus, they might not be able to build deep, long-lasting relationships.

Avoidant adults typically prefer their social connections to remain surface-level only. If someone starts to push them on this, they close themselves off and retreat pretty quickly. They might even subconsciously try to find a reason to end the relationship by picking up on petty things such as their partner’s behavior, habits, or even appearance.

It’s not that people with this attachment style don’t want relationships; it’s more that they don’t know how to be close and intimate with another person.

Despite some of these issues, someone with an avoidant attachment style can be an excellent partner in a relationship. For more information on your strengths in this area, check out the section on superpowers at the end of this profile.

- ① Use the Intimate Relationships exercise in the workbook to reflect on how your anxious attachment style has affected your intimate relationships; what they meant to you and the role that you played within them.

3.2 Potential Triggers

People with avoidant attachment don't simply break up with other people for no reason. But when their attachment system is triggered, they might feel the need to escape.

Look at Miguel's story; his attachment style doesn't interfere with his relationships until his attachment system is triggered.

After a month or two into the relationship, Miguel's girlfriends expect him to start opening up to them. When he doesn't, the other person tries to figure out ways to get closer to him. But he sees this as an invasion of his personal space and retreats, eventually ending the relationship.

Let's take a look at more potential triggers for avoidant attachers - you could try to think if any of these have applied to you in the past:

- a partner starting to ask personal questions
- a partner wanting to spend time with the avoidant's family
- feeling like the relationship takes up too much of their time
- feeling that they will be judged
- their partner criticizing them or demanding of them



So, when such events trigger the avoidant adult's attachment system, how do they react? How do you think you might have responded to being triggered in the past?

- They withdraw from the relationship
- They distract themselves with their work/hobbies
- They try to ignore their feelings

In rounding up this section, it might be a worthwhile activity to make a note of your personal triggers, as well as how you typically respond to them.

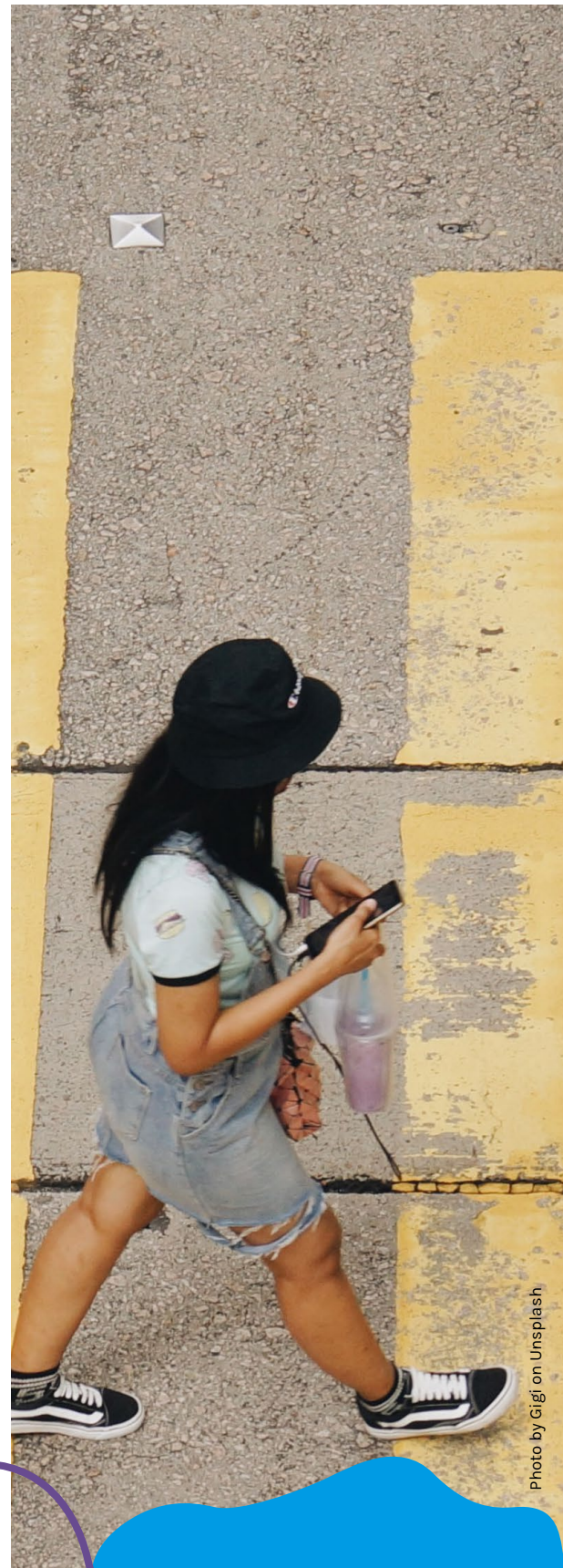
Also, try to think of your previous relationships and the reasons why they didn't work out concerning your attachment style, as well as the possible reasons outside of your attachment style.

After all, your partner and their attachment style play an equally important role in how the relationship played out.

If you would like to, or need guidance in, identifying your personal triggers in an intimate relationship,



then refer to [the Identifying Your Personal Triggers in a Relationship.](#)



3.3 Attachment Style Partnership Pairing

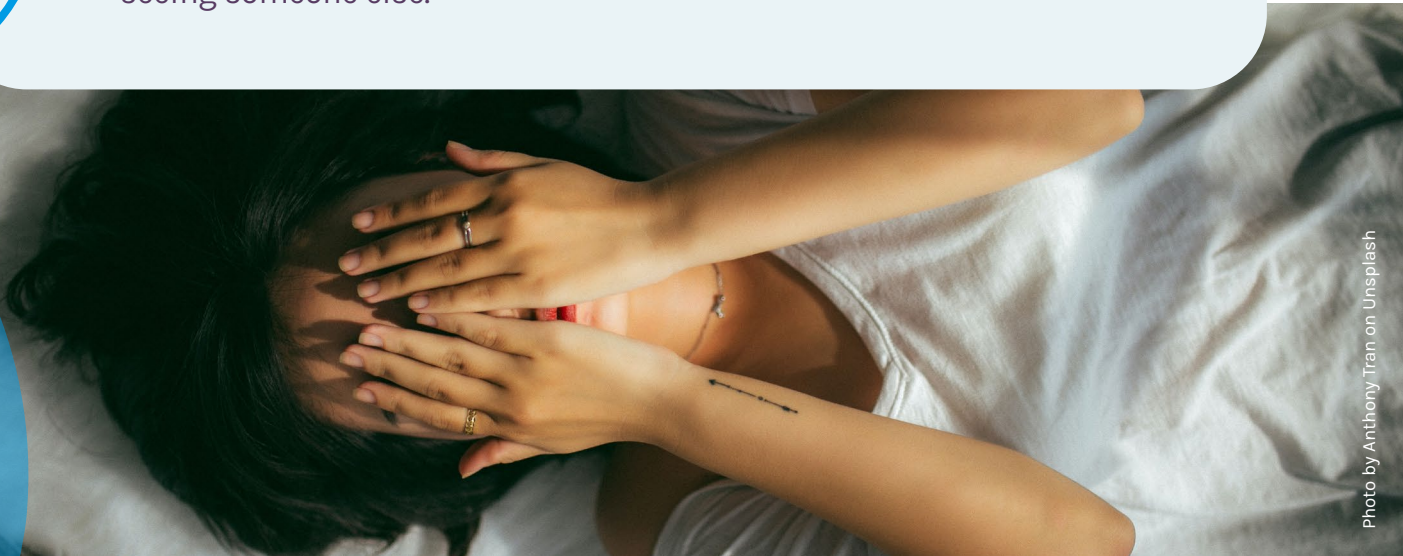
AVOIDANT-ANXIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Yamishe, a 34-year old IT specialist, always falls for avoidant types. Recently, she had the best date she'd ever had. It was a fix-up with a guy called Yuri, with whom she felt an instant connection and attraction. During the date, Yuri expressed his desire to be in a committed relationship. Yamishe was delighted – it gave her the confidence that Yuri would be serious about her and their potential future relationship.

After four weeks of frequent, daily contact, Yuri disappeared for days without any notice. He didn't answer Yamishe's texts or calls. When he finally picked up the phone, he apologized and explained that he was just "busy."

Yamishe was devastated. Yet, her desire for closeness was in full swing. Desperate to see Yuri, she agreed to let him come over.

Two hours later, Yuri still hadn't arrived. Yamishe downed a few glasses of wine, fell in a heap on her bed, texted Yuri twenty times, and cried herself into a stupor. The next day, she received an email from Yuri - not even a phone call - saying that he had started seeing someone else.



Relationships between anxious and avoidant attachers often end up in disaster. But why?

The main issue with such relationships is that one of the partners (the anxious one) seeks closeness and the other (the avoidant one) wants distance. The avoidant's desire for space triggers the anxious attacher's fear of abandonment, so they start to cling to their partner and challenge them on their need for distance. This causes the avoidant attacher to withdraw even further, making the anxious attacher cling even more.

So, unfortunately, both partners end up getting hurt; one becomes quiet and flees, and the other yells and pushes. Eventually, the avoidant attacher feels forced to leave.

This kind of relationship can be tough to break off – as we established earlier, an anxious attacher tends to try to hold on to a relationship. The traits of their attachment become triggered by separation, so they might desperately try to get closer to their ex in a vain attempt at calming their anxiety. In some **extreme** cases, this might lead to stalking.

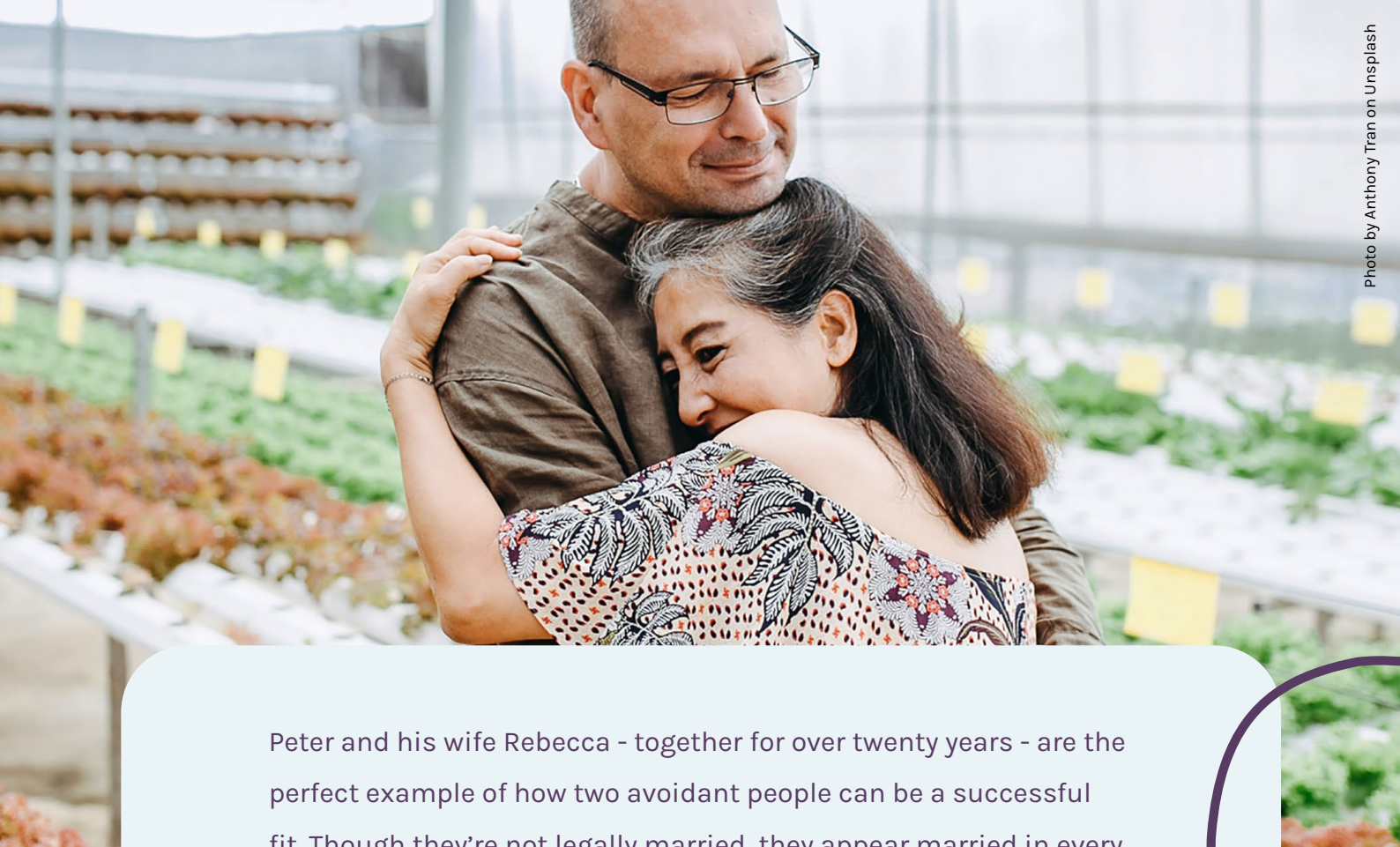


AVOIDANT-AVOIDANT RELATIONSHIPS

Sigmund Freud claimed that he and his wife, Martha, never quarreled in fifty years of marriage. Wow. Never argued? Not once? It kind of sounds like they were dodging intimacy and emotions. Yet, the marriage was apparently a happy union for both partners!

As with Sigmund and Martha, two people with avoidant attachment can have a successful relationship without conflict. Sure, their partner rarely shares any emotions, but that's fine. Certainly, not something that would be fought about, that's for sure.





Peter and his wife Rebecca - together for over twenty years - are the perfect example of how two avoidant people can be a successful fit. Though they're not legally married, they appear married in every sense of the word. They enjoy each other's company, they spend a lot of time together laughing and bantering, and neither has ever felt the need to stray outside the relationship.

In their many years together, Peter and Rebecca have never had a fight or a serious argument. Although they infrequently say "I love you," they do call each other "babe" and "honey."

They don't discuss feelings with each other; instead, they talk about their day and keep everything as light as possible. Despite living like a married couple, they retain financial independence.

For them, avoidance works.

Such couples seem like a perfect fit, right? However, if one partner was to become suddenly needy, this would alter the dynamics of the relationship, and the other might back off. Although rare in avoidant types, it can still happen in certain circumstances, such as if one partner becomes ill and, therefore, dependent on the other.

AVOIDANT-SECURE RELATIONSHIPS

Jonathan and Luke had been dating for about six months. Both were marine biologists in Miami and had quite a bit in common. Luke, typically a quiet person, really enjoyed Jonathan's goofy sense of humor; when they were together, they were always laughing.

Jonathan was happy to see Luke in person a few days a week, though they did speak daily. Luke, however, was starting to get frustrated with the relationship; he wanted more than just a couple of dates a week. Yet, he couldn't get Jonathan to open up and share his feelings.

Six months into the relationship, Luke was sent to Costa Rica along with his co-worker Jason. The two went out for dinner and, after a few drinks, Luke explained his frustrations with Jonathan to Jason. Jason hugged him and told him he deserved more. When Luke returned to Miami, he broke up with Jonathan and, within a few weeks, he had moved in with Jason.

Secure attachers are able to give avoidant partners the emotional and physical space that they need. This way, the romantic relationship might not become so overwhelming for the avoidant attacher. However, the lack of closeness, emotional sharing, and affection might still become too much for someone, no matter how secure they are.

3.4 Dating Online and in Person

The dating landscape of recent years is a new and often tough-to-navigate landscape. The constant evolution of smartphones and dating apps means that the potential to meet the right person rests in the palms of our hands. However, how do we traverse the masses of people who also wish to avail of the convenience of online dating to best ensure our chances of meeting a compatible partner?

Using your knowledge of your attachment style and its compatibility with the other styles may increase your chances of meeting an appropriate match.

Although there is no surefire way of determining someone's attachment style through an app or on the first meet-up, keeping an eye out for certain attachment traits may help you determine whether a potential partner is a good fit for you.

Try to keep in mind, however, that even if you're not technically compatible with another attachment style, then this doesn't mean that a fledgling relationship is doomed to fail. We all have individual differences that affect how we behave within relationships. Therefore, if there is enough of a spark between two people, then it is entirely possible to overcome the challenges presented by attachment traits through either personal or professional work. After all, we have to believe that love can conquer all!

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS SECURELY ATTACHED:

Someone with a secure attachment style is the perfect match for someone with an avoidant attachment style. This compatibility is primarily due to a secure attacher's early bond with their attachment figure(s); their need for security, proximity, and affection was met by their caregiver(s) during their formative years. As a result, someone with a secure attachment can effectively regulate their own emotions and those of others, typically has a positive outlook on themselves and others, and desires a healthy amount of affection and intimacy.

Therefore, they can meet the emotional needs of an avoidant attacher; secure attachers won't infringe on an avoidant attacher's personal space, but they may also help them to share themselves in un-encroaching ways.

So how can you tell whether someone is securely attached either online or on a first date?

ONLINE

You can tell whether someone has a secure attachment style through a dating app based on their messages and manner of communication. For starters, their profile will have their essential information but probably won't over-divulge too much. However, if they're interested in you, someone with a secure attachment won't hesitate to connect.



A secure attacher will ask questions about you rather than just speak about themselves because they are interested in who you are as a person. Furthermore, they will also likely maintain a steady stream of messages without being too persistent or disappearing for days on end. Although they will be direct with you in your interactions, they won't overshare personal information - this doesn't mean that a secure attacher won't open up more in time, but they won't do so too early in the relationship.

IN PERSON

Similar to meeting through an app, when meeting a secure attacher face-to-face, they will not continuously talk about themselves but instead will be interested in getting to know who you are as a person. Thus, they will ask you personal questions about your life and share personal information about themselves within reason. The secure attacher will be open, warm, and friendly. If they're interested in you, they will communicate that through their conversation and non-verbal communication, such as through open body language and steady eye contact.

Furthermore, as the date progresses, you may be able to glean some information about the individual's past relationships. If they are securely attached, they may have had a couple of long-term relationships, but may also have spent periods of time alone. This pattern is due to a secure attacher's comfort both in a relationship and by themselves.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS ANXIOUSLY ATTACHED:

According to statistics, anxious attachers are more likely to use dating apps than avoidant attachers. Therefore, you are potentially more likely to match with an anxious attacher online than someone with any other form of attachment style. Typically, the avoidant and anxious partnership isn't considered to be the most compatible out of the attachment pairings. This potential lack of compatibility may be due to an avoidant attacher's need for boundaries and emotional distance and an anxious attacher's desire for intimacy and attention.

Thus, such relationships can trigger the attachment traits of both individuals; the anxious attacher pushes for closeness, and the avoidant attacher pulls away.

Still, relationships between anxious and avoidant partners have the potential to be loving and compatible - it may just require more understanding of your partner's needs, as well as compromises to facilitate both of your requirements. So how can you tell whether someone is anxiously attached either online or in person?

ONLINE

Anxious attachers may initially masquerade as secure attachers during an online conversation as their first impressions are that of a chatty and open person. However, it likely won't take long for their anxious attachment traits to burgeon; instead of asking questions about you, an anxious attacher may mostly talk about themselves in order to impress you and reduce the risk of rejection. They may also attempt to forge intimacy and closeness within the relationship by divulging personal information too early.

IN PERSON

As with online connections, anxious attachers may focus primarily on talking about themselves when you meet them in person. Thus, pay attention to whether they ask you questions about yourself or whether the focus remains on them. What's more, their anxious attachment style may manifest in non-verbal ways, such as fidgeting, attempting to stand or sit too close, or maintaining too much eye contact in an attempt to seek connection and acceptance.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS AVOIDANTLY ATTACHED:

A fellow avoidant attacher's early experiences with their caregiver(s) can leave them feeling uncomfortable with vulnerability and intimacy. So to protect themselves, they often create boundaries and disconnect from their innate need to connect with others.

However, as another avoidant attacher, you may feel comfortable with this manner of operating within a relationship as you also likely prefer to maintain emotional distance and avoid intimacy.

Therefore, two avoidant attachers could potentially be compatible romantically as you may respect each other's needs and boundaries - that is, unless the parameters of one partner's needs change and more intimacy is required. So how can you tell whether someone is avoidantly attached either online or in person?



ONLINE

The avoidant style is relatively easy to identify through app dating compared to the other attachment styles. For example, an avoidant attacher may be quite reserved during the early stages of your connection and perhaps not message too much, or resist opening up regarding personal information. What's more, when you do talk/message, they may focus on non-personal topics such as films or books that they enjoy, their job, or sports that they play.

Also, if a fellow avoidant attacher loses interest in the relationship, they may back off by not messaging or "ghosting" you. This disappearing act can happen quite suddenly, in particular, after an emotional breakthrough or disclosure. The avoidant attacher's reaction isn't personal - it's just how they typically cope with intimacy. But you may identify with this as another avoidant attacher!

IN PERSON

Much of an avoidant attacher's behaviors in person will be similar to those through app dating; they will resist intimate or emotional disclosures. However, in person, an avoidant attacher will not only be closed off in their verbal communication, but also in their non-verbal expression; they may be quite reserved in their body language and have difficulty maintaining eye contact. For example, they may look at your chin or mouth as a strategy to avoid another person's gaze.

What's more, attempting to increase closeness by trying to push an avoidant attacher's boundaries through probing too much or forcing eye contact may cause them to feel unsafe, and they may retreat from the connection. However, you may be respectful of a fellow avoidant attacher's need for personal space and privacy, having similar ones yourself.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE HAS A DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT:

Since someone with a disorganized attachment may vacillate between the anxious and avoidant dimensions of attachment depending on their mood and circumstances, they may be prone to unpredictable behaviors and difficulties regulating their emotions. Because of their chaotic formative period, they typically both strongly desire and fear intimacy and emotional closeness. As an avoidant attacher, this unpredictability could be challenging to manage, as you may fight to retain emotional parameters and boundaries within the relationship. Thus, your actions could potentially trigger a disorganized attacher's intense fear of rejection, and they may fight to retain closeness with you, but potentially in unpredictable or chaotic ways.

Remember - a successful and loving relationship between two people with these attachment styles is not impossible; however, professional support may be required to process previous trauma or instability issues. So how can you tell whether someone has a disorganized attachment, either online or in person?

ONLINE

On a dating app, someone with a disorganized attachment style typically leans towards more anxious patterns of behavior because of their innate desire for connection. Therefore, they are likely to disclose personal information quite quickly in an attempt to establish a close and intimate bond with the other person. They may also talk about themselves a lot and not ask questions about the person they matched with. However, if things progress too quickly, they may back off and "ghost" the other person, meaning they may stop messaging without any clear reason.

IN PERSON

Face to face, a disorganized attacher is as likely to vacillate between anxious and avoidant traits - just like online. Thus, they may alternate between both styles depending on their mood and circumstance. For example, when you first meet them, they might be eager to connect and talk a lot about themselves. They may hold eye contact and attempt to sit or stand in close proximity. Alternatively, they may just as easily be uncomfortable disclosing personal information, be withdrawn in their body language, and avoid eye contact by looking at your mouth or chin. It can be challenging to determine which traits a disorganized attacher will manifest on a particular day.



3.5 Attachment in the Bedroom

By this point, you're hopefully aware of how avoidant people behave in relationships, so now it's time to see how they typically act when it comes to one particular part of relationships.

Let's talk about sex. Can your attachment style influence your sex life? And if so, how?

First thing's first - attachment absolutely does influence your sex life.

Think about it - it's so obvious! Sex bonds two people. It creates intimacy and an emotional connection. On the one hand, it's how we tell someone, "Hey - I think you're hot!" but on the other, it expresses our love for them. And all of these factors connect to our attachment system.

By the way, when referring to your sex life, we're not just talking about the actual physical act of love-making. We're talking about your outlook on it, the way you think and feel about it, and the ways that you use sex to meet your emotional (not sexual) needs.

This is what we'll be covering in the following section.

HOW DOES AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT AFFECT YOUR SEX LIFE?

People with an avoidant attachment style are typically uncomfortable with intimacy and talking about feelings. But, as we know, sex is all about intimacy and emotions!

So, this is a clear juxtaposition for an avoidant attacher - how can they have a healthy and fun sex life if they dislike intimacy?

One way in which an avoidant attacher might go about this is by completely avoiding sexual activities. Some studies have shown that certain people with this attachment style report their sex drive as relatively low, so avoiding sex is likely quite feasible for this group. They have other options such as pornography or sexual fantasies to take advantage of if they want to satisfy their physical needs.

However, many individuals with an avoidant attachment don't abstain from sex, so how can they do so if they dislike intimacy?



Photo by Charles Deluio on Unsplash

It's simple: they engage in emotion-free sex. Typically, the sexually active avoidant attacher seeks relationships that don't require any real commitments - they don't use sex to express love for their partners. So, casual relationships or hookups, as well as one-night stands, are usually ideal.

If the partner of an avoidant attacher becomes frustrated by their aloofness, the avoidant might even use sex to avoid a confrontation on the matter. It might be worth noting that such adults might avoid passionate and affectionate foreplay, as well as intimate sexual positions, as it may breach their comfort zone.

What's more, avoidant attachers might be less likely to fall in love (compared to people with other attachment styles), and they don't seem to as readily believe in "happily ever after."

To end this section, it's worth noting that your triggers, responses, and the way things turn out in a relationship don't depend solely on you and your attachment style. Your partner and their attachment style play an equally important role in the development and outlook of the relationship.

IV. ATTACHMENT AND PARENTING

One of the most significant predictors in our parenting style is the attachment style that we developed with our caregivers – after all, it influences how we act in the important relationships in our lives, and our relationship with our children is no exception. However, even though you may be prone to repeating your caregivers’ behavior, it doesn’t mean that you actually will – **you are not doomed to repeat the past.**

How you understand and make sense of your childhood and your behaviors in your adult relationships can be an even more significant predictor of what kind of parent you might be. At any stage in life, you have the power to adapt and change your attachment style. It may take self-reflection, understanding your past, empathy towards yourself and your experiences, and sometimes professional support. Still, in the end, you can become a parent with a healthy and nurturing outlook towards your child.

No parent is perfect - you’ll inevitably make mistakes. Still, if you enable yourself to repair any ruptures in the relationship, your child will likely grow up with a secure attachment.

4.1 What to Watch out for When Parenting With an Avoidant Attachment Style

Because someone with an avoidant attachment style might have grown up in an environment where their caregiver had difficulties tending to them emotionally, they might have adapted by “closing down” their emotions and developing a highly independent attitude where they refuse to rely on others. As adults, they might balk at displays of intimacy, which makes parenting tricky – a child requires their parent to be emotionally available to them.

For these reasons, if you are aware that you have an avoidant attachment style, you must remain vigilant about your attachment behaviors.

Make sure that you are emotionally available to your child and continuously examine whether you have made enough time and effort to create and maintain an emotionally consistent environment for them. Understanding is the first step to breaking the cycle.



4.2 How to Raise Your Child to Have a Secure Attachment

If you can remember, for a child to develop a secure attachment, they need to evolve in an environment where they feel **safe, seen and known, comforted, valued, and support for being their best self.**

It's essential to create a compassionate and warm environment for the child, one in which their caregiver can self-regulate their own emotions and reactions to upsetting stimuli. Doing so will help pass on these skills to their child as they learn through modeling and observation. It's also essential to view a child as an individual so that you are comfortable with them exploring; children with a secure attachment see their caregiver as a safe base from which they can explore their world with confidence. They are satisfied with the knowledge that their caregiver is nearby and that they have someone to turn to if they get scared. This facilitates the belief that other people will be there for them.



V. ATTACHMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

It's not just family, friends, and romantic relationships that can be affected by your attachment style - you might be more naturally inclined to act a certain way in the workplace, too, for both the positive and negative!

Josh, 45, is the chief editor of a book publishing agency in Paris. He started working for the agency as an intern right after he graduated from college. As he's been in the company for many years, Josh knows that he's earned his senior position, and he feels at home in the workplace. He knows everyone, and everyone respects him.

Still, Josh has never really paid much attention to the people in the office. He doesn't care much when someone gets fired or leaves. He doesn't hang out with the "gang" - a group of colleagues who regularly go out for beers after they clock out and watch movies together on weekends. For Josh, work is just work.

Every morning, he opens his office door at exactly 8:30. At 17:01, he leaves. When someone wants to come in to ask for help or guidance, Josh does help them, but he always keeps it short, straightforward, and professional. In the end, he'd say something like, *"I hope that solves your issue. I have to get back to work now."*

Despite his distance from the rest of the team, everyone appreciates Josh and admires his confidence and decisiveness. And somehow, his team knows that they can always count on him to “take out the fire” whenever the company is experiencing a problem.

Are you ‘a Josh’ in the workplace?

Josh’s story and the discussion below considers the typical characteristics of avoidant attachers in the workplace. Just keep in mind that this doesn’t mean that you have to recognize them in yourself.

The following information is based on an overview of the findings of many studies that examined avoidant attachers’ behaviors in the workplace.



Photo by Christina Wojcintehat on Unsplash

5.1 What Are the Typical Characteristics of Avoidant Employees?

We have separated the characteristics of avoidant attachers in the workplace into two types; potential difficulties and challenges and positive characteristics.

Here are the *potential difficulties/disadvantages* that an avoidant adult may bring to the workplace:

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES & DISADVANTAGES

1. Less positivity and more negative emotions
2. Avoid interpersonal closeness and group tasks; prefer to work alone
3. Distant; use work commitments to avoid socializing
4. Negative view of and criticism towards the leader
5. Resistant to leadership and new information (when forming judgments)
6. Distrust towards others in general
7. Seek less support from others
8. Do not conform to groups wishes

Looking at the evidence, one thing is pretty apparent; the avoidant employee is not the social type at work. They do not seek out friendships with colleagues, and they don't need social support.

It's not uncommon for avoidant individuals to have a poor perception of the people they work with – including their boss. They might look down on group activities as being beneath them and have an overall distrust towards others.

For this reason, they might prefer to work on their own. They put independence at the top of their list of priorities, so they might use a heavy workload as an excuse not to socialize with others.

There is the risk of avoidant employees in the workplace being labeled as the “troublemakers” of the office – they can resent leadership and may struggle with conforming to the group.

Here are the *positive characteristics* that an avoidant adult may bring to the workplace:

POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS

- 1. Work well independently**
- 2. Better capacity to sustain focus on the tasks at hand and to get the job done**
- 3. The quickest to act in times of danger (effectively, without hesitation)**
- 4. Determined to get positive results from tasks**

Having an avoidant employee on your team definitely has its benefits, even if they are a bit of a lone-wolf! A recent study demonstrated that avoidant employees tend to detect threats and manage danger more efficiently than other workers – thus, their superpower is being the quickest to respond to a problem without emotion and hesitation! Also, let’s face it, when a deadline is near, the avoidant employee will be the one who gets the job done.

For more information on your potential strengths in the workplace, check out the following section on the superpowers of the avoidant attachment style.

VI.

SUPERPOWERS

By this stage, you have learned about your attachment style in-depth, your personal characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, the way you engage in relationships, your needs, and your soothing strategies. You also continued to learn about different types of scenarios for dating and behaviors in the workplace.

The following are the potential superpowers of the avoidant attachment style in the different domains of their lives; relationships, friendships, and workplace.



RELATIONSHIP SUPERPOWERS

- Someone with an avoidant attachment style is likely to be respectful of their partner's boundaries. This regard is due to the avoidant attacher's own need for space. They won't ask too many probing questions of their partner, nor will they be overly demanding of their time because they wouldn't appreciate this behavior in return.
- An avoidant attacher is unlikely to overshare personal information or become overly emotional in a relationship. Thus, the avoidant attacher likely retains independence and individuality in a relationship.

FRIENDSHIP SUPERPOWERS

- Avoidant attachers are often sociable and radiate confidence. These traits can make them very desirable friends - others often perceive them as cool and self-assured.
- Avoidant attachers are more likely to have many friends rather than a few close ones. This amiability often places them at the hub of a social group.
- Someone with the avoidant attachment style can be an excellent advice-giver: they will tell people what they need to hear, instead of simply trying to make the person who's in distress feel better. They prefer to give advice based on logic rather than allowing emotions to rule their opinions.

WORKPLACE SUPERPOWERS

- Someone with an avoidant attachment style may be an evolutionary altruist. Thus, they may incur a personal cost to enhance someone else's quality of life. In the workplace, this may likely mean that avoidant attachers are willing to put in the extra work hours to increase team productivity and save on resources.
- Avoidant attachers are often quick responders to threats in their environment. This ability means that they may identify workplace problems more quickly than others, leaving time to effectively solve the issue and reduce the severity of its impact.
- Avoidant attachers are likely to be confident in their abilities and decisions in the workplace. Therefore, they are less likely to require the support of their colleagues, leaving more time for productivity.
- Since an avoidant attacher is less likely to overly focus on personal issues, they have the freed-up mental capacity to push themselves towards professional success. Therefore, they can achieve greatness in the workplace.

If you would like some help with identifying your attachment related personal superpowers, then refer to the Identifying Your Superpowers exercise in the workbook. You could even try reconsidering ones that you previously thought of as a weakness as potential strengths!

CHAPTER V

The Disorganized Attachment Style





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The Disorganized Attachment Style

Having a disorganized attachment may mean that you went through more hardships as a child than others might understand, but you survived. You're here, reading this. This means that you persevered when times were tough and not only did a great job, but you're eager to learn more about who you are and how you function.



An insecure attachment is not a life sentence; through understanding, self-reflection, and perhaps professional help, you can make great strides towards more fulfilling relationships and personal life.

As you continue to read through this profile, you may find that the meaning and genesis of disorganized attachment will become more apparent.

However, you might also find that some experiences and traits of this attachment style fit closely with your life, yet others might be incredibly disparate.

This is because a disorganized attachment style can look very different for everyone who has it - the main commonality is that people who have it likely had a rough start in life. Well done - you're genuinely incredible for making it to this point!


***Warning** - the following content may be emotionally triggering for some people. Remember that this information is a guideline, and your experiences may fit very well with it or not at all. There is a reflection exercise at the end of the upcoming passage should you wish to process or document your emotions/feelings.*



1.1 How Does the Disorganized Attachment Style Develop in Children?

Attachment is formed around the quality of the relationship between a child and its caregivers. So, this might mean that the bond your caregivers made with you in your early childhood didn't satisfy your emotional needs. Let's consider why. The disorganized attachment style is believed to be the most challenging type of insecure attachment. It is often observed in people who have been physically, verbally, or sexually abused in early childhood. They also may have experienced neglect or witnessed traumatic situations.

Attachment is created in the first 18 months of life through the relationship with a primary caregiver, usually the mother or father. The roots of this attachment style are based in **perceived fear**; the child sees their source of safety (the caregivers) as a source of fear.

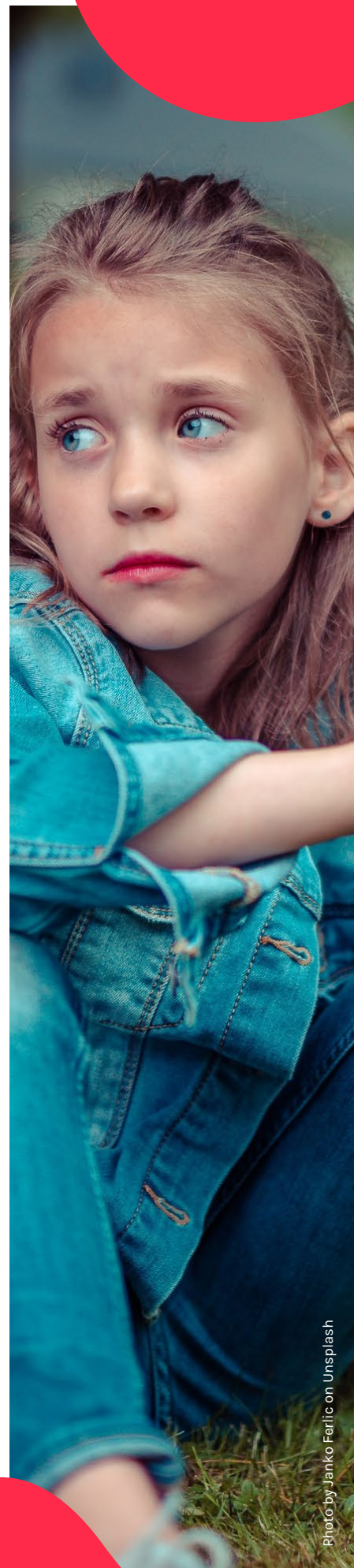
How we interpret our childhood can help us understand how our attachment style developed. If it feels comfortable for you to do so,  the Early Childhood Experience exercise in the workbook can help you to identify your early memories.

BUT WHERE DOES THIS FEAR COME FROM?

When caregivers show highly contrasting behavior, then a child can start fearing for their safety. They don't know when their basic needs will be met, if even at all.

Subconsciously, the child learns that the caregiver cannot meet their needs.

Can you remember back to Chapter One and the type of parental behavior that can cause disorganized attachment? "*Frightened*" and "*frightening*" behavior were the terms deemed most appropriate at that time.




Sometimes, caregivers are scared. They lack confidence in their own ability to parent, so their child is frightening to them. Other times, it's the caregivers that are scary and frightening. They might behave aggressively or threateningly towards their child. In more extreme cases, they might even be abusive. In some situations, the child may have experienced or witnessed a traumatizing event that involves their caregiver. For instance, the caregiver might abuse the child (verbally, physically, or sexually), or else the child witnesses the caregiver abuse someone else. Either way, the child no longer trusts their caregiver.

Now the child has a dilemma on their hands; their caregiver is a source of attachment, but now they're also a source of fear. How can they go to someone that they're scared of for comfort?

What's more, often, these caregivers have unresolved trauma themselves. This creates a barrier to bonding with their child, which causes the child to become disorganized as they try to figure out a way to get their caregivers to connect with them emotionally.

Unfortunately, children with a disorganized attachment style aren't able to adapt to their caregiver's behavior – it's too unpredictable. They end up confused and conflicted about how to act; should they seek closeness with the person they love? Or distance themselves from a source of fear?

Our emotions and emotional needs can be excellent indicators of our deep level functioning. For help or guidance in recognizing your

 emotions and needs refer to the Uncovering Your Needs exercise


 and the Uncovering Your Emotions exercise in the workbook



Photo by Helena Lopes on Unsplash

Reflection

Some of the information we have gone through in this section might feel upsetting or triggering. We encourage you to take a few minutes to tune in to the feelings and emotions that you might be experiencing, as well as any changes that you notice within your body. Now is not the time for judgment, but instead a moment when you should be kind and understanding towards yourself.

1.2 Personality Characteristics

In adulthood, people with a disorganized attachment style can be highly inconsistent in their behavior.

This is because they have an internal battle between two opposing attachment strategies:

Hyperactivation is usually seen in anxious/preoccupied children; the child clings to their caregivers and screams for attention to get their needs met.

Deactivation is usually seen in avoidant/dismissive children; the child understands that their needs won't be met and distance themselves from their caregivers.

As an adult, disorganized people tend to switch between anxious and avoidant traits and the result is an unpredictable pattern of behavior.

Just like anxious attachers, disorganized adults can be clingy, needy, and demanding. Their desperate need for love makes them seek attention and approval from others. They can become jealous and suspicious due to their tendency to over analyze everything - even the most minimal things - that the people around them say or do. Disorganized attachers typically feel unworthy of love, and they live in constant fear that the people they love will hurt or abandon them.

Like avoidant attachers, disorganized adults presume that their needs will not be cared for by others. For this reason, they might find it hard to trust and rely on anyone else. They may shut down their emotions and become cold and rejecting towards others. Disorganized adults are usually uncomfortable with intimacy and often hesitate to let people in.

Sarah Lynn, now 23 years old, was abused by her father's girlfriend, Amanda, when she was a kid. Jacob, Sarah Lynn's dad, was a good-hearted person who adored his daughter. At the same time, he was so in love with Amanda that he trusted every single word that came out of her mouth. Amanda was always jealous of Sarah Lynn and resented her. So, every time she got the chance, Amanda did everything she could to hurt the little girl - both physically and mentally.

Growing up, Sarah Lynn never felt truly happy. She felt alone and misunderstood as if the whole world was against her. At some point during her high school years, she started hanging out with a group of kids who were into partying, drugs, and alcohol. Sarah Lynn was a good fit for her new gang and quickly picked up all of her peers' bad habits.

Somehow, pretty much everyone in Sarah Lynn's high school was interested in her. Half of them were impressed by how cool she seemed, and the other half thought that she was "completely insane." On the one hand, Sarah Lynn was fun and always up for a good time; she seemed confident and mature. She'd go to all the parties, dress provocatively, and often hook up with college boys. On the other hand, there were times when she would make a scene for no apparent reason. Dramatic and uncontrollable, she'd burst into anger and then shut herself off and not leave her house for days.

The truth was that Sarah Lynn never really felt "cool." She was depressed and scared. She wanted to connect with people, have real friends, and be loved, but she didn't know how. She was convinced that she was worthless and that nobody could ever truly love her. She knew people only hung out with her because they thought she was interesting. Besides, what was the point of trusting anyone when they were only going to hurt, reject, or abandon her anyway?



A typical disorganized attacher, Sarah Lynn's personality traits and behaviors are a mix of anxious and avoidant symptoms.

On the one hand, Sarah Lynn is desperate for attention and approval. She is needy and demanding, and when things don't go her way, she makes a scene.

But on the inside, Sarah Lynn feels unworthy of love and true connections. She often feels helpless because of her inability to control her emotions and moods.

On the other hand, disorganized people like Sarah Lynn can easily disconnect from others. They're unable to trust or rely on anyone, so they quickly back off and reject people. In more extreme cases, a person with disorganized attachment can push people away by deliberately hurting them, only confirming their belief that everyone abandons them at some point. This mix of behaviors might feel a bit like "I hate you, but don't leave me" in their relationships.

As you can see, people with disorganized attachment typically have a distinctive pattern of behavior. Let's sum it up:

People with disorganized attachment:

- Show contradictory and ambiguous behavior
- They are sometimes clingy and needy, and at other times, dismissive and distant
- Can be dissociated and disconnected
- Tend to feel lonely and angry
- Suspicious and jealous
- Might be manipulative, moody, and dramatic
- Exhibit instability, upheaval, and storminess in their relationships
- Feel like they don't have an impact on the world
- Often feel ineffective and helpless in life, and tend to have poor goal-oriented behavior
- Have a hard time bonding with, opening up to, and trusting others
- Fear that their partner will abandon, reject, or hurt them

Which of your personality characteristics can you identify as potentially being a product of your attachment style? The Identifying Your Personality Characteristics exercise in the workbook may help if you need some guidance in pinpointing these characteristics.



1.3 Disorganized Attachment and Self-Development

At this stage, you're likely already aware that securely attached adults have an overall positive view of themselves and other people's intentions towards them; because their needs were met as a child, they consider themselves worthy of love, and they don't fear rejection. Essentially, they have healthy self-esteem.

On the contrary, having an insecure attachment style influences the formation of healthy self-esteem because if your needs weren't met as a child, then you might come to believe that your needs, and, thus, you, don't matter.

This can cause people to repeatedly choose adult relationships that are unsatisfying to them, so they tend to experience romantic failure frequently without truly understanding why.

When their relationships continue to fail, it reinforces their belief that they are unworthy of love, possibly even subconsciously causing them to behave in a way that sabotages their relationship – hence, this cycle of unhealthy relationships and low self-esteem continues.

But this isn't all bad news! As you already know – our attachment styles are not necessarily set in stone, and, therefore, nor is our self-esteem. In the upcoming section, we'll discuss what self-esteem, sense of self, and sense of agency are before discussing how to use some self-development techniques to improve your outlook on yourself, your world, and how you fit into it.

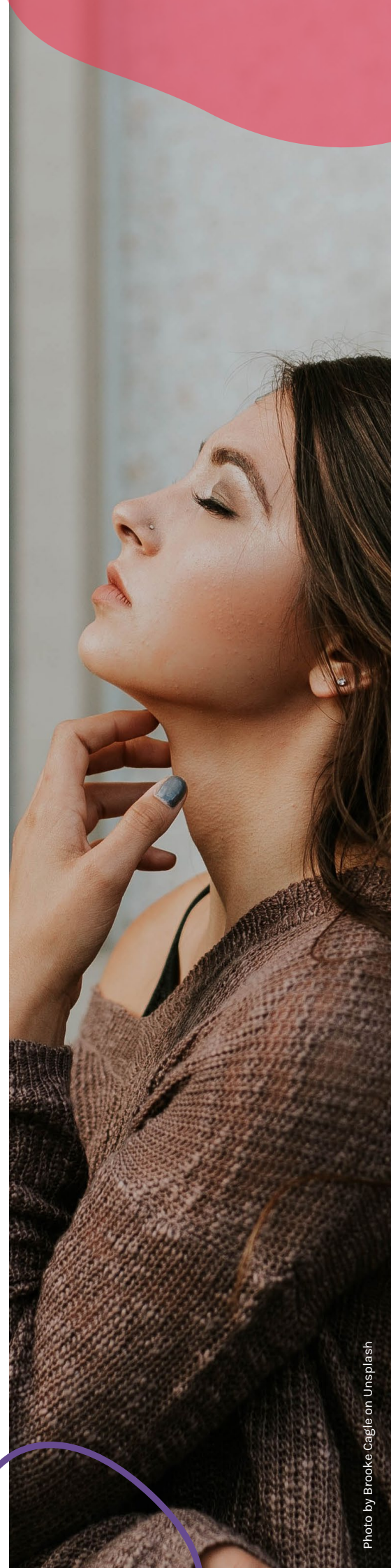


SELF-ESTEEM AND DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT

Your self-esteem or self-worth is how you feel about yourself or the opinion that you have about yourself; it is how valuable and worthwhile that you believe yourself to be. Your levels of self-esteem are often due to your experiences, especially those from when you were a child. Hence, since the way that we view ourselves and others are rooted in our attachment styles, our type of attachment is seen as closely related to our self-esteem.

Your levels of self-esteem are not related to how capable or successful you *actually* are – you could have an amazingly accomplished career, social life, or love life and still have low levels of self-esteem. Instead, self-esteem is more about how positive you **feel** about yourself and your life. Someone with a disorganized attachment style might have a negative view of themselves and others – they typically think that their needs don't really matter and that they are unworthy of love and acceptance. They may also expect the worst of others, including romantic partners, so they might behave suspiciously or jealous towards them. They could also try to protect their self-esteem by pushing a romantic partner away before they can reject them first. Still, when they actually leave, it only reinforces their belief that they are unlovable.

A disorganized attacher might also feel like they don't have an impact on the world – they might instead feel like the world is happening to them. It is out of their control, so they feel helpless, and they might not make goals for themselves in life as a result.



SENSE OF AGENCY AND DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT

A sense of agency, sometimes known as self-agency, is the feeling of control that you get over your actions and their consequences. When you complete an action voluntarily, you tend to feel as though you are in charge; the action isn't just happening to you – you chose to do it. You affect your environment, and even more importantly, you build a mental image of yourself and how you impact your environment.

Someone with a strong sense of agency knows that they can influence the people and objects in their environment to get the kind of reaction that they want. For example, when a little boy uses his favorite action figure to knock down some lego buildings, he knows the cause and effect of his actions.

Essentially, having a sense of agency means that you feel like you're in the driving seat when it comes to your choices and actions.

On the contrary, someone with a poor sense of agency might believe that they are powerless in their world – they think that things just happen to them and they have no control over it. *The world is happening to them.* For example, think of a voodoo doll; someone else is inflicting pinpricks on the doll and putting it in all sorts of predicaments. It has no control over what is happening to it. Someone with a poor sense of agency might see themselves as similar to the voodoo doll; they might feel like they have little to no control over their environment and other people's actions in it.




By now, you've probably come to predict that your sense of agency is affected by your attachment style; similar to low levels of self-esteem, having a disorganized attachment style may leave you susceptible to having a poor sense of agency. Due to their chaotic childhood, disorganized attachers tend to have deep-rooted shame about who they are as a person because they often feel unlovable, inadequate, and unworthy to the extent that they may never develop a sense of agency.

Therefore, as a disorganized attacher, you might feel like the world is happening to you rather than you're having an impact on it. This isn't permanent - you may have to work on it, but that's ok. Understanding is the first step towards achieving change.



Photo by Simon Berger on Unsplash

To help determine whether you have healthy self-esteem or if this is an aspect of yourself that you need to work on, refer to  the Unveiling Your Self-Esteem and Sense of Self exercise in the workbook.

SENSE OF SELF AND DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT

People with low self-esteem often tend to protect themselves by steering clear of any form of a challenge as they see them as inevitable mistakes waiting to happen. On the contrary, someone with robust self-esteem welcomes challenges as an opportunity to achieve personal growth. Combined with their aversion to tasks that might help them personally grow and the belief that their opinions and needs don't matter, someone with low self-esteem might never really get to know who they are as a person. They lack a *sense of self*.

A sense of self is your understanding of the characteristics that you think define you. This might be your talents, likes, and dislikes, moral code, or your personality traits - all of these things contribute to who you are. Knowing who you are as a person makes it easier to acknowledge your positive traits -the ones that you should be proud of - as well as identify and change the ones that you would like to improve. However, having a vague or ill-defined sense of self makes it difficult to know who you are, so it's tough to fully understand what it is you want out of life and your relationships.

But here's the good news; we already know how adaptable to our environment our brains are - otherwise, we wouldn't have developed an attachment style so early in life, but this flexibility can have promising implications for the future too!



Photo by Toa Heftiba on Unsplash


Neuroplasticity is our brain's ability to adapt to our environment.

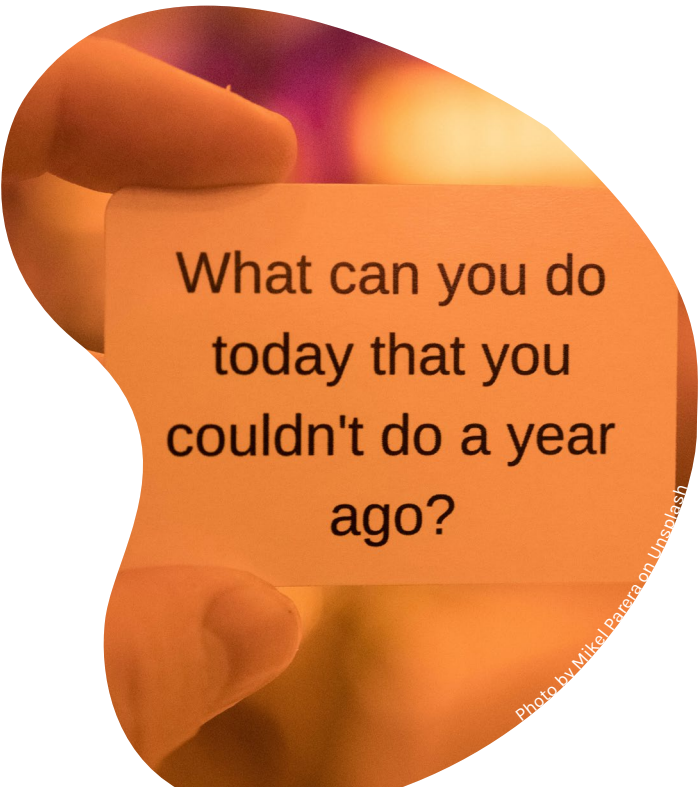
When we learn something different or try to make novel habits, our brains make new connections between their neurons.

This happens naturally every day as we adapt to different situations, but it's also something that we can encourage and promote. Essentially, from the day we are born until the day we die, our brain rewires itself in response to what we need it to do.

This extraordinary ability means that you can develop a strong sense of self and use it to build your self-esteem. Using self-development techniques, you can hone your talents, interests, and goals and use them to grow in regards to who you are as an individual and increase your sense of self and self-esteem. Ultimately, self-development helps you to create an authentic sense of you – it facilitates feeling content in your own skin and the ability to reach your full potential and happiness level in life.

For these reasons, it is all the more critical that you understand your more in-depth levels of functioning. The Self-Development

 Techniques in the workbook may help you to develop a true understanding of who you are as an individual.



What can you do
today that you
couldn't do a year
ago?

Photo by Mikel Parara on Unsplash

1.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Disorganized Attachment Style

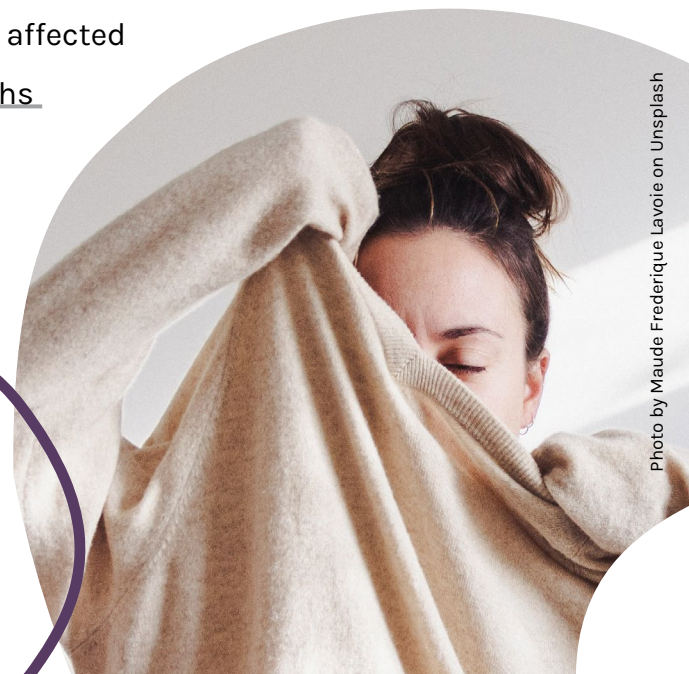
Strengths:

- You can be resilient when times are tough
- You may be capable of taking care of yourself
- You can be social and fun to be around
- You value your connections with others
- You may not give up on others easily

Weaknesses:

- You may be uncomfortable with emotional closeness
- You struggle to trust others
- You fear that others will reject or abandon you
- You may be moody and prone to creating conflict
- You might seek out emotional closeness and then turn away from it

We all have strengths and weaknesses, and some of these can be attributed to our attachment style. For support in uncovering your strengths and weaknesses, as well as how they have affected your life, please refer to [the Discovering Your Strengths and Weaknesses exercise in the workbook.](#)



II.

FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIAL GROUPS

Every friendship dynamic is different, but your attachment style likely affects how you relate to your friends. Remember, your first experiences of relationships may not have met your desire for emotional closeness. As a result, you may have certain subconscious expectations of how other people will meet your needs.

Of course, you're not just defined by your attachment style. Since your childhood, you have gone through many different experiences, met many different people, and perhaps even gone through therapy or figured out other methods of coping with your past.

This means that you might be more equipped than others to manage the often tricky dynamics of friendships. For this reason, some of the below traits might sound like you, but others may not.

A disorganized attacher may display traits of both the avoidant and dismissive attachment style in friendships. This might look a bit like "Come here. No, go away," as you might both crave and fear friendships. Because you might be clingy and anxious around your social group, you may end up frequently involved in conflict even if you don't wish to be. This could happen for insignificant reasons; for example, if someone failed to return a text message, then you might assume that they're mad at you, and as a result, you may become upset and confrontational. Someone with a disorganized

attachment style may also be prone to unpredictable moods, thus making it difficult for friends to stay connected with you.

As a disorganized attacher, you may struggle with trusting others and therefore balk at someone's attempts to grow close to you. This inability to be mutually vulnerable with friends can strain a relationship and make it difficult for you to maintain long-lasting friendships.

For more information on your potential strengths in the area of friendships, check out the section on superpowers at the end of this profile.

For help in determining how your current social groups operate, how you behave within them, and what you need from your


 friendships, please refer to [the Friendships and Social Groups exercise in the workbook.](#)



Photo by: Jasmalene Rose from Unsplash

III. INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

3.1 General Profile

People with a disorganized attachment may be prone to stormy, unstable, and dramatic relationships. Even though they desperately want their partners to love them, they also expect them to hurt them. They're waiting for the inevitable rejection and disappointment that they've grown used to.

For someone with this type of attachment, the partner and the relationship are often a source of both desire and fear, which can cause extremes of emotion – sometimes they're angry and distant ("I hate you"), and other times clingy and desperate ("Don't leave me").

It's common for people with early trauma to recreate the conditions of their childhood. They may end up confusing feelings of love and being loved with physical or emotional abuse or violence. Therefore, one or both partner's belief that they were not worthy of love ends up being confirmed by the volatile nature of their relationship. It's challenging for disorganized attachers to let their barriers down as they risk showing their genuine emotions and people seeing their vulnerabilities.

For more information on your potential strengths in the area of intimate relationships, please refer to the section on superpowers at the end of this profile.

- ✎ Use [the Intimate Relationships exercise in the workbook](#) to reflect on how your anxious attachment style has affected your intimate relationships; what they meant to you and the role that you played within them.

3.2 Attachment Style Partnership Pairing

DISORGANIZED-DISORGANIZED RELATIONSHIPS

It is pretty common for people with a disorganized attachment to be attracted to partners who are also disorganized. Consider it this way; when you have experienced traumatic situations, you may feel more understood and accepted by someone who has also had these experiences.

On the other hand, someone who tends to feel conflicted in their emotions and how to express them may also place themselves in vulnerable situations, engage in risky behaviors, and constantly shift their expectations in relationships ("come here - no, go away").

Thus, it can be difficult for a disorganized person to manage their own actions, let alone those of a disorganized partner.

It's not all bad, though. Suppose a disorganized attacher falls in love with another disorganized attacher. In this case, they can both take steps towards building mutual trust, to allowing themselves to depend on someone else, and towards sharing a happy and fulfilling future. It may take time, but nothing worthwhile in life comes easy.



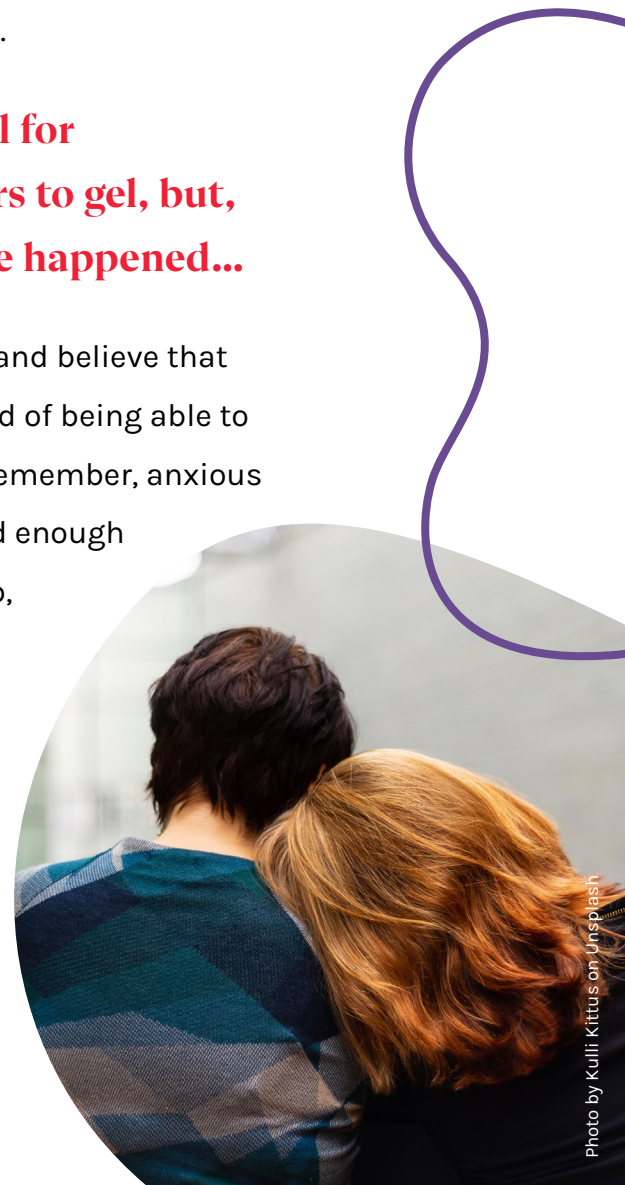
However, it's essential to be mindful that such relationships sometimes have the potential to be retraumatizing as past wounds may still be fresh, so they may require intensive personal work to avoid hurting each other and themselves. Therefore, professional help may be necessary in order to see progress.

DISORGANIZED-AVOIDANT AND DISORGANIZED-ANXIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

In relationships, an avoidant attacher typically prefers to be independent and not ask for help from others, even if they need it. They also may look down on others for being emotionally open or dependent on others. Someone with this attachment style may even come across as arrogant, but this is typically a defense mechanism for a fragile sense of self-esteem.

For this reason, it would be unusual for disorganized and avoidant attachers to gel, but, hey! Why not? Stranger things have happened...

An anxious attacher might hope for the best and believe that their disorganized partner can change instead of being able to move on with their life to greener pastures. Remember, anxious attachers tend to think that they are not good enough – therefore, even in a challenging relationship, they may believe that they did something to inspire their partner to behave a certain way.



Even if it's abusive. The anxious attacher may think that if they change their behavior, then the relationship will change along with it. What's more, an anxious attacher may be scared of never finding another love, so even if it means staying in an unhealthy relationship, they're convinced that it's better than being single. These relationships can therefore be quite toxic for each of the two partners.

DISORGANIZED-SECURE RELATIONSHIPS

Secure partners may be able to provide stability for a disorganized partner in a relationship as they may help them regulate their moods and emotions. A secure partner is more likely to have a positive outlook than a disorganized partner, which may fulfill the disorganized attacher's need for emotional closeness. However, sometimes professional support or guidance may be required depending on the disorganized attacher's history and outlook.



3.3 Dating Online and in Person

The dating landscape of recent years is a new and often tough-to-navigate landscape. The constant evolution of smartphones and dating apps means that the potential to meet the right person rests in the palms of our hands. However, how do we traverse the masses of people who also wish to avail of the convenience of online dating to best ensure our chances of meeting a compatible partner?

Using your knowledge of your attachment style and its compatibility with the other styles may increase your chances of meeting an appropriate match. Although there is no surefire way of determining someone's attachment style through an app or on the first meet-up, keeping an eye out for certain attachment traits may help you determine whether a potential partner is a good fit for you.

Try to keep in mind, however, that even if you're not technically compatible with another attachment style, then this doesn't mean that a fledgling relationship is doomed to fail. We all have individual differences that affect how we behave within relationships. Therefore, if there is enough of a spark between two people, then it is entirely possible to overcome the challenges presented by attachment traits through either personal or professional work. After all, we have to believe that love can conquer all!

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS SECURELY ATTACHED:

Someone with a secure attachment style is the safest romantic bet for someone with a disorganized attachment style. A secure attacher's early bond with their attachment figure(s) meant that their need for security, proximity, and affection was met. Thus, they

can effectively regulate their own emotions and those of others, typically have a positive outlook on themselves and others, and desire a healthy amount of affection and intimacy.

Therefore, they can meet the emotional needs of a disorganized attacher and help them better balance their emotions and feel secure within the relationship.

So how can you tell whether someone is securely attached either online or in person?

ONLINE

You can tell whether someone has a secure attachment style through a dating app based on their messages and manner of communication. For starters, their profile will have their essential information but probably won't over-divulge too much. However, if they're interested in you, someone with a secure attachment won't hesitate to connect.

A secure attacher will ask questions about you rather than just speaking about themselves because they are interested in who you are as a person. Furthermore, they will also likely maintain a steady stream of messages without being too persistent or disappearing for days on end. Although they will be direct with you in your interactions, they won't overshare personal information - this doesn't mean that a secure attacher won't open up more in time, but they won't do so too early in the relationship.



IN PERSON


Similar to meeting through an app, when meeting a secure attacher face-to-face, they will not continuously talk about themselves but instead will be interested in getting to know who you are as a person. Thus, they will ask you personal questions about your life and share personal information about themselves within reason. The secure attacher will be open, warm, and friendly. If they're interested in you, they will communicate that through their conversation and non-verbal communication, such as through open body language and steady eye contact.

Furthermore, as the date progresses, you may be able to glean some information about the individual's past relationships. If they are securely attached, they may have had a couple of long-term relationships, but may also have spent periods of time alone. This pattern is due to a secure attacher's comfort both in a relationship and by themselves.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS ANXIOUSLY ATTACHED:

According to statistics, anxious attachers are more likely to use dating apps than avoidant attachers. Therefore, you are potentially more likely to match with an anxious attacher online than someone with any other form of attachment style. The anxious and disorganized attachment styles, although potentially explosive, also could be intensely loving and caring.

This pattern is due to both partners' shared need for intimacy and strong fear of rejection/abandonment.



Yet, consequently, each partner may distrust the other's intentions and act hypervigilant towards any potential threat to the relationship. What's more, as both may believe that they are unworthy of love, when they find it, they fight to make sure that it doesn't end - even if the relationship isn't working. So how can you tell whether someone is anxiously attached either online or in person?

ONLINE

Anxious attachers may initially unwittingly masquerade as secure attachers during an online conversation as their first impressions are that of a chatty and open person. However, it likely won't take long for their anxious attachment traits to burgeon; instead of asking questions about you, an anxious attacher will probably talk about themselves to impress you and reduce the risk of rejection. They may also attempt to forge intimacy and closeness within the relationship by divulging personal information too early.

IN PERSON

Similar to making a connection with an anxious attacher online, when you meet them in person, they may focus primarily on talking about themselves. Thus, pay attention to whether they ask you questions about yourself or whether the focus remains on them. What's more, their anxious attachment style may manifest in non-verbal ways, such as fidgeting, attempting to stand or sit too close, or maintaining too much eye contact in an attempt to seek connection and acceptance.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS AVOIDANTLY ATTACHED:

It might be unusual for a relationship between an avoidant attacher and a disorganized attacher to progress past the first spark of attraction due to fundamental incompatibilities. An avoidant attacher's early experiences with their caregiver(s) can leave them feeling uncomfortable with vulnerability and intimacy. So to protect themselves, they often create boundaries and disconnect from their innate need to connect with others. However, this could trigger a disorganized attacher's fear of rejection: the disorganized attacher's desire for intimacy and closeness might cause them to push the avoidant partner to form a connection quickly - sometimes even in unpredictable or chaotic ways.

Remember - a successful and loving relationship between two people with these attachment styles is not impossible; however, professional support may be required to process previous trauma or instability issues. So how can you tell whether someone is avoidantly attached either online or in person?

ONLINE:

The avoidant style is relatively easy to identify through app dating compared to the other attachment styles; they may be quite reserved during the early stages of your connection and perhaps not message too much or resist opening up regarding personal information. What's more, when you do talk/message, they may focus on non personal topics such as films or books that they enjoy, their job, or sports that they play.

Also, if an avoidant attacher loses interest in the relationship, they may back off by not messaging or "ghosting" you. This disappearing act can happen quite suddenly, in particular, after an emotional breakthrough or disclosure.



IN PERSON:

Much of an avoidant attacher's behaviors in person will be similar to those through app dating; they will resist intimate or emotional disclosures. However, in person, an avoidant attacher will not only be closed off in their verbal communication, but also in their non-verbal expression; they may be quite reserved in their body language and have difficulty maintaining eye contact. For example, they may look at your chin or mouth as a strategy to avoid another person's gaze.

Remember - as a disorganized attacher, you may attempt to increase closeness by trying to push an avoidant attacher's boundaries through probing too much or forcing eye contact. This behavior may cause the avoidant attacher to feel unsafe, and they may retreat from the connection.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE HAS A DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT:

It's pretty common for two people with a disorganized attachment style to be attracted to each other. After all, who is more likely to appreciate and understand what you've experienced in life other than someone who went through similar experiences? However, this does not mean that you're typically compatible with another disorganized attacher; as you know, a fellow disorganized attacher may vacillate between the anxious and avoidant dimensions of attachment depending on their mood and circumstances. Thus, they may be prone to unpredictable behaviors and difficulties with regulating emotions. Regardless of how passionate such pairings may be, you may both struggle to manage each other's emotions. It is also essential to recognize that attempting to help a partner cope with their emotions and past may trigger your own negative memories and emotions.

However, a successful and loving relationship between two disorganized attachers is not impossible. Just bear in mind that professional support may be required to process previous trauma or instability issues. So how can you tell whether someone else has a disorganized attachment, either online or in person?

ONLINE

On a dating app, someone with a disorganized attachment style typically leans towards more anxious patterns of behavior because of their innate desire for connection. Therefore, they are likely to disclose personal information quite quickly in an attempt to establish a close and intimate bond with the other person. They may also talk about themselves a lot and not ask questions about the person they matched with. However, if things progress too quickly, they may back off and “ghost” the other person, meaning they may stop messaging without any clear reason.

IN PERSON

Again, a disorganized attacher is as likely to vacillate between anxious and avoidant traits in person as they are online. Thus, they may alternate between both styles depending on their mood and circumstance. For example, when you first meet them, they might be eager to connect and talk a lot about themselves. They may hold eye contact and attempt to sit or stand in close proximity. Alternatively, they may just as easily be uncomfortable disclosing personal information, be withdrawn in their body language, and avoid eye contact by looking at your mouth or chin. It can be challenging to determine which traits a disorganized attacher will manifest on a certain day.

As a disorganized attacher, your triggers may change depending on your mood and current circumstances. However, if you would like to, or need guidance in, identifying your typical triggers in an intimate relationship, then refer to the Identifying Your Triggers in a Relationship exercise in the workbook.



3.4 Attachment in the Bedroom

By this point, you're aware of how disorganized people behave in relationships, so now it's time to see how they typically act when it comes to one particular part of relationships.

Let's talk about sex. Can your attachment style influence your sex life? And if so, how?

First thing's first - attachment absolutely does influence your sex life.

Think about it. Sex bonds two people. It creates intimacy and an emotional connection. On the one hand, it's how we tell someone, "Hey - I think you're hot!" but on the other, it expresses our love for them. And all of these factors connect to our attachment system.

By the way, when referring to your sex life, we're not just talking about the actual physical act of love-making. We're talking about your outlook on it, the way you think and feel about it, and the ways that you use sex to meet your *emotional* (not sexual) needs.

This is what we'll be covering in the following section.

HOW DOES DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT AFFECT YOUR SEX LIFE?

As we mentioned in the previous section, disorganized people tend to swing between anxiety- and avoidance-driven behaviors, which creates an unpredictable pattern of behavior. This tendency is also likely to apply to their sexual interactions.

On the one hand, disorganized attachers might be uncomfortable with physical intimacy due to their lack of trust in partners. They might expect to be hurt or abused by their loved ones, which might put a dampener on sexual desire. In situations such as this, the disorganized person might choose to abstain from sex altogether or else aim to have only casual, one-night stands. This way, they're not in a committed relationship, so they can't get hurt.

Alternatively, disorganized attachers can be highly passionate and loving towards their partners. Like anxious/preoccupied people, they often crave the love of a relationship. But at the same time, they also feel unworthy of love, so they're susceptible to rejection. This can cause them to become jealous and angry towards their partners, act clingy and demanding, and use sex as a way to manipulate their significant others.



Photo by Ha Nguy on Unsplash

This manipulation can take the form of using sex to provoke their partners into being attentive and taking care of them. They might also use sex to re-establish a sense of closeness; if their fear of rejection is triggered, sex becomes a way to feel more secure in the relationship.

In general, disorganized adults might be less satisfied with their sex lives than secure individuals; they may have a hard time building long-lasting, committed relationships, where sex is a way of expressing mutual love and affection.

To end this section, it's worth noting that your triggers, responses, and the way things turn out in a relationship don't depend solely on you and your attachment style. Your partner and their attachment style play an equally important role in the development and outlook of the relationship.

IV. ATTACHMENT AND PARENTING

One of the most significant predictors in our parenting style is the attachment style that we developed with our caregivers – after all, it influences how we act in the crucial relationships in our lives, and our relationship with our children is no exception. However, even though you may be prone to repeating your caregivers' behavior, it doesn't mean that you actually will – **you are not doomed to repeat the past.**

How you understand and make sense of your childhood and your behaviors in your adult relationships can be an even more significant predictor of what kind of parent you might be. At any stage in life, you have the power to adapt and change your attachment style. It may take self-reflection, understanding your past, empathy towards yourself and your experiences, and sometimes professional support. Still, in the end, you can become a parent with a healthy and nurturing outlook towards your child.

No parent is perfect - you'll inevitably make mistakes. Yet, if you enable yourself to repair any ruptures in the relationship, your child will likely grow up with a secure attachment!

4.1 What to Watch Out for When Parenting With a Disorganized Attachment Style

Because someone with a disorganized attachment style might have grown up in an environment that felt unpredictable or unsafe, they might have felt fear or confusion about how to respond to their caregivers in order to get their needs met. As an adult, people with this attachment style might view others as unpredictable and untrustworthy but still feel like they desperately need love and reassurance. This may cause them to act both anxious and avoidant in their adult relationships. This can create a level of emotional turmoil for a child – on the one hand, their parent is affectionate to the point of needy, and on the other, they are aloof and distant to them. This can be pretty scary to a child.

Furthermore, children are full of emotions, and they experience them with great intensity.

This may be difficult to manage when you're used to avoiding your own. Their actions may even trigger a deep emotional upset as it speaks to the infant within you. Regardless, emotions are essential to healthy functioning, and it's your job as a parent to help your child adaptively express them.

As a parent, having children and loving them with all of your heart can be a motivating factor towards finally taking care of yourself. If you are aware that you have a disorganized attachment style, you must remain vigilant about your emotions and behaviors and the best way to express them.

Many professionals are there to help if you find that you're struggling with parenting difficulties.

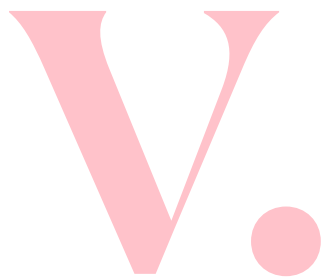
4.2 How to Raise Your Child to Have a Secure Attachment

If you can remember, for a child to develop a secure attachment, they need to build in an environment where they feel **safe, seen and known, comforted, valued, and support for being their best self.**

It's essential to create a compassionate and warm environment for the child, one in which their caregiver can self-regulate their own emotions and reactions to upsetting stimuli. Doing so will help to pass on these skills to their child as they learn through modeling and observation. It's also essential to view a child as an individual so that you are comfortable with them exploring; children with a secure attachment see their caregiver as a safe base from which they can explore their world with confidence. They are satisfied with the knowledge that their caregiver is nearby and that they have someone to turn to if they get scared. This facilitates the belief that other people will be there for them.



Photo by Eye for Ebony on Unsplash



ATTACHMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

It's not just family, friends, and romantic relationships that can be affected by your attachment style – you might be more naturally inclined to act a certain way in the workplace too, for both the positive and negative!

5.1 What Are the Typical Characteristics of Disorganized Employees?

Unfortunately, to date, research has not overly focused on this form of attachment in the workplace. This is probably because it incorporates features of both the anxious/preoccupied and the avoidant/dismissive attachment style.

However, we can discuss the common traits of anxious and avoidant attachers – this might give you the chance to identify the profile that your behaviors align with the most. You might also feel like your actions switch between both, and that's absolutely fine.

The following information is based on the findings of many studies that examined anxious attachers' behaviors in the workplace.

We have separated the characteristics of anxious attachers in the workplace into two types; potential difficulties and challenges and positive characteristics.

ANXIOUS ATTACHERS IN THE WORKPLACE

By this stage, we're aware that people with an anxious attachment tend to experience low self-esteem and high levels of insecurity and self-doubt.

In comparison to romantic relationships where this type of person may seek approval from their partner, it is colleagues, supervisors, and bosses who become the source of positive feedback and affirmation in the workplace.

Fitting in and being universally liked in the workplace are priorities for an anxious attacher. To achieve this, they might try to people-please and may actively avoid confrontation by conforming with the group's wishes – even if they disagree.

What's more, fear of negative feedback may cause an anxiously attached employee to rely heavily on supervision and the team to complete tasks successfully. This, in combination with clingy tendencies, can end up driving colleagues away.

Because anxious individuals set such high personal standards for themselves, they can become quickly dissatisfied with their occupation if they feel like they're not achieving goals as quickly as they would like. This can lead to the risk of burnout and drop-off from the job.

The following are the *potential difficulties and challenges* that an anxious adult may encounter in the workplace:

- 1.** Preoccupation with being accepted by the group and seeking approval
- 2.** Intense fear of rejection and negative evaluation
- 3.** Conforms to group wishes
- 4.** Overwhelming desire for interpersonal closeness & investment in social relationships
- 5.** Negative expectations regarding the leader's behavior
- 6.** Less ability to work independently and autonomously & over-reliance on the supervisor/leader
- 7.** Hypersensitivity to feedback
- 8.** Feeling under-appreciated and dissatisfied
- 9.** Higher burnout levels
- 10.** Counterproductive work behavior and turnover intentions



Photo by Charles Deluvio on Unsplash

For every negative, there is a positive, and this is definitely the case for people with an anxious attachment style!

In fact, thanks to their sensitive nature, anxious attachers might just be superheroes when it comes to detecting risks, threats, and deceit in the workplace.

Their high personal standards and their need for approval from others cause them to be reflective of their performance and address any shortcomings that may affect their work. I'm pretty sure most employers would embrace the opportunity to hire someone so keen to improve themselves and their work!

Lastly, I think it's pretty obvious that an anxious employee would probably be the last person in the workplace that you would expect to create trouble. They want to be liked and to be seen positively, not as the office troublemaker.

Here are the positive characteristics that an anxious-preoccupied adult may bring to the workplace:

- 1. Better at detecting and responding to risks**
- 2. More accurate in detecting deceit**
- 3. Create less friction in the workplace**
- 4. More alert to their own potential deficiencies and hyper-vigilant about seeking ways to improve**

WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AVOIDANT EMPLOYEES?

We have separated the characteristics of avoidant attachers in the workplace into two types; potential difficulties and challenges and positive characteristics.

Here are the potential *difficulties/disadvantages* that an avoidant adult may bring to the workplace:

- 1. Less positivity and more negative emotions**
- 2. Avoid interpersonal closeness and group tasks; prefer to work alone**
- 3. Distant; use work commitments to avoid socializing**
- 4. Negative view of and criticism towards the leader**
- 5. Resistant to leadership and new information (when forming judgments)**
- 6. Distrust towards others in general and towards a leader**
- 7. Seek less support from others**
- 8. Do not conform to groups wishes**

Looking at the evidence, one thing is pretty apparent; the avoidant, or dismissive, employee is not the social type at work. They do not seek out friendships with colleagues, and they don't need social support.

It's not uncommon for avoidant individuals to have a poor perception of the people that they work with - including their boss. They might look down on group activities as being beneath them and have an overall distrust towards others.

For this reason, they might prefer to work on their own. They put independence at the top of their list of priorities, so they might use a heavy workload as an excuse not to socialize with others.

There is the risk of avoidant employees in the workplace being labeled as the "troublemakers" of the office - they can resent leadership and may struggle conforming with the group.

Here are the *positive characteristics* that an avoidant adult may bring to the workplace:

- 1. Work well independently**
- 2. Better capacity to sustain focus on the tasks at hand and to get the job done**
- 3. The quickest to act in times of danger (effectively, without hesitation)**
- 4. Determined to get positive results from tasks**

Having an avoidant employee on your team definitely has its benefits, even if they are a bit of a lone-wolf! A recent study demonstrated that avoidant employees tend to detect threats and manage danger more efficiently than other workers - thus, their superpower is being the quickest to respond to a problem without emotion and hesitation! Also, let's face it, when a deadline is near, the avoidant employee will typically be the one who gets the job done.

What's more, the avoidant individual prefers to work independently and is good at it. They don't need extensive supervision or 'babysitting' in order to complete their tasks.

WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Now that you've seen the typical traits of both anxious and avoidant employees, perhaps give yourself a moment to reflect on them.

Do you feel like you identified more with the anxious/preoccupied traits or the dismissive/avoidant traits?

If you can't figure it out, don't worry - it's totally normal for disorganized attachers to waver between anxiety and avoidance driven-behaviors. Remember, the traits of the disorganized attachment style can vary according to where you fall on the anxious and avoidant dimensions of attachment on a particular day and according to certain circumstances.

It's also normal not to understand or know what triggers the switch between both styles.

For more information on your potential strengths in the workplace, check out the next section on the superpowers of the disorganized attachment style.



VI. SUPERPOWERS

By now, you have learned about your attachment style in depth, your personal characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, the way you engage in relationships by identifying your triggers, your needs, and your soothing mechanisms. You also continued to learn about different types of scenarios for dating and behaviors in the workplace. The following are the potential superpowers of the disorganized attachment style in the different domains of their lives; relationships, friendships, and workplace. Now try to identify your personal superpowers that tie in with your attachment style and interests. Even consider ones that you previously may have thought were a challenge based on your attachment traits!

RELATIONSHIP SUPERPOWERS

- A disorganized attacher may have the ability to retain their independence in relationships and not become overly demanding of a partner's time. Even though a disorganized attacher may crave connection and intimacy, they often put up boundaries to protect themselves from hurt. For this reason, someone with this attachment style can retain their independence in relationships and not become demanding of a partner's time.



- Alternatively, someone with a disorganized style may also give themselves over to a relationship entirely. If they align more with the anxious dimension of attachment, then they have the potential to fall in love easily and put a lot of time and effort into maintaining and protecting the relationship.
- Because a disorganized attacher desires emotional closeness, when they start to feel secure in a relationship, they have the ability to open up and welcome the intimacy that romantic relationships require. They may also be able to mutually provide a partner with the love and support they need to feel secure within the relationship.
- A disorganized attacher would typically hold their partner in high regard and may thus be able to help a loved one see themselves in a positive light. Their partner might even recognize that if someone that they care about can see their worth, then there must be some grains of truth in it!

FRIENDSHIP SUPERPOWERS

- Disorganized attachers have the ability to be open, warm, and supportive to their friends. After all, they have experienced hardships, so there is likely no one better placed to listen to and understand other people's troubles.
- Other people are often drawn to a disorganized attacher because they can come across as sociable and cool. People initially admire their sense of adventure and daring but actually want to become friends with them when they realize that there is more to a disorganized attacher than their exciting facade.

WORKPLACE SUPERPOWERS

- Similar to the avoidant and anxious attachment styles, someone with a disorganized attachment may be an evolutionary altruist. This trait means that they might be willing to incur personal costs to improve the quality of life of others. These personal costs can be quite clear in the workplace environment, as disorganized attachers that align more with the avoidant attachment style may be more likely to put in increased work hours to improve the team's output. This increase in productivity may come with a personal sacrifice, as they may focus so much energy on meeting deadlines and doing a good job that they might neglect their personal life. However, this may suit the disorganized attacher if they fall more on the avoidant dimension of attachment.
- Disorganized attachers may be more alert to threats in their environment. This ability means that they can alert others to a potential problem before it becomes a big issue and requires expensive resources to fix.

If you would like some help with identifying your attachment related personal superpowers, then refer to [the Identifying Your Superpowers exercise in the workbook](#). Remember to stay open minded regarding your strengths - even though it might feel uncomfortable for you to identify your positive attributes, they are still there, and it's important for you to acknowledge them. You may even be able to reconsider ones that you previously thought of as a weakness and instead understand them as a strength!

CHAPTER VI

The Secure Attachment Style





The Secure Attachment Style

I.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

How we interpret our childhood can help us to understand how our attachment style developed. As a secure attacher, you may be able to access your early memories more easily than the other attachment styles, however, if you would like some support or guidance in this area, please refer to [the Early Childhood Experience exercise in the workbook](#).

Secure attachment develops when a child's needs are met by their caregivers. They feel safe, protected, loved, and valued. Approximately two out of three kids grow up to become secure attachers - that's a pretty good percentage!

However, this doesn't mean that their caregivers were perfect or flawless.

Everyone makes mistakes, and that's OK - it's impossible to be an ideal parent 24/7.

Whether it's picking your child up an hour late from nursery or leaving them unattended for a few moments with your friend's cherished flatscreen TV - we all make mistakes. It's inevitable.

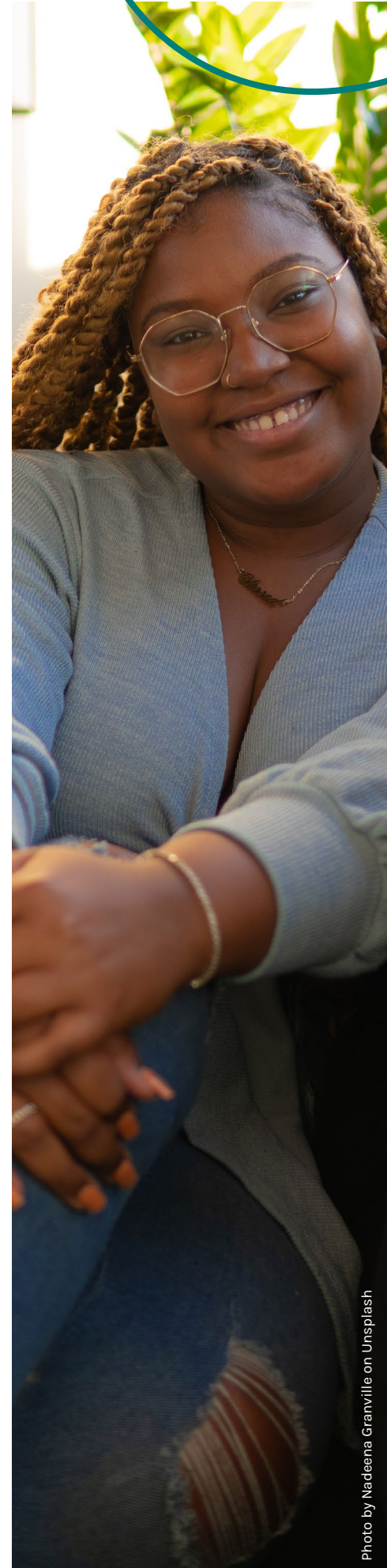
The point is, though, that the caregivers of a secure child - and that includes your caregivers - managed to fulfill the child's needs and not break their trust. Be mindful, though - your parents certainly did it right, but perhaps not perfectly - and that's OK too! You can be securely attached and still have some bugbears with them!

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

Your attachment style is not the only factor of your personality. You also have genetic and physical characteristics, as well as personal experiences which affected how you developed. However, the following features are typical of people with a secure attachment:


- Open, straightforward, and easy-going
- Don't cause drama and make a big deal out of things
- Calm and balanced
- Aware of their emotions and able to express those emotions freely
- Feel comfortable sharing private thoughts and feelings
- Value and trust people
- Empathic and caring but know how to set boundaries
- Comfortable with mutual dependency
- Like being able to rely on others and have others depend on them
- Can accept criticism without significant distress
- Have good self-reflection skills and understand the consequences of behaviors in social contexts
- Manage to balance emotions between the extremes of feeling too much and too little

Secure adults are generally more connected with their feelings than insecure adults. They're likely to be balanced, but this doesn't mean that they can't exhibit extremes of emotion or behavior (hypersensitive people, for example), but they typically manage to cope with their feelings and emotions more adaptively.



As warm, social people, secure attachers find it easy to bond with others and usually have many contacts. A secure adult might seek comfort, support, and guidance from their loved ones in times of need. In turn, they are comfortable offering those same things to others. In general, secure attachers value attachment to others, and they are comfortable with mutual dependency, yet they don't need constant reassurance and attention. They know their worth.

Which of your personality characteristics can you identify as potentially being a product of your attachment style? The

 Identifying Your Personality Characteristics exercise in the workbook may help if you need some guidance in pinpointing these characteristics.

Jimmy, 37, is a secure adult. He has a great social network and a robust support system. And that's no surprise, as he's always cared for the people around him. Jimmy pays attention to the people he meets, he's genuinely interested in them, and he's always willing to help when someone's in need.

Besides, Jimmy is calm and easy-going. He's never pushy or angry at people when they don't do what he wants, doesn't talk behind people's backs, and has probably never created drama in his entire life. Jimmy values people's personal opinions and choices, and whenever those conflict with his own, he speaks openly yet doesn't make a big deal out of it.

Even though almost everyone who meets Jimmy wants to be in his life, Jimmy knows how to set boundaries. He prioritizes the time he spends with his closest contacts - his partner Christine, his childhood friends, and his family members - as well as the time he wants to spend on his own.

Still, Jimmy's always up for a good time and loves meeting new people. On weekends, he and Christine invite people over - friends, family, colleagues, etc. And despite the parties, dinners, lunches, and other activities they host, Jimmy and Christine always spare some weekend time just for themselves. They read, cook, or do some yoga together.

Jimmy is genuinely happy. He loves his girlfriend, he loves his life, and he loves himself. Yet, like everyone else, he, too, feels down sometimes. Whenever that happens, he shares his worries with his loved ones - usually Christine. He knows that she'll listen and won't judge him; he trusts her.

Remember, Jimmy is fiction! If he was a real person, he too would have bad days, become angry at his friends after a hard day, or forget his sister's birthday when he's busy. He might also be disappointed in others when he feels like they let him down. However, because he's securely attached, he's less likely to feel victimized, abandoned, or betrayed by others. He will also not feel less than others - he is able to get over it.

Do you ever wonder whether your thoughts about yourself influence your actions and their consequences? A self-fulfilling prophecy is when our beliefs about ourselves result in a specific outcome. As a secure attacher, you may be less likely to experience negative automatic thoughts, but it doesn't mean that you don't. If you would like some support in figuring out whether your thoughts



and actions result in self-fulfilling prophecies, refer to [the Self-Fulfilling Prophecies exercise in the workbook](#)

1.1 Secure Attachment and Self-Development

At this stage, you're already likely aware that securely attached adults have an overall positive view of themselves and other people's intentions towards them; because their needs were met as a child, they consider themselves worthy of love and don't fear rejection. Essentially, they have healthy self-esteem.

On the contrary, having an insecure attachment style influences the formation of healthy self-esteem because if your needs weren't met as a child, then you might come to believe that your needs, and, thus, you, don't matter.

This can cause people to repeatedly choose adult relationships that are unsatisfying to them, so they tend to repeatedly experience romantic failure without truly understanding why.

When their relationships continue to fail, it reinforces their belief that they are unworthy of love, possibly even subconsciously causing them to behave in a way that sabotages their relationship – hence, this cycle of unhealthy relationships and low self-esteem continues.

As you already know – our attachment styles are not set in stone, and, therefore, nor is our self-esteem. In this section, we'll discuss what self-esteem, sense of self, and sense of agency are before discussing how to use some self-development techniques to improve your outlook on yourself, your world, and how you fit into it (even though you may not need it!).



SECURE ATTACHMENT AND SELF-ESTEEM

Your self-esteem or self-worth is how you feel about yourself or the opinion that you have about yourself. It is how valuable and worthwhile that you believe yourself to be. Your levels of self-esteem are often due to your experiences, especially those from when you were a child. Hence, since the way that we view ourselves and others is rooted in our attachment styles, our type of attachment is seen as closely related to our self-esteem.

Your levels of self-esteem are not related to how capable or successful you *actually* are – you could have an amazingly accomplished career, social life, or love life and still have low levels of self-esteem. Instead, self-esteem is more about how positive you feel about yourself and your life. In fact, you have a general self-esteem and a focused self-esteem that relate to different fields or activities in your life (for example, you might have low general self-esteem but can still admit that you are a talented footballer).


Someone with a secure attachment tends to have a positive self-image, a strong sense of self, and healthy self-esteem. Seeing as they have a favorable view of themselves, they don't need constant reassurance from others to feel valued or worthy of love. This doesn't mean that they don't want intimacy or personal closeness - they simply feel good on their own as well as in relationships.

Secure attachers also have a favorable view of others; they tend to trust their partners and do not feel the need to be jealous of others or doubt their loved one's intentions.

Someone with a secure attachment can accept affection and act warm and loving to their partners. They have the ability to build meaningful, long-lasting romantic relationships because they are secure in themselves.

However, having a secure attachment isn't a guarantee for having healthy self-esteem. Plenty of people with this attachment style have experienced knocks to their self-confidence and may wonder how to rebuild their self image. After all, even if you're securely attached, it can't hurt to explore who you truly are!

To help determine whether you have a healthy self-esteem, or if this is an aspect of yourself that you need to work on, refer to

 [the Unveiling Your Self-Esteem exercise in the workbook.](#)



SENSE OF SELF AND SECURE ATTACHMENT

People with low self-esteem tend to protect themselves by steering clear of any form of a challenge as they see them as inevitable mistakes waiting to happen. On the contrary, someone with robust self-esteem welcomes them as an opportunity to achieve personal growth. Combined with their aversion to tasks that might help them personally grow and the belief that their opinions and needs don't matter, someone with low self-esteem might never really get to know who they are as a person – they never really establish who they are. They lack a *sense of self*.

A sense of self is your understanding of the characteristics that you think define you. This might be your talents, likes, dislikes, moral code, or personality traits – all of these things contribute to who you are. Knowing who you are as a person makes it easier to acknowledge your positive attributes -the ones that you should be proud of and identify and change the ones you would like to improve. However, having a vague or ill-defined sense of self makes it difficult to know who you are, so it's tough to understand what you want out of life and your relationships.

But here's the good news; we already know how adaptable to our environment our brains are – otherwise, we wouldn't have developed an attachment style so early in life, but this flexibility can have promising implications for the future too!



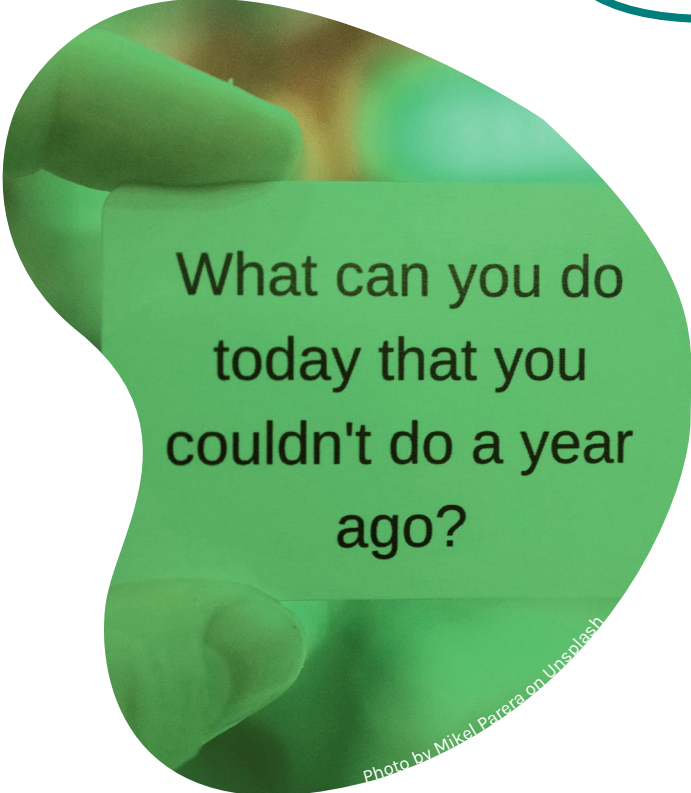
Photo by Toa Heftiba on Unsplash

Neuroplasticity is the ability of our brain to adapt to our environment. When we learn something different or try to make novel habits, our brains make new connections between their neurons.

This happens naturally every day as we adapt to new situations, but it's also something that we can encourage and promote.

Essentially, from the day we are born until the day we die, our brain rewires itself in response to what we need it to do.

This extraordinary ability means that you can develop a strong sense of self and use it to build your self-esteem. Using self-development techniques, you can hone your talents, interests, and goals and use them to grow in regards to who you are as an individual and increase your sense of self and self-esteem. Ultimately, self-development helps you to create an authentic sense of yourself - to feel content in your own skin and reach your full potential and happiness level in life.

A hand is shown holding a piece of green paper. The paper has a question written on it in black text. The background is white with decorative wavy lines in purple, teal, and light blue.

What can you do
today that you
couldn't do a year
ago?

Photo by Mikel Parera on Unsplash

SENSE OF AGENCY AND SECURE ATTACHMENT

A sense of agency, sometimes known as self-agency, is the feeling of control that you get over your actions and consequences. When you complete an action voluntarily, you tend to feel as though you are in charge; the action isn't just happening to you – you chose to do it. You affect your environment, and even more importantly, you build a mental image of yourself and how you impact your environment.

Someone with a strong sense of agency knows that they can influence the people and objects in their environment to get the kind of reaction that they want. For example, when a little boy uses his favorite action figure to knock down some Lego buildings, he knows the cause and effect of his actions on his environment.

Essentially, having a sense of agency means that you feel like you're in the driving seat when it comes to your choices and actions.

On the contrary, someone with a poor sense of agency might believe that they are powerless in their world – they think that things just happen to them and they have no control over it. *The world is happening to them.* For example, think of a voodoo doll; someone else is inflicting pinpricks on the doll and putting it in all sorts of predicaments. It has no control over what is happening to it. Someone with a poor sense of agency might see themselves as similar to the voodoo doll; they might feel like they have little to no control over their environment and other people's actions in it.




However, secure attachers's formative periods mean that they may be more confident than insecure attachers about their level of control over and impact on their world. As a result, they have a:

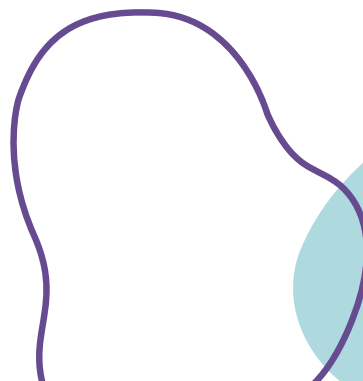
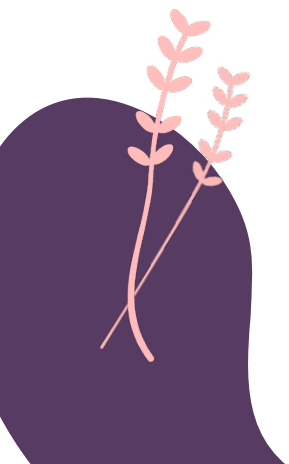
1. POSITIVE VIEW OF SELF

Securely attached adults have a favorable view of themselves. They do not need reassurance all the time from others to feel valued or worthy of love (but they may appreciate it!). Yet, this does not mean they reject or do not want intimacy or emotional closeness. They simply can manage to be on their own as well as in relationships.

2. POSITIVE VIEW OF OTHERS

Securely attached people also have a favorable view of others. They tend to trust their partners and do not feel the need to be jealous of others or doubt their loved one's intentions. They can accept displays of affection without fear or confusion. They are usually warm, loving, and lovable. They are capable of building and maintaining meaningful and long-lasting romantic relationships. They are comfortable with proximity and bond easily with others.

Although you may have a secure attachment style, you may still want to further develop your sense of self and sense of agency. If  this is the case, the Self-Development exercises in the workbook may help you to figure out more of a sense of who you truly are as an individual.



TYPICAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF A SECURELY ATTACHED PERSON

Strengths:

- You have a favorable view of yourself
- You have a favorable view of others
- You can solve problems on your own, but you're not afraid to ask for support if you need it
- You're confident about your value and strengths
- You trust the people close to you
- You are less likely to feel hopeless about life
- You have strong relationships and social support
- People enjoy being in your company
- You have the ability to emotionally regulate others

Weaknesses:

- Although there are no downsides to being securely attached, often people with this attachment style may still have some characteristics of an insecure attachment style. Try to consider the following strengths and weaknesses of the different attachment styles and whether you identify with any. This may help you to resolve any underlying issues that you may experience in your relationships and personal life.



TYPICAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE ANXIOUS/ PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT STYLE

Strengths:

- Caring & empathetic
- Precise, careful, and hard-working
- Likeable and agreeable
- Open to making new contacts and relationships
- Friendly and understands how to make new connections
- Doesn't give up on others easily- has a forgiving nature
- Values family, friends, and partners

Weaknesses:

- Might disregard their own opinions and interests in order to avoid confrontation
- Takes care of others needs first, so their own needs are often neglected
- May become perfectionistic and obsessive
- Loves attention and compliments in the beginning of a relationship, but may become anxious if these start to wane (“if people really get to know me, they won't like me anymore”)
- Might become manipulative in their desire to achieve closeness
- May ignore red flags in relationships and stick with people who are bad for them
- Fear that others will leave, reject, or abandon them

TYPICAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE AVOIDANT/ DISMISSIVE ATTACHMENT STYLE

Strengths:

- Capable of taking care of themselves
- Fiercely independent
- Tough and emotionally stable
- Don't seek attention and external validation
- Don't rely on the opinions or preferences of others - they make decisions based on their own evaluation of the situation
- They know their worth and are rarely shaken by criticism
- Can be social and maintain many contacts if they choose to
- Don't demand or expect others to do things for them
- Rarely feel let down by others

Weaknesses:

- Not comfortable with emotional closeness
- Don't let people in - it's hard for people to get to know them
- Don't trust people in general - sometimes they may even think negatively of others
- Lack awareness of their inner world, such as their emotions, needs, and fears
- May present a false self to the world
- Might refuse to let others be there for them and demonstrate love
- They may back off and distance themselves when others try to get close to them
- They typically suppress their emotions



TYPICAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT STYLE

(often a mix of anxious and avoidant traits)

Strengths:

- Can be resilient when times are tough
- Often desire closeness to others
- May be capable of taking care of themselves
- Can be social and fun to be around
- Value their connections with others
- May not give up on others easily

Weaknesses:

- May be uncomfortable with emotional closeness
- Often struggle to trust others
- Difficulty seeking help when they need it
- Have a hard time opening up to others
- Fear that others will reject or abandon them
- Have trouble managing their emotions - may be moody and prone to creating conflict
- Difficulty with forming and maintaining relationships
- Might seek out emotional closeness and then turn away from it
- May see the world as an unsafe place

We all have strengths and weaknesses, and some of these can be attributed to our attachment style. You might even recognize some of your weaknesses in the traits of an insecure attachment style. For support in uncovering your strengths and weaknesses, as well as how they have affected your life, please refer to the

 Discovering Your Strengths and Weaknesses exercise in the workbook.

Reflection

Some of the information that we have gone through in this section might feel emotional or triggering to you - even if it is in a positive way. We encourage you to take a few minutes to tune in to the feelings and emotions that you might be experiencing, as well as any changes that you notice within your body

II.

FRIENDSHIPS & SOCIAL GROUPS

Every friendship dynamic is different, but your attachment style likely affects how you relate to your friends. Remember, your first experiences of relationships probably met your desire for emotional closeness. As a result, you may have certain subconscious expectations of how other people will meet your needs.

The following are some behaviors that you might recognize in yourself if you're securely attached - you may even recognize some of your friend's characteristics.

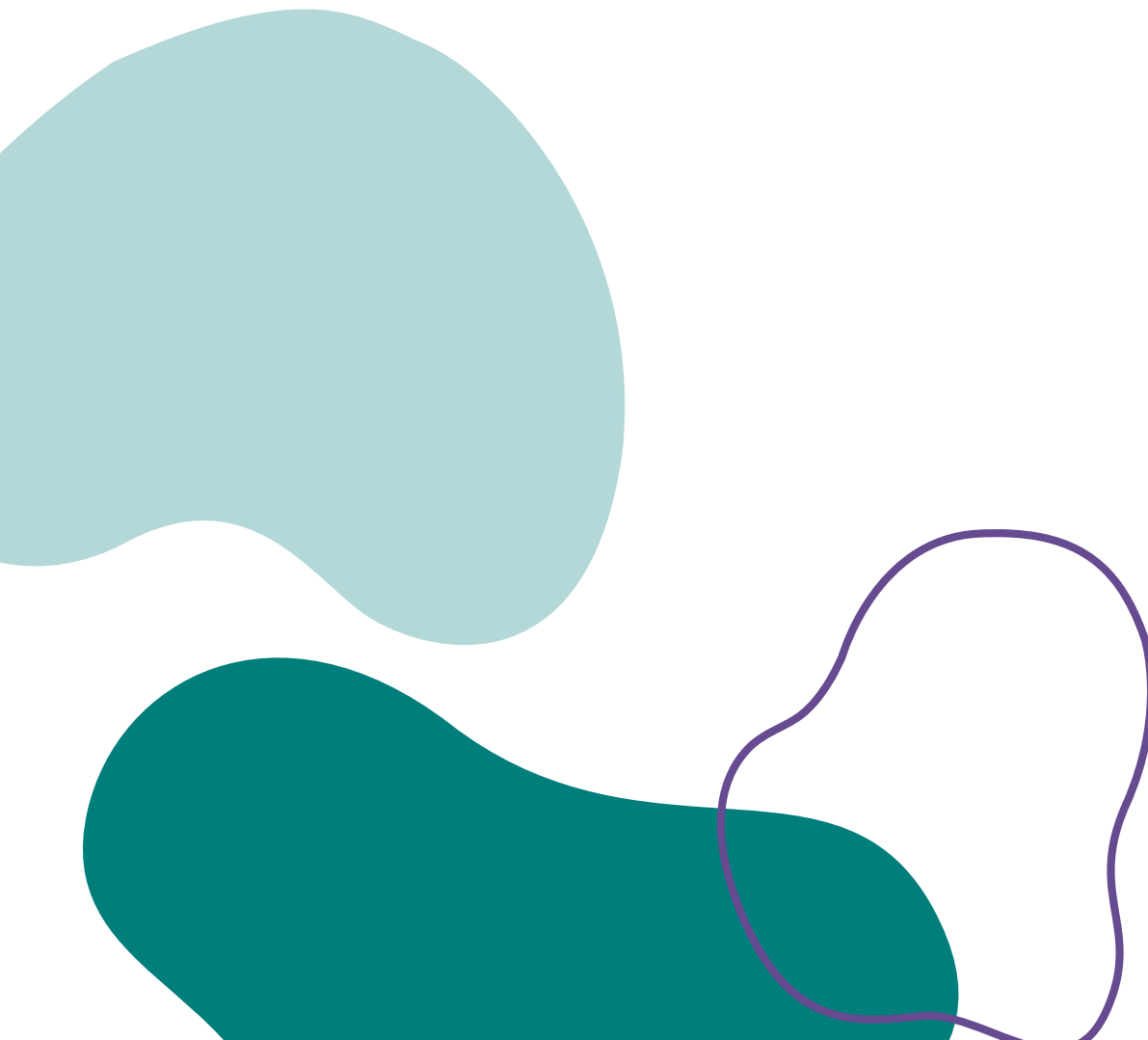
Being securely attached means that you feel positive about yourself and others; therefore, you likely feel comfortable allowing yourself to be vulnerable in your friendships and social circles. Securely attached people are also more likely to be effective communicators, meaning that others feel safe approaching them for comfort. They aren't afraid to ask for support when they need it.

They also don't take things too personally, such as a friend canceling plans last-minute, because they're secure in the stability of the friendship.

As a secure attacher, people may gravitate towards you as you have a strong sense of assurance about yourself that permits the development of trusting, long-lasting, and deep friendships.

Although you routinely reach out to others, you also respect their boundaries. Although you seek social support when you need it, you're also content to be by yourself.

For help determining how your current social groups operate, how you behave within them, and what you potentially need from your friendships (if anything), please refer to the Friendships and Social Groups exercise in the workbook.



III.

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

First of all, remember that your attachment style doesn't predict everything in your love life (or your life in general). You are much more complex than that – you are a result of your genetics, temperament, and experiences, as well as your attachment style. All of this can affect who you are as a unique person. Here, we're exploring how you are fortunate enough to be able to rely on your secure attachment, but remember – nobody is 100% secure!

3.1 General Profile

Secure attachment means generally feeling safe and comfortable in relationships, including intimate ones. A secure person isn't overly threatened by emotional closeness. You, as a securely attached person, may even read that and be puzzled; *“But...why would relationships be a threat?”*

Well, emotional closeness can trigger personal fears such as abandonment or intimacy for people with insecure attachments. For this reason, relationships can be challenging for them, which can cause a variety of problems.

But this isn't a significant issue for you – as a secure attacher, you are less reluctant to feel and show intimacy. You might also find it relatively easy to bond with others; secure attachers don't need to pretend to be something that they're not – they are more comfortable in their own skin and can typically communicate their thoughts and wants clearly to others. They also don't feel the

need to hide their feelings to avoid confrontation. Most importantly, secure attachers are aware of their worth and the role that they play in relationships.

Secure people are more likely to trust their romantic partners, so they are less suspicious or jealous. Therefore, they feel no need to cause unnecessary drama or manipulate their loved ones to get what they want. If a relationship isn't working out, they're probably going to approach it reasonably.

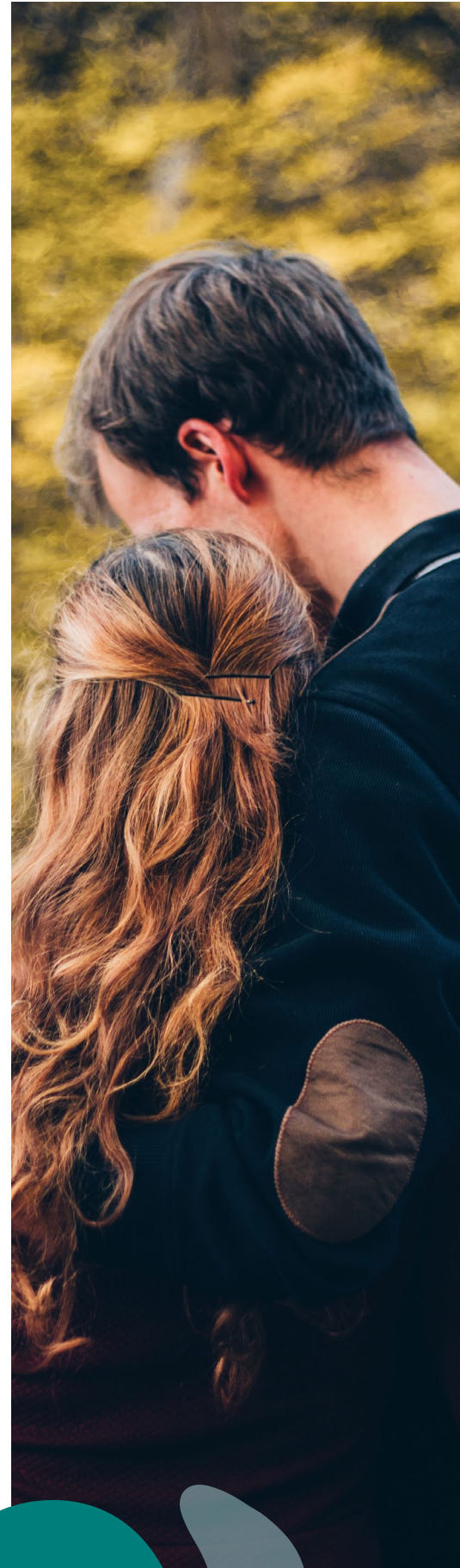
For example, if two partners have tried everything within reason to make their relationship work, but nothing is improving, then the secure attacher will likely make the pragmatic choice and move on.

Sometimes, secure partners may attract insecure partners, and they may be able to help them address their need for emotional security. Sometimes it works (with a bit of trial and error and often external help), sometimes it doesn't. For previous reasons, secure attachers might let go of unhealthy relationships more quickly due to their social support and solid sense of self. However, when they find the right partner, secure people can build stable and loving relationships.

If you would like to reflect on your previous intimate relationships, what they meant to you, and the role(s) that you played within them, then please refer to the Intimate



Relationships exercise in the workbook.



3.2 Attachment Style Partnership Pairing

It takes two...to make a relationship work.

As a secure attacher, it might be relatively easy for you to form and be in a relationship, especially seeing as your actions aren't driven by anxiety or avoidance but solely by your desire to be with someone. You're one of the lucky ones.

Unfortunately, for people with attachment issues, things can be a bit more complicated. Let's see what happens when securely attached adults enter a relationship with an insecure attacher:

SECURE-ANXIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Anxious attachers need someone patient and understanding around what makes them tick – possibly someone like Finn Hudson from *Glee*. Finn, Rachel Berry's on-screen boyfriend, has endless patience with Rachel's schtick. He puts up with her constant cries for attention and demands that he should quit the football team so other girls don't flirt with him.

Don't be mistaken – not all anxious attachers are like Rachel Berry. Obviously, her character is written for drama, but she's still a cookie-cutter example of an anxious attacher!

A securely attached person is the ideal personality type for an anxious attacher; they're able to form healthy relationships because they're comfortable letting their guard down. This means that they're naturally able to provide the intimacy and reassurance that an anxiously attached person craves. In time, an anxious attacher would even be able to relax into the relationship because of the stability that a securely attached partner provides.

Isabella's long-term boyfriend, Dan, is securely attached. Isabella is a likeable, friendly, and social person. She's known for always having a smile on her face. But Isabella's also a chatterbox, and her constant need for attention keeps her chirping away.

Easy-going and somewhat introverted, Dan seems unfazed by Isabella's chattiness, and he often makes a loving joke about what a chatterbox she is. His obvious delight in Isabella makes her feel like he is genuinely appreciative of her, and she feels free just to be herself.

From the first date on, Dan made her feel at ease. She doesn't worry that her boyfriend will see her as needy and controlling if she wants to spend more time with him (as she did in her previous relationships). "And," Isabella laughs, "he texts me back quickly, so I don't have to feel worried."



SECURE-DISMISSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Jonathan and Luke had been dating for about six months. Both were marine biologists in Miami and had quite a bit in common. Luke, typically a quiet person, really enjoyed Jonathan's goofy sense of humor; when they were together, they were always laughing.

Jonathan was happy to see Luke in person a few days a week, though they did speak daily. Luke, however, was starting to get frustrated with the relationship; he wanted more than just a couple of dates a week. Yet, he couldn't get Jonathan to open up and share his feelings.

Six months into the relationship, Luke was sent to Costa Rica along with his coworker Jason. The two went out for dinner and, after a few drinks, Luke explained his frustrations with Jonathan to Jason. Jason hugged him and told him he deserved more. When Luke returned to Miami, he broke up with Jonathan and, within weeks, he had moved in with Jason.

Secure attachers could provide their dismissive partners with the space they need. This way, the romantic relationship might not feel so overwhelming for the avoidant attacher. Yet, such relationships might be frustrating for a secure person who desires closeness and affection. But with patience and effective communication, their stability may help an avoidant partner to become more confident in the relationship and slowly allow themselves to become more vulnerable.

SECURE-SECURE RELATIONSHIPS

My *Big Fat Greek Wedding* is an excellent romantic comedy – it’s just impossible not to get a warm feeling watching Toula and Ian fall in love. Both partners are so supportive of each other and show a natural warmth and easy intimacy in their relationship. Communication is open between them, and they tell each other their worst fears and secrets.

Of course, because it’s a movie, there’s going to be drama – but to resolve the issues that arise from their cultural differences, both Toula and Ian make compromises and sacrifices for each other.

For example, Ian baptizes himself to be Greek, and he allows Toula’s family to plan the wedding. Absolute relationship goals!

By now, I think you’re getting an idea about how secure relationships function - warm and loving, with lots of sharing and open communication. A secure couple value togetherness but also give each other the independence to do their own thing. Unsurprisingly, these relationships tend to be joyful and long-lasting. Of course, this doesn’t mean that life won’t throw hurdles at you or that you both won’t change within the relationship.



SECURE-DISORGANIZED RELATIONSHIPS

Secure partners may be able to provide stability for a disorganized partner in a relationship as they may help them regulate their moods and emotions. A secure partner is more likely to have a positive outlook than a disorganized partner, which may fulfill the disorganized attacher's need for emotional closeness.

However, sometimes professional support or guidance may be required depending on the disorganized attacher's history and outlook.

3.3 Dating Online and in Person

The dating landscape of recent years is a new and often tough-to-navigate landscape. The constant evolution of smartphones and dating apps means that the potential to meet the right person rests in the palms of our hands. However, how do we traverse the masses of people who also wish to avail of the convenience of online dating to best ensure our chances of meeting a compatible partner?



Using your knowledge of your attachment style and its compatibility with the other styles may increase your chances of meeting an appropriate match. Although there is no surefire way of determining someone's attachment style through an app or on the first meet-up, keeping an eye out for certain attachment traits may help you determine whether a potential partner is a good fit for you.

Try to keep in mind, however, that even if you're not technically compatible with another attachment style, this doesn't mean that a fledgling relationship is doomed to fail. **We all have individual differences that affect how we behave within relationships.**

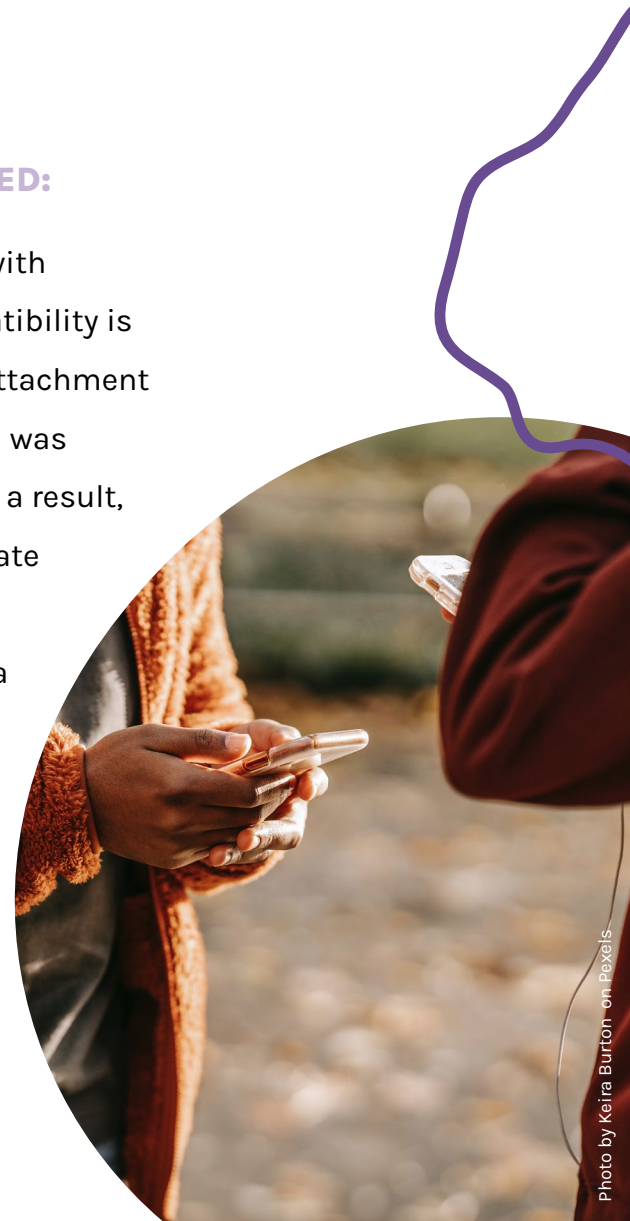
Therefore, if there is enough of a spark between two people, then it is entirely possible to overcome the challenges presented by attachment traits through either personal or professional work. After all, we have to believe that love can conquer all!

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS SECURELY ATTACHED:

A fellow secure attacher is an ideal match for someone with either a secure or insecure attachment style. This compatibility is mostly due to a secure attacher's early bond with their attachment figure(s); their need for security, proximity, and affection was met by their caregiver(s) during their formative years. As a result, someone with a secure attachment can effectively regulate their own emotions and those of others, typically has a positive outlook on themselves and others, and desires a healthy amount of affection and intimacy.

ONLINE

You can tell whether someone has a secure attachment style through a dating app based on their messages and manner of communication. For starters,



their profile will have their essential information, but probably won't over divulge too much. However, if they're interested in you, someone with a secure attachment won't hesitate to connect.

A secure attacher will ask questions about you rather than just speaking about themselves because they are interested in who you are as a person. Furthermore, they will also likely maintain a steady stream of messages without being too persistent or disappearing for days on end. Although they will be direct with you in your interactions, they won't overshare personal information - this doesn't mean that a secure attacher won't open up more with time. Still, they won't do so too early in the relationship.

IN PERSON

Similar to meeting through an app, when meeting a secure attacher face-to-face, they will not continuously talk about themselves but instead will be interested in getting to know who you are as a person. Thus, they will ask you personal questions about your life and share personal information about themselves within reason. The secure attacher will be open, warm, and friendly. If they're interested in you, then they will communicate that through their conversation and non-verbal communication; such as through open body language and steady eye contact.

Furthermore, as the date progresses, you may be able to glean information about the individual's past relationships. If they are securely attached, they may have had a couple of long-term relationships, but may also have spent periods of time alone. This is due to a secure attacher's comfort both in a relationship and by themselves.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS ANXIOUSLY ATTACHED:

You might be more likely to match with someone with an anxious attachment style over any other on a dating app. This is because - according to statistics - anxious attachers are more likely to use online dating than the other attachment styles. Someone with the anxious attachment style typically fears rejection and intensely desires love and acceptance. Thus, they tend to act hypervigilant towards any threat to a relationship and can even push someone away inadvertently. However, a secure attacher can help an anxious attacher to regulate their emotions and feel secure within a relationship. So how can you tell whether someone is anxiously attached either online or in person?

ONLINE:

Anxious attachers may initially masquerade as secure attachers during an online conversation as their first impressions are that of a chatty and open person. However, it likely won't take long for their anxious attachment traits to burgeon; instead of asking questions about you, an anxious attacher will talk about themselves in order to impress you and reduce the risk of rejection. They may also attempt to forge intimacy and closeness within the relationship by divulging personal information too early.

IN PERSON:

Similar to making a connection with an anxious attacher online, when you meet them in person, they may focus mostly on talking about themselves. Thus, pay attention to whether they ask you questions about yourself or whether the focus remains on them. What's more, their anxious attachment style may manifest in non-verbal ways, such as fidgeting, attempting to stand or sit too

close, or maintaining too much eye contact in an attempt to seek connection and acceptance.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS AVOIDANTLY ATTACHED:

An avoidant attacher typically feels unsafe in intimate situations. Thus, they like to establish boundaries within a relationship in an attempt to avoid emotional closeness and avoid affection. However, a secure attacher can help an avoidant attacher break down their boundaries in a way that feels safe for them, eventually helping them not become as triggered by emotional closeness in relationships. So how can you tell whether someone is avoidantly attached either online or in person?

ONLINE:

The avoidant style is relatively easy to identify through app dating compared to the other attachment styles; they may be quite reserved during the early stages of your connection and perhaps not message too much or resist opening up regarding personal information. What's more, when you do talk/message, they may focus on non personal topics such as films or books that they enjoy, their job, or sports that they play.

Also, if an avoidant attacher loses interest in the relationship, they may back off by not messaging or "ghosting" you. This disappearing act can happen quite suddenly, in particular, after an emotional breakthrough or disclosure.

IN PERSON:

Much of an avoidant attacher's behaviors in person will be similar to those through app dating; they will resist intimate or emotional

disclosures. However, in person, an avoidant attacher will not only be closed off in their verbal communication, but also in their non-verbal expression; they may be quite closed and reserved in their body language and have difficulty maintaining eye contact. For example, they may look at your chin or mouth as a strategy to avoid another person's gaze. Attempting to force eye contact or probing too much into an avoidant attacher's life may cause the avoidant attacher to feel unsafe, and they may retreat from the connection.

HOW TO TELL IF SOMEONE HAS A DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT:

Since someone with a disorganized attachment may vacillate between the anxious and avoidant dimensions of attachment depending on their mood and circumstances, they may be prone to unpredictable behaviors and difficulties regulating their emotions. Because of their chaotic formative period, they both strongly desire and fear intimacy and emotional closeness. Even for a secure attacher, this level of unpredictability can be difficult to manage. However, a secure attacher is often emotionally equipped to help someone with a disorganized attachment regulate their emotions in a balanced and healthy way.

Thus, a successful and loving relationship between secure and disorganized attachers is entirely possible. However, in some cases, the disorganized individual may require professional support to process previous trauma or instability issues. So how can you tell whether someone has a disorganized attachment, either online or in person?



ONLINE:

On a dating app, someone with a disorganized attachment style typically leans towards more anxious patterns of behavior because of their innate desire for connection. Therefore, they are likely to disclose personal information quite quickly in an attempt to establish a close and intimate bond with the other person. They may also talk about themselves a lot and not ask questions about the person they matched with. However, if things progress too quickly, they may back off and “ghost” the other person, meaning they may stop messaging without any clear reason.

IN PERSON:

Again, a disorganized attacher is as likely to vacillate between anxious and avoidant traits in person, just like they do online. Thus, they may alternate between both styles depending on their mood and circumstance. For example, when you first meet them, they might be eager to connect and talk a lot about themselves. They may also hold eye contact and attempt to sit or stand in close proximity. Alternatively, they may just as easily be uncomfortable disclosing personal information, be withdrawn in their body language, and avoid eye contact by looking at your mouth or chin. It can be challenging to determine which traits a disorganized attacher will manifest on a certain day.

Although you have a secure attachment style, you may still find that there are certain things that a partner does that irritate you or perhaps even trigger traits of an insecure attachment style. If you would like to, or need guidance in, identifying your personal triggers in an intimate relationship, then refer to [the Identifying Your Triggers in a Relationship exercise in the workbook.](#)





3.4 Attachment in the Bedroom

By this point, you're aware of how secure people behave in relationships, so now it's time to see how they typically act when it comes to one particular part of relationships.

Let's talk about sex. Can your attachment style influence your sex life? And if so, how?

First thing's first - attachment absolutely does influence your sex life.

Think about it. Sex bonds two people. It creates intimacy and an emotional connection. On the one hand, it's how we tell someone, "Hey - I think you're hot!" but on the other, it expresses our love for them. And all of these factors connect to our attachment system.

By the way, when referring to your sex life, we're not just talking about the actual physical act of love-making. We're talking about your outlook on it, the way you think and feel about it, and the ways that you use sex to meet your emotional (not sexual) needs.

This is what we'll be covering in the following section.

HOW DOES SECURE ATTACHMENT AFFECT YOUR SEX LIFE?

In general, secure attachers tend to be satisfied with their sex lives and have a positive attitude towards sex. Two main factors contribute to that:

First, secure attachers feel good about themselves. A secure adult doesn't worry or stress too much about how they look, and they don't feel uncomfortable when sexual partners look at or touch their body. Although most people, securely attached or not, have some insecurities about their appearance, a secure person doesn't let it ruin an enjoyable experience.

Secure attachers tend to value themselves and know their worth. And that's super important when it comes to good sex. After all, how can you enjoy sex if you're too busy critiquing your looks and feeling bad about yourself?

Second, secure attachers trust their partners. When there's mutual trust and respect, neither party feels uncomfortable sharing their desires and preferences and will also do their best to satisfy their partner's sexual needs. A secure person trusts that their partner has good intentions and will be respectful, loving, and understanding. This makes it more likely that the couple will experiment and have fun in the bedroom -feeling secure and safe makes it easy for secure attachers to have satisfying sex.



As a result, securely attached adults tend to feel positive about their sex lives. They typically engage in sexual activities to express love for their partners.

Of course, we're talking about the ideal secure adult who has no complexes and no negative experiences in their past! A great sex life is, above all, a journey of learning about each other and communicating your needs.

IV. ATTACHMENT AND PARENTING

One of the most significant predictors in our parenting style is the attachment style that we developed with our own caregivers – after all, it influences how we act in the important relationships in our lives, and our relationship with our children is no exception. Even though you are securely attached, you may still have characteristics or traits of an insecure attachment based on how you were parented. However, even though you may be prone to repeating your caregivers' behavior, it doesn't mean that you actually will – **you are not doomed to repeat the past.**

How you understand and make sense of your childhood and your behaviors in your adult relationships can be an even more significant predictor of what kind of parent you might be. No parent is perfect – you'll inevitably make mistakes. Still, if you enable yourself to repair any ruptures in the relationship, your child will likely grow up with a secure attachment!

For these reasons, if you are aware that you have some characteristics of an insecure attachment style, you must remain vigilant about these behaviors.

To the best of your ability, consciously evaluate whether you have created an emotionally consistent environment for them and pay attention to whether you are meeting their emotional needs. Understanding is the first step to breaking the cycle.

4.1 How to Raise Your Child to Have a Secure Attachment

If you can remember, for a child to develop a secure attachment, they need to develop in an environment where they feel **safe, seen and known, comforted, valued, and support for being their best self.**

It's essential to create a compassionate and warm environment for the child, one in which their caregiver can self-regulate their own emotions and reactions to upsetting stimuli. Doing so will help pass on these skills to their child as they learn through modeling and observation. It's also essential to view a child as an individual so that you are comfortable with them exploring; children with a secure attachment see their caregiver as a safe base from which they can explore their world with confidence.

They are satisfied with the knowledge that their caregiver is nearby and that they have someone to turn to if they get scared. This facilitates the belief that other people will be there for them.



V. ATTACHMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

It's not just family and romantic relationships that can be affected by your attachment style - you might be more naturally inclined to act a certain way in the workplace, too, for both the positive and negative!

George, 35, works in a music production company. Every week, from Monday to Friday, he wakes up at 5:30 am, showers, has a quick snack, and travels to his office by bike. It takes him about an hour to get there, so by around quarter to 8; he already has his headphones on and a few tabs open on his desktop.

George is excited about his job and loves being in his office. That's why he's always there on time. He works hard, but not at the expense of his good mood and well-being. He's focused and "in a flow" - he gets things done, and he tries his best not to let his boss or colleagues down.

Besides loving the work that he does, George enjoys being around his colleagues. In fact, he likes being around people in general. He's always cheerful, helpful, and notably kind to the people he works with. George loves being in a team - collaborating, attending meetings, and when needed, supervising and guiding newcomers. In turn, George's coworkers enjoy being around him. They value and respect him, and they trust that he'll always help them or step in when there's a problem situation.

Being securely attached has benefits for all social contexts, including the work environment. OK, so obviously George is pretty well-rounded and works within the perfect team – being secure in the workplace might not look exactly like this, but it does have its benefits!

Employees with this attachment style feel comfortable and relaxed regarding relationships at work – regardless of whether they're colleagues, supervisors, or leaders.

Others in the workplace see secure attachers as valuable team members - possibly due to their ability to form strong bonds with people.

What's more, securely attached employees tend to be more satisfied with their jobs, working conditions, and coworkers. They also get sick less than insecure employees and are usually described as; *“the least likely to put off work, least likely to have difficulty completing tasks, and least likely to fear failure and rejection from coworkers,”* (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). They're also likely to trust others and see their bosses positively.



Photo by Sowemimo Bamidele on Unsplash

5.1 Securely Attached Individuals May Make Better Leaders

Secure attachers are not only great employees, but they typically also have the potential to be great leaders.

If they climb to the position of leader, they would likely be able to sustain their focus on work objectives and still be sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. Secure leaders are thought to show concern and care about their employees' well-being, which can only lead to a balanced, healthy work environment. Actions such as these are known to improve company productivity and success – so, everyone wins!



VI.

RECOGNIZING YOUR SUPERPOWERS

By now, you will have learned about your attachment style in-depth, your personal characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, the way you engage in relationships by identifying your triggers, your needs, your soothing mechanisms, and more. You also continued to learn about different types of scenarios for dating and behaviors in the workplace. If you would like some help with identifying your attachment related personal superpowers,


 then please refer to the Identifying Your Superpowers exercise in the workbook. Perhaps even try to identify ones that could be attributable to one of the insecure attachment styles.



Photo by Disruptivo on Unsplash

CHAPTER VII

Therapies and Alternative Approaches



Next Steps

At this stage, you likely have a much better understanding of your attachment style and how it might be affecting your thoughts, actions, relationships, and professional outlook. However, if you want to make a positive change in your life, you might be wondering how to actually go about it. Knowledge and understanding are powerful steps towards healing, so you've already taken the first constructive stride, but this upcoming section will discuss the next measures that you could take towards achieving success and positive change.

Whatever therapeutic approach you choose, listed here or not, it is essential to be well informed from reliable and credible sources about its operation, its objectives, and the practitioner you contact. Some of these approaches may seem like you can do it yourself, but we encourage you to be pragmatic - attachment is first and foremost about relationships, so this is something that you should factor in.

If there is a therapy or alternative approach that you are interested in, but it's not listed here, it might help to ask your doctor or another health professional whether they have any information and if they think it would be the right approach for you. It's important to note that self-treating a condition or delaying or avoiding care can have serious consequences.

Try Therapy

One possible approach for achieving change is therapy, as it gives you the option of talking out your thoughts and problems with a trained mental health professional without feeling judged or fearful. You will undoubtedly end up discussing how past situations, your feelings, and your actions are affecting your day-to-day life. Still, how you'll go about it will depend on the issues that you're hoping to address, as well as the methods of the therapist.

Therapy can be incredibly healing, but it can be challenging in the moment as it can bring up some distressing thoughts and feelings. For this reason, it's crucial to choose your form of therapy with care and consideration to your personal needs. Doing so can lead to a happier and healthier life.

In this section, we will discuss different types of therapies and the option of medication, as well as other alternatives, but first, let's broach the importance of the fit between you and a therapist.



The Therapeutic Alliance

The important word here is “alliance.” It would be difficult to achieve change in therapy without having a solid relationship with your therapist! People approach therapy because they have an emotional need – they want to be unburdened from the difficulties of their childhood, their adult relationships, and their feelings of unworthiness. Furthermore, they want to realize who they are and establish new life goals for themselves. A therapist plays an essential role in this process of change, and many professionals in the field even consider the therapeutic relationship to be the most important factor when achieving a successful outcome. A study by the APA’s *Society of Clinical Psychologists* even found that the success of psychotherapy is independent of the type of treatment – meaning that it doesn’t really matter what form of therapy you choose as long as your fit with your therapist is good. For this reason, trust how you feel about your relationship with your therapist – confidence isn’t built during one or two sessions, but listen to your gut!

If you’re feeling a little lost on how to choose a therapist, then this [guide](#) from the American Psychological Association (APA) might help. Remember, if you don’t feel like you’re making the connection you need with your therapist, there’s nothing wrong with stating so or trying a different therapist. After all, a therapist understands more than anyone how important the therapeutic connection is.

I.

SCHEMA THERAPY

1.1 What Is Schema Therapy?

You're already familiar with schema theory and therapy, but let's recap it for clarity; schemas are unhelpful patterns that some people may develop if their emotional needs weren't met as children. They can affect your thoughts and actions and create unhealthy ways of coping with your problems if they're left unaddressed. Schema therapy combines methods from attachment theory, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), psychoanalysis, and more, to help you meet your emotional needs in a way that doesn't cause you distress. It is effective for building resilience, allowing you to tap into your strengths, and resolve unhealthy patterns and deep-rooted negative beliefs. Schema therapy is thought to be particularly helpful for people with emotional and relationship issues.

1.2 What Does Schema Therapy Look Like?

The goal of schema therapy is not to get rid of your schemas. Instead, it focuses on helping you to meet your needs in a healthy way that doesn't trigger your schema as often or less intensely. A schema therapist will assess you and teach you about your schema and then focus on treating it using various strategies such as fostering a strong therapeutic relationship, behavioral techniques, cognitive techniques, and emotion-focused techniques. If you're interested in finding out more about whether Schema Therapy is right for you, then you can visit the International Society for Schema Therapy at <http://isstonline.com>.

II.

PSYCHODYNAMIC THERAPY

2.1 What Is Psychodynamic Therapy?

Challenging emotions are often the most difficult part of life, but they can make us stronger and lead to a keener sense of self. However, some people need support to be able to do this as their past might be emotionally prickly. The basic assumption underlying psychotherapy is that our feelings and actions are determined by unconscious motives, which are influenced by our childhood. The influence of these past experiences remains in our subconscious and continues to exert influence on our judgments, feelings, and actions as adults, despite being unaware of them. Essentially, the tenet of psychodynamic therapy is that our relationship with our caregivers shapes our personalities and problems.

Therefore, it's understandable why psychodynamic therapy might be appropriate for many people with attachment issues.

2.2 What Does Psychodynamic Therapy Look Like?

Instead of focusing on your behavior, psychodynamic therapy involves interpreting your mental and emotional processes. For this reason, therapy sessions are often intense and determined by the client's needs. Sessions are typically once a week and can last up to an hour in a one-to-one setting.

Through this process, chronic issues that were at one stage subconscious are brought to the surface. This allows the client the self-awareness to unveil how these subconscious patterns are affecting their life, as well as how they came to be, before they can change them.



III.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

3.1 What Is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy?

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a common treatment for a range of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders. It is considered to be a present-focused form of therapy, as it focuses on the here-and-now rather than delving into your past. As a talking therapy, CBT concentrates on how your feelings and actions are directly influenced by your thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes.

Essentially, the theory behind CBT is that how we think about situations directly affects the way we feel and behave. For example, if you have a negative outlook on an event, then you might feel bad as a result, and consequently, behave in an unhealthy way. If this negative outlook isn't challenged, then you might accept it as fact.

Thus, it will continue to impact your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, eventually becoming a continuous cycle that can be difficult to break.

3.2 What Does CBT Look Like?

CBT consists of two components; the cognitive therapy element, which examines the way you think (your negative thinking), and the behavior therapy element, which analyzes your actions (unhealthy behaviors). Although CBT is present-focused, the root of your negative thinking might stem from childhood, as your past experiences could be affecting your current outlook on the world. Therefore, if you experience maladaptive thoughts such as “I’m a terrible person - I’ll never be good enough,” then your therapist might explore issues such as your relationship with your caregivers.

Together with your therapist, you will work at identifying your negative thoughts, which are usually automatic, and how they impact how you feel and behave. Once you have done this, you can both figure out how best for you to challenge these thoughts, so that you no longer just accept them as fact.



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IV. POLYVAGAL THEORY IN THERAPY

4.1 What Is Polyvagal Therapy?

Polyvagal Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that engages the social nervous systems of both the therapist and client, potentially providing a sense of attachment or bond for the client within appropriate parameters. The opportunity to socially engage on a meaningful level with another person, and have it reciprocated, is a richly reparative experience for someone who has feelings of rejection or inconsistency from their childhood.

Just as animals have an inbuilt fight or flight response to threatening situations, we too rely on defense mechanisms to survive and flourish. For example, if you did not receive the amount of attention and affection that you desired as a child, you might have responded by shutting down emotionally. This kind of self-protective reaction can also be seen in animals when they “feign death” in the hopes that a predator will lose interest in them and move on. This is our nervous system’s response to what we understand as danger, and it often happens without our awareness – we either become amped up or shut down and respond in a way that we feel increases our feelings of safety.

However, Polyvagal Theory identifies a third kind of nervous system response, one that incorporates both the calming and activating responses of our nervous system - the social engagement system. This marvelous system helps you navigate relationships and become more adaptive in your coping styles, which may be ideal for someone with an insecure attachment style.

4.2 What Does Polyvagal Therapy Look Like?

In contrast to talking therapy, the Polyvagal therapist is in tune with what's happening within their own body in response to what their client is telling them; they use these subtle somatic changes to provide insight into what the client is experiencing. Through this, they can model behaviors to their client in a way that is unobtrusive and gentle. For example, the therapist might notice that their client is holding their breath, so they might take deep breaths in and out as a nonverbal form of encouragement for their client to do the same. Alternatively, they might verbalize it so as to make their client aware of what their own body is experiencing. What's more, the therapist behaves openly and acceptingly towards their client so that they feel understood and at ease.

This form of co-regulation of emotions may be extremely valuable for someone with attachment issues, as they may find it difficult to trust and open up around others. It can help them to feel connected and safe, even while experiencing distressing emotions.

In time, this ability to co-regulate may also transfer successfully to their intimate relationships.



V

ACCELERATED EXPERIENTIAL DYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY (AEDP)

5.1 What Is Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy?

Don't be frightened off by AEDP's lengthy title, it's just another form of psychotherapy, but it focuses on healing-oriented techniques to achieve change in behaviors. Going through difficult times can actually make you stronger; it often provides someone with remarkable capacities and mental resources – they're often just untapped. AEDP aims to make the most of these strengths through exploring your emotions and their related experiences in-depth, therefore understanding more about how to heal and transform.

It has roots in many fields, such as attachment theory, body-focused approaches, and neuroscience.

The end goal of AEDP is to enable the client to confront and deal with their emotions rather than putting up barriers and using defensive tactics. Many people who undergo AEDP report that they had the skills to confront their issues all along, but that AEDP helped them become more aware of them and taught them how to access them. The key to AEDP is the therapeutic relationship – the therapist becomes the secure base for someone with an attachment issue, and together they work towards positive change.

5.2 What Does AEDP Look Like?

AEDP seeks to “undo aloneness,” so its therapists are often in partnership with professionals and clinicians from other fields, such as attachment therapists, body-focused strategists, experiential therapists, and trauma therapists. This means that choosing AEDP makes it more likely that you’ll benefit from the broad knowledge base of all of these disciplines –making it both a practical and innovative way for someone with an attachment issue to approach their issues and renew their zest for life.



VI.

INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS THERAPY (IFS)

6.1 What Is Internal Family Systems?

Essentially, the underlying premise of IFS is that an individual cannot be fully understood in isolation from their family.

This doesn't mean that you need to have your family there for therapy sessions, but instead that you have likely built mental representations of your family members (sub-personalities) and the role they play in how you make decisions. These "personalities" often have their own characteristics and outlook, which can create internal conflict.

6.2 What Does Internal Family Systems Look Like?

IFS therapy may take the form of talk therapy, but the therapist might also use methods such as relaxation or visualization to get you to tap into your internal environment and achieve the overall goals of IFS - to gain a sense of balance within yourself. With the help of the therapist, you can learn how your inner "personalities" function as part of a system and how this system reacts to other circumstances and people. Most importantly, you will understand that the "Self" is who you are at your core and how it should be the leader of your emotions and decisions. This can help you to develop a more significant quality of life and sense of well-being as you'll learn how to manage conflict and difficult situations as they arise.

VII.

EMOTION-FOCUSED THERAPY (EFT)

7.1 What Is Emotion-Focused Therapy?

Emotion-focused therapy (EFT) operates under the assumption that ignoring or avoiding unpleasant emotions does us harm. In fact, trying to control our feelings unsuccessfully has been linked to mood disorders such as depression. Therefore, EFT is based around the idea that our emotions are signposts towards healthy and meaningful lives.

EFT's tenet is that emotions form a crucial part of our identity; therefore, having a lack of emotional awareness can make it challenging to interpret the important information that our feelings provide us with. EFT originated from attachment theory; thus, it can help individuals and couples form more secure emotional bonds and create healthier patterns of behavior.

EFT may also be helpful for anyone who avoids unpleasant emotions or situations, such as someone with social anxiety.

7.2 What Does Emotion-Focused Therapy Look Like?

In EFT, the therapist and the client work as collaborators towards a common goal. Both are equal contributors, as the client is the one with the power to interpret their own emotions. EFT therapists are non-judgemental, open, and reflective, allowing their clients to understand and appreciate their feelings. In EFT, you learn two key skill sets;

- 1.** How to become more aware of your emotions, as well as how to welcome and regulate them.
- 2.** How to transform these emotions into healthy actions or outcomes.



Photo by Hannah Bursine on Unsplash

VIII. ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT)

8.1 What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?

Often, when confronted with unpleasant emotions and feelings, our first instinct is to try to ignore them in the hopes that they will go away. However, we would all likely agree that these negative emotions resurface again and usually very soon. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) encourages you to embrace your thoughts and feelings – including negative ones – rather than denying or feeling guilty for them. It helps you to accept things that are out of your control and commit to actions that make your life better. This enables you to develop psychological flexibility and self-acceptance of who you are as an individual.

This form of therapy might be beneficial for someone with an attachment issue as it can help them recognize their negative cycle of thoughts and behaviors and connect with their values.

8.2 What Does Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Look Like?

ACT involves acceptance and mindfulness techniques, as well as commitment and behavior change strategies. There are six core steps that you will go through with a therapist during the process of ACT:

- Acceptance – instead of avoiding negative thoughts or trying to change them, you accept them.
- Cognitive Defusion – ACT encourages you to change how you react to negative thoughts and feelings, therefore ultimately fixating on them less.
- Being Present – allowing yourself to experience the moment without trying to predict or change it.
- Self as Context – we are not the sum of what has happened to us. We experience what happens to us.
- Values – in the ACT context, values are the qualities that we want to live our life according to, such as honesty or being loving or trustworthy.
- Committed Action – ACT encourages you to establish long-term goals and commit to achieving them.

IX.

WHAT IS BODYDYNAMICS?

Bodydynamics is a form of somatic psychology, meaning that it focuses on our physical experiences and includes both therapeutic and holistic approaches to bridge the gap between what happens in the mind and what happens in the body. However, Bodydynamics is unique from other forms of somatic psychology as it incorporates multiple interrelated and overlapping models of psychology to understand how we function in a more sophisticated way.

Whereas Bodydynamics aims to understand the psychological roots of physical problems, it also goes much further than that; the Bodydynamics system deals with the fluid nature of how we interact with ourselves, as well as others, and our environment.

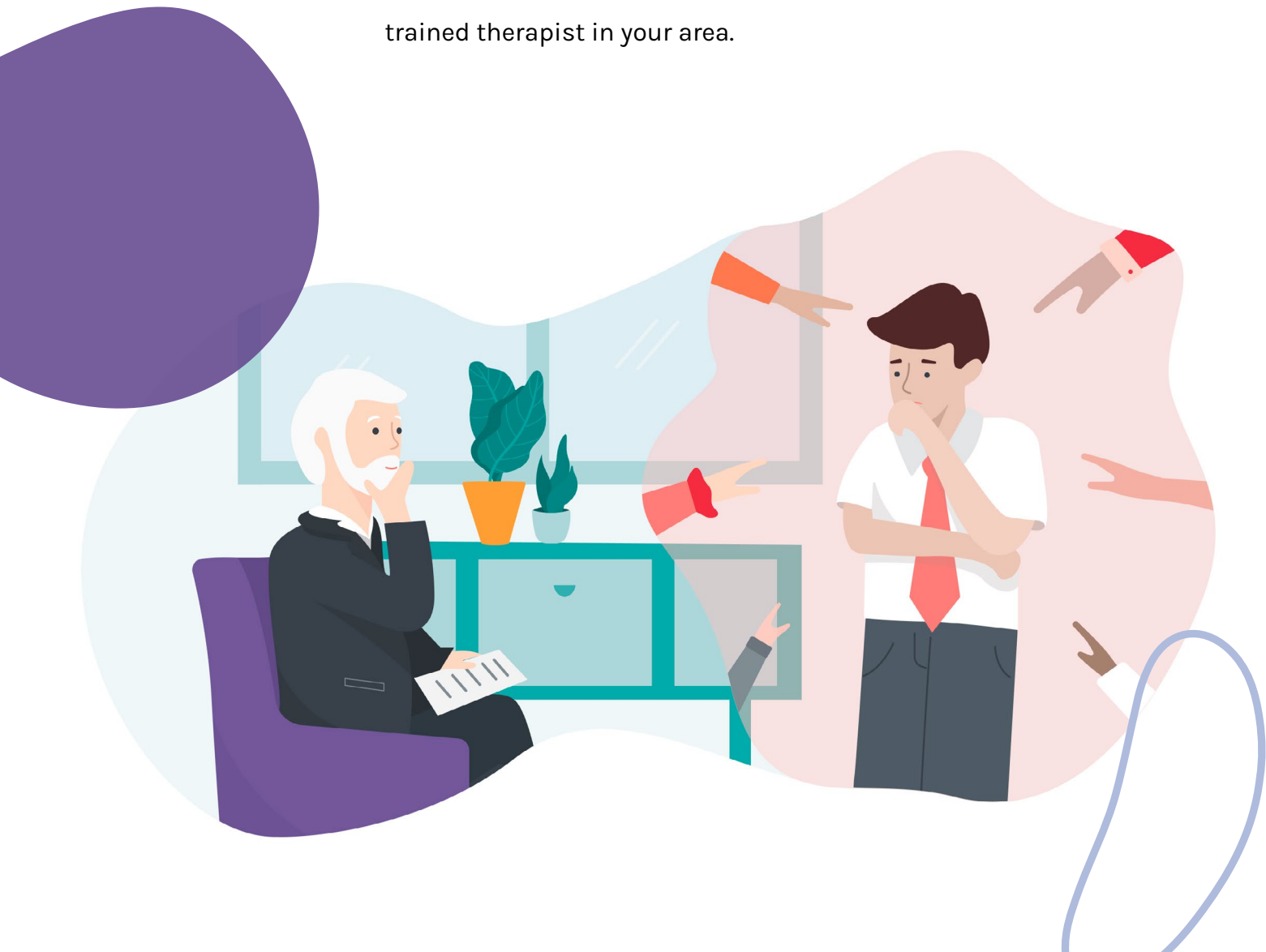
These systems are our emotional forces, and they form the basis of what we value in our lives, the choices that we make, and the relationships we involve ourselves in.

Bodydynamics could work for someone with attachment issues as it focuses on developmental psychology and the belief that early emotional stress creates a psychological and emotional resignation, which eventually is reflected in the body. This might look like pushing down emotions such as anger or putting up a barrier towards affection – behaviors quite typical of an insecure attachment style.

9.1 What Does Bodydynamics Look Like?

A Bodydynamics therapist is trained to adapt to the specific needs of their client, but they typically incorporate verbal and non-verbal exercises to help identify subconscious systems which may be affecting day-to-day functioning, such as whether there's pre-existing trauma that needs to be worked through or defense mechanisms which may cause a barrier to intimate relationships. The Bodydynamics therapist may use techniques such as Affirmational Relational Messages (ARM's), exercises that focus the mind, and conflict resolution to help you work through any issues that you might have.

If you feel like Bodydynamics might be the right fit for you, then this link from Bodydynamic.com can help you to find a Bodydynamics-trained therapist in your area.



MEDICATION

There is a stigma around medication, but the truth is, it does have its place in the effective management of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders. Many people use medication to help manage their more severe and persistent symptoms - if you're struggling to cope day to day, make an appointment with your GP or a psychiatrist to discuss your options - it is important to do what is necessary and suitable for you to regain control over your life.

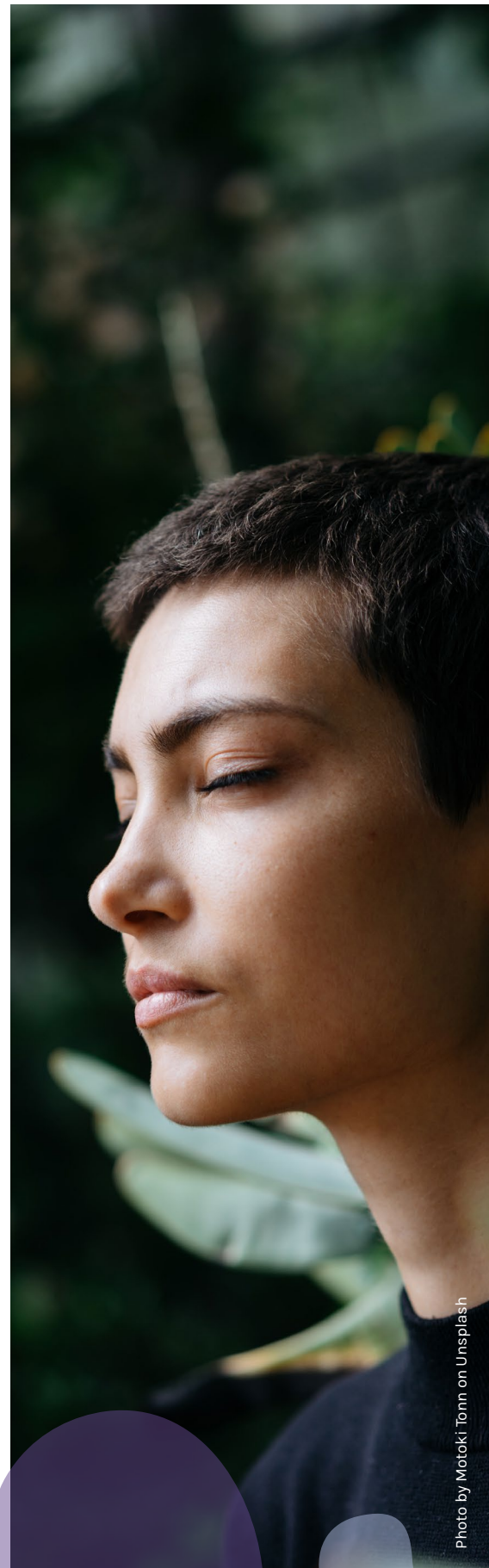
However, medication could be considered a part of a larger, holistic care plan, as it is not going to target the unhealthy thoughts that lead to maladaptive behaviors.

If your outlook of it is as being a useful, temporary tool to help you to balance out while you're getting used to therapy, then you are improving your chances of successfully working through your emotions and feelings.

EASTERN APPROACHES TO STRESS REDUCTION

In recent years there has been a growing academic interest in Eastern approaches to managing our mental health, especially in the areas of mindfulness practices based on traditional medicine and Buddhist concepts. Through a Buddhist lens, all causes of personal suffering can be changed through a progressive recognition of our true selves and understanding the nature of the Self as dependent on other factors and impermanent.

The connection between our mind and body is never more evident than when we feel stressed or anxious, and an attachment issue can often create these issues.



Think about it – while we believe anxiety to be an issue solely of the mind, it is absolutely as equally physical in nature as we hold on to tension in our bodies. Similarly, although fear is an emotion, it can cause us to respond in a defensive physical manner, such as increased heart rate, sweating, and rapid breathing. All these symptoms demonstrate just how much influence the mind has over the body. Well, it also works both ways; this mind-body connection works in reverse, and physical tension can also increase anxiety and tension in the mind.

For this reason, engaging in activities that focus on relaxing the body will also calm the mind.

This next section will focus on body-based activities that you can do to ease any tension associated with your attachment style. In fact, even if you don't have any tension in this area, they can be of benefit for a variety of other reasons!



X

START SIMPLE – FOCUS ON DIET AND SLEEP

Prolonged periods of stress can take their toll on the body and mind as it causes long-term increases of the hormone Cortisol. For this reason, it is important to rest as much as you can; sleep is restorative, and it will provide your body and mind the chance to recover from adverse situations.

Similarly, diet is equally important in regard to mood management and reducing stress. Complex carbohydrates are known to increase serotonin – otherwise known as the “happy hormone” – as it produces a calming effect. Complex carbohydrates break down much slower than simple ones such as white flour and sugar; therefore, you’ll have a more balanced, full, and positive feeling for longer. Proteins also help make you feel full for longer and keep your blood sugar level, which means you will feel more energetic and able to cope with stress, so include eggs, lentils, Greek yogurt, and other protein-rich foods in your diet.

Include plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and fish high in omega-3 fatty acids in your intake, as well as plenty of water and fluids as even dehydration can have a negative impact on mood.

10.1 Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION?

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a healing approach to a variety of mental health issues that combines the Eastern approaches of meditation and yoga. Jon Kabat-Zinn developed it in the 1970s as a way of combating life's difficulties through addressing the unconscious thoughts, feelings, and behaviors which are believed to increase stress and tension. Initially created to help hospital patients to achieve a greater quality of life, it has since been used successfully with countless people to cultivate a better awareness of the present moment.

WHAT DOES MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION LOOK LIKE?

MBSR is a group program that is composed of two main components; mindfulness meditation and yoga. It is intended to be practiced in a way best suited to the individual, rather than a pre-prescribed script that can be used widely. Even though it is individualized, MBSR is based on the same set of principles. The following descriptions are from the [Centre for Mindfulness website](#);

- 1. Making the experience a challenge rather than a chore and thus turning the observing of one's life mindfully into an adventure in living rather than one more thing one "has" to do for oneself to be healthy**
- 2. An emphasis on the importance of individual effort and motivation and regular disciplined practice of the meditation in its various forms, whether one "feels" like practicing on a particular day or not**



3. The immediate lifestyle change that is required to undertake formal mindfulness practice, since it requires a significant time commitment (in the clinic 45 minutes a day, six days a week minimally)

If MBSR is a route that you're considering, then make sure to pursue training in a reputable center, such as a medical center, clinic, or hospital, where the classes are taught by qualified professionals in the area of MBSR. Also, if you're thinking of using it for a condition such as anxiety, depression, or other health conditions, then discuss its suitability with your health professional first.

10.2 Inner Smile Meditation

WHAT IS INNER SMILE MEDITATION?

Taoism (often referred to as Daoism) originated in China approximately 2000 years ago and is an ancient tradition of religion and philosophy that is strongly connected to Chinese customs and outlook. The root of Taoism is the tao, or roughly translated, "the way". It essentially stands for the belief that all things within the universe are connected and unified. Taoism promotes the achievement of union with nature, the strive for spiritual immortality, and the pursuit of self-development.

Inner Smile meditation is a Taoist practice that regards the experience of negative emotions as necessary, but that they should be *low-grade life force energy* - they shouldn't overly drain our resources. For example, many people live their lives in a perpetual state of anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, depression, fear, and a range of other

different forms of negative energy. Unfortunately, this form of energy may eventually lead to the development of chronic disease and drain our *good life force energy*.

How often have we heard phrases such as “Stop acting like a girl”, “Don’t be so emotional”, and “You’ve got to develop a thicker skin”? Many cultures frown upon and discourage outward displays of emotion (potentially increasing the chances of developing an insecure attachment), resulting in someone hiding or bottling their emotions for fear of being judged. The problem with this is that for most people, negative emotions are a form of a reaction to a stimulus; we react to our thoughts, our beliefs, and as a response to life’s events.

Inner Smile meditation can help you learn the skills to acknowledge and accept negative emotions and actively transform them so that you start to recognize your inner virtues and naturally positive emotions.

When someone smiles at you, you feel warm and accepted. A genuine smile transmits loving energy, which has the power to heal. This person is sending you a message that you are welcome and liked. Well, The Inner Smile is a sincere, loving, and grateful smile that you send to all parts of your body; your organs, glands, muscles, and bones, as well as to the nervous system. We are acknowledging their roles in keeping us healthy and alive. Similar to how we feel when someone smiles at us, The Inner Smile is sending high-quality energy that can transform negative energy into positivity, vitality, and a strong sense of alert relaxation.

The Inner Smile allows us to forgive and love ourselves and others. Smiling lovingly at our inner selves energizes our immune system and can even be linked to the prevention and cure of serious diseases through the spread of love and gratitude to the ailing parts of our bodies.

Our eyes are a major sense organ, so Inner Smile Meditation focuses on how to awaken a true smile in the eyes. Doing so is thought to release tension and blockages in the muscles, organs, and glands and release their energy so that they can function at their highest level.

What's more, focusing this smiling awareness inwardly also promotes more profound and powerful meditations.



WHAT DOES INNER SMILE MEDITATION LOOK LIKE?

Inner Smile meditation can take anywhere from 3 to 30 minutes, usually seated in a chair. Initially, it is practiced and taught as a guided meditation, but over time, as skill sets develop, you can learn to guide yourself through the practice.

The process often involves visual aids such as pictures and charts to help people picture where their internal organs and glands are located in their body in order to smile at them more effectively.

It is important that you combine visualization with actively feeling the sensations in your body.

Some people report feeling positive benefits after the first Inner Smile session, but for others, it might require a couple of sessions before they start to experience the beneficial results.

THE SIX HEALING SOUNDS

The Six Healing Sounds or Liu Zi Jue (六字訣) are one of the older documented Qigong exercise sets of China, dating back to around 250 A.D. during the Chin Dynasty. With a rich and complex history, especially in Taoism, they are among the most effective and significant forms of self-healing exercises.

The basic theory behind the Six Healing Sounds is that we draw the energy we need to stay alive and thrive from the food that we eat, the air we breathe, and sunlight, as well as other sources. Our cells break the glucose from our food into energy - 75% of which is in the form of heat. Other than the heat that we need to keep our bodies at their normal healthy temperature, the rest of the heat produced is essentially exhaust and, thus, needs to be released out of the body.

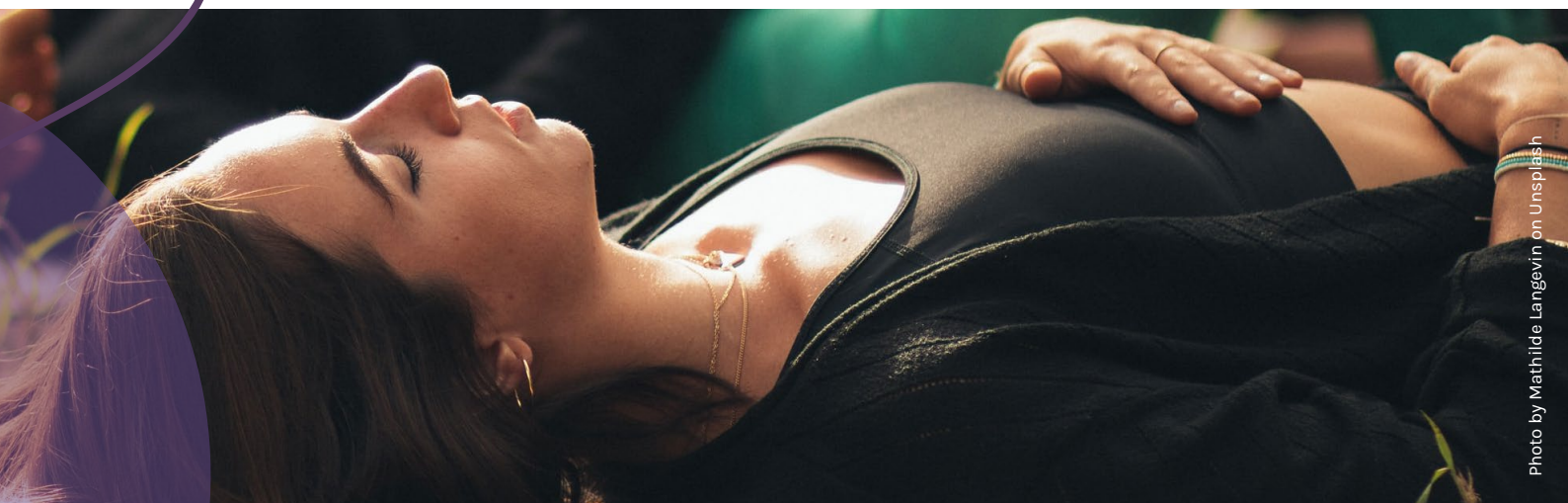


Each of our internal organs and muscles is surrounded by a wrapper of fascia - a sac that resembles a thin, white filmy tissue. The fascia allows our organs and muscles to glide over each other without sticking. It also facilitates the dispersion of the excess body heat out of the skin.

However, according to this practice, when we're subjected to traumatic injury, poor posture, stress, or chronic negative emotions, the fascia may stick to the tissues and fail to carry away the excess heat.

When the internal body temperature rises in various parts of the body, it can cause inflammation, malfunction, autoimmune disorders, and even cancer.

Of particular importance in Taoism and Chinese Medicine is the inseparable connection between our internal organs and our emotions. Each organ has healthy positive virtuous attitudes, as well as negative emotions anchored in it. With the Six Healing Sounds practice, you can train in clearing your organs to allow your natural and inherent virtuous attitudes to shine forth unobstructed without being covered by clouds of negative emotions. You can develop the ability to remember and identify again with your true healthy nature.



This isn't to suggest that your negative emotions are bad per se; you need them to alert you when events may threaten your well-being - like an internal alarm system. However, when we are under constant stress and experiencing chronic negative emotions, the alarm system becomes the problem in itself. Conversely, when an organ becomes out of balance, we are more apt to experience the negative emotions associated with that organ.

We express ourselves through our bodies, our speech, and our minds. When practicing the Six Healing Sounds, you will use a combination of movements to open the space around the organs, sounds that vibrate the particular organ, and visualization and intention to release any heat, sickness, and negative emotions present.



Photo by William Farlow on Unsplash





10.3 Other Alternatives

A combination approach to treating the symptoms of an attachment issue may be beneficial for many people as it can speed up the time taken to see results. There are a number of different strategies that can be used to suit your lifestyle and needs. **Trust in the relationship with your therapist and discuss what you think might be necessary for your care with them.**

Mindfulness - Practicing mindfulness (not just MBSR) has been shown to be a powerhouse in managing physical and mental issues. For example, studies on chronic stress have shown that mindfulness reduces the harmful effects of stress on both the mind and body. In fact, mindfulness has a positive effect on well-being in general, and attachment issues are no exception - a recent study has shown that mindfulness is associated with lower levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Mindful breathing - also known as conscious breathing, mindful breathing is an easy and effective way of reducing anxiety and increasing relaxation in the moment. It helps you access the part of the nervous system that allows you to reduce stress and think clearly, eliminating the feeling of being overwhelmed by anxious thoughts and panic.

Meditation - Other forms of relaxation techniques such as transcendental meditation have been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, improve quality of life, decrease psychological distress, and improve cognitive performance. Even without any significant attachment issues, it's potentially a step towards a more positive lifestyle. There are a range of different courses/training, so perhaps check out this [guide](#) from Helpline if you want to find a type of meditation that best suits you.

Cardiac coherence - (also known as coherent breathing) with this breathing technique, you can learn to control your heart rate variation to regulate your autonomic nervous system. This method influences the parasympathetic system, which calms down the organs and reduces global stress.

Exercise - research has shown that physically active people have lower occurrences of mood disorders than sedentary people. Studies even suggest that a ten-minute walk may be as beneficial as a forty-five-minute workout. If paired with a complementary stretching exercise such as yoga, you can achieve even greater relaxation and decreases in stress.

Reducing alcohol - alcohol can alter serotonin and dopamine levels (as well as other neurotransmitters) in the brain, which may cause profound levels of anxiety and depression. When the effect of alcohol wears off, you are more likely to experience increased anxiety which can last from several hours to a couple of days. Plus, although alcohol can have an initial calming effect, after the body processes it, it can actually cause irritability and mood instability. It also interferes with your sleep cycle.

BE RECURSIVE

The therapeutic path isn't always easy; it requires commitment in regards to time, money, and internal reflection. If this is the route for you, then you will need to be patient and confident in your ability to unveil your deeper functioning and your ability to enjoy your life to it's fullest. It may be the case that not everything you try will work immediately, nor may everything you choose be the right fit for you. Sometimes, you may need to be recursive and try something else if the first choice wasn't the right one for you.

This doesn't mean to suggest that you give up because something is hard, but instead, you may have to judge whether a particular approach is appropriate for you based on your gut feeling.

What's more, you might find that a combination approach that employs a number of methods suits you best. Don't be afraid to talk to someone you trust, your GP, or your therapist about experimenting with a few of the strategies – perhaps you'll find that therapy is helping to make a world of difference to your outlook, but maybe you would prefer to deal with your problems through a fusion of methods, such as combining an eastern approach, exercise, and diet. Regardless, be mindful of your mind and body as you are healing, and do not hesitate to speak to a medical professional if you need advice on the best approach to take for you.



APPENDIX

Neuroscience



Peeping Into the Brain

In the last twenty years, there has been an explosion of discoveries in neuroscience, and these have given us insight into why the four early patterns of attachment affect the development of our brains.

Attachment theory research and modern neuroscience all confirm one thing: our earliest relationships built the neural connections that we use for our relationships throughout our lives.

So, let's get to it! Let's peer into the brain. In the following chapter, we explore the following:

- The social role of the different parts of the brain
- Fight-or-flight response of the amygdala
- Negative social bias of the right hemisphere and positive bias of the left hemisphere
- Role of the prefrontal cortex in attunement and in learning the “rules” of attachment

1 SNS & PNS

The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) has two branches: the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), which is responsible for arousal and flight-fight, and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), which is responsible for calming - “rest and digest.” These two branches serve to “step on the gas” of the nervous system when action is necessary (SNS) and step on the brake pedal to calm down arousal (PNS) when action is no longer needed.

SNS and PNS are active at the same time. The goal is to maintain balance.

With too much SNS and too little PNS -> we feel restless, agitated, stressed, and in the extreme, panicked.

With too much PNS and too little SNS -> we feel slow, lethargic, numb, and in the extreme, we might faint.

When there is balance, the world feels right.

But how does this delicate balance relate to relationships?

SECURE ATTACHMENT

Within the safety of a secure attachment relationship, our sympathetic nervous system is not overly active and does not pump out stress hormones, such as cortisol. We stay within our comfort zone and we're still able to function.

In a secure relationship, we are more relaxed. We're neither over-aroused and irritated or aggressive, nor under-aroused and bored.



INSECURE ATTACHMENT

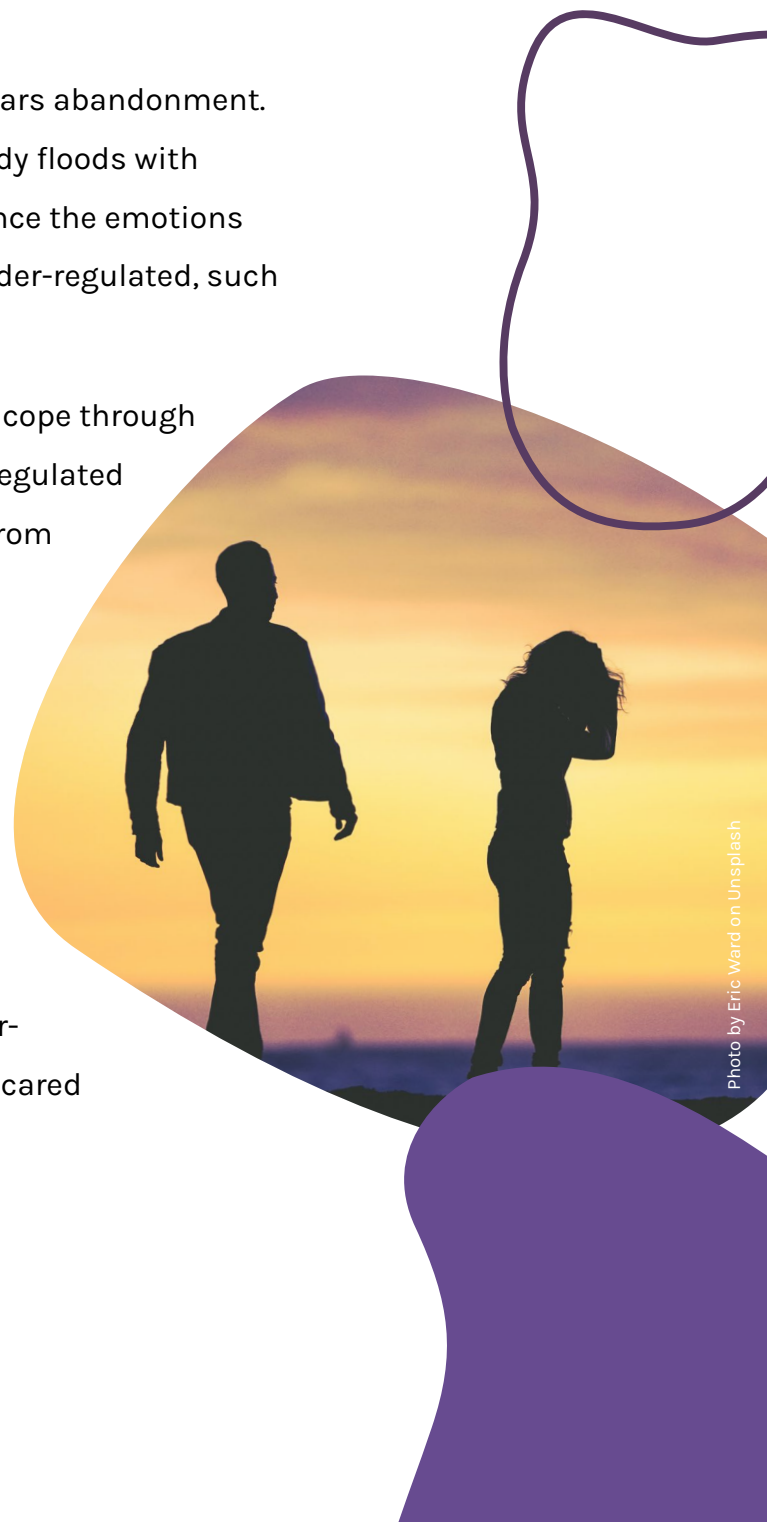
For someone with an insecure attachment, relationships mean danger. This perceived threat activates the SNS, and the brain prepares us for a ‘flight or fight’.

The SNS arouses the amygdala - our fear centre. All rational thought goes up in smoke; our emotions take over. If the threat is an actual life threat, the PNS calms down everything, and our system shuts down; we go numb and freeze.

A person with *anxious/preoccupied attachment* fears abandonment. This threat overstimulates the SNS, and the body floods with “stress chemistry”. The brain shouts “Fight!” Since the emotions of anxious/preoccupied people are typically under-regulated, such people often engage in anger and aggression.

Individuals with *avoidant/dismissive attachment* cope through avoidance and withdrawal. Emotions are over-regulated and dampened, as a means of self-protection from becoming vulnerable, and as a shield from the other person. Because avoidant people hide their feelings, they may come across as under-stimulated, even though everything inside them is buzzing.

People with *disorganized attachment* feel fright without a solution; a sense of danger, or life threat, pervades their being. The PNS over-regulates their bodily energy, and looking like scared rabbits, they feel helpless and freeze.



2 AMYGDALA

The limbic system is the seat of our emotions. One part of the limbic system is the amygdala - the 24/7 watchdog for safety or danger - and it constantly scans the environment for threats, even in our sleep.

If a situation is perceived as dangerous, the amygdala generates the fight-or-flight response, and we begin to avoid similar situations in the future.

If we feel safe engaging, interacting, and bonding in a relationship, we won't run away from it, even when we sense a threat. We do so because we feel trusting enough to regulate our emotional distress.

For example, imagine that, your spouse screams at you. There's probably no need to get too upset; maybe they're just having a bad day and are taking out their frustration on you.

Feeling the connection (despite the discord), the brain releases oxytocin, which calms down the amygdala. The fear centre stops firing its signals of alarm and we relax.

John Bowlby hypothesized that **attachment is about safety and protection, and about emotional regulation in times of perceived threat or danger.** In his *three-part motivational system* of fear-attachment-exploration, fear triggers attachment behaviors. This happens because fear throws the amygdala into red alert.

For instance, while playing happily, a baby hears a loud thud -> **fear**.

The baby cries out -> **attachment**.

A quick embrace soothes the fear of the amygdala, and the baby returns to throwing the ball -> **exploration**.

Through sensitive responding, parents regulate fear and anxiety and soothe the baby's amygdala. Such soothing will get imprinted on the baby's implicit memory of human touch as comforting and healing.

In a secure relationship in adulthood, they will experience a similar sense of comfort in a loved one's arms.

3 HIPPOCAMPUS

Above the amygdala is the hippocampus; on each side of the temporal lobe, near the ears. While the amygdala is the seat of our emotions, the hippocampus is the seat of our memory.

At around two and a half years of age, the hippocampus begins translating experience into explicit memory - memory that can be recalled, which is a vital link to higher thinking.

Explicit memory is processed consciously and remembered in the cortex - *the thinking brain*. With explicit processing, the child begins to remember experiences. They consciously learn to approach or avoid certain people and emotions.



4 HYPOTHALAMUS

Located deeper in the limbic system, the hypothalamus coordinates both the autonomic nervous system and the activity of the pituitary gland, which controls body temperature, thirst, hunger, and other homeostatic systems.

The hypothalamus releases various hormones to regulate the amygdala. Most importantly (regarding attachment), it releases oxytocin - the bonding hormone. Touch, warmth, and movement - such as during birth, breastfeeding, and orgasm - cause the release of oxytocin.

Hugs make us feel safe and bonded, mainly because our brains release oxytocin, serotonin (our mood neurotransmitter), and dopamine (our reward neurotransmitter) when we're touched affectionately.

5 CORTEX

The cortex is our higher-thinking brain. The social brain in the **medial prefrontal cortex** (mPFC) is of particular importance to emotional regulation and empathy as well as to understanding and changing the patterns of attachment. The social brain regulates or overrides the emotional amygdala.

The **dorsolateral prefrontal cortex** (dPFC - on the sides of the frontal lobes) is the area of our working memory. Working memory is what makes the following things possible:

- retrieving stored memories into conscious awareness and playing with them
- reshaping new experiences before re-storing them in memory
- metacognitive awareness

RIGHT VS. LEFT HEMISPHERE OF THE CORTEX

To make things even more complicated, each side of the cortex plays a different role in emotional expression and regulation.





The right hemisphere represents our creative side and processes experiences nonverbally - through bodily sensations, visual images, and emotions. It's where we get our "gut" feelings; our intuitive sense, and the ability to "see the big picture".

The left hemisphere of the brain is our logical side. It processes experiences verbally and linearly - through symbols and words. The left hemisphere is responsible for cognitive processing and the processing of details. If you tend to notice how the nose in a painting is a bit crooked rather than get an impression of the face as a whole, then it's probable that your left brain is more "lit" than your right.

Though both hemispheres process experiences consciously, consciousness in the right hemisphere comes in images, sensations, and emotions; while consciousness in the left hemisphere comes in words and symbols.

When it comes to relationships, the right hemisphere decodes our relationship experiences; the left hemisphere describes them.

6 NEUROPLASTICITY

Fortunately, the human brain is plastic: it can grow new neurons and create new synaptic connections between neurons. Because of neuroplasticity, we could, for example, change our brains to become more open to new ways of relating.

Given the right input, our brains rewire to create new neural circuitry - pathways and networks that allow us to relate in new, healthier, more resilient ways. This happens through explicit memory (what we remember), which can be retrieved in conscious awareness.

While any experience causes neurons in our brains to fire, repeated experiences cause neurons to fire repeatedly. Neurons that fire together wire together, thus strengthening neural connections.

The more intense the emotional charge, the more neurons will fire in our brains, and the more likely we are to register the experience in our implicit memory.

This is why less than optimal parenting has such an impact on our development. Day after day of being ignored, yelled at, insulted, and frowned upon builds up patterns of insecurity and lack of trust in relationships.

PART I

The Anxious Style Exercise Workbook



EXERCISE 1 | EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

1a. How we interpret our childhood can help us to understand how our attachment style developed. Try to think of an early memory that aligns with the symptoms of your anxious/preoccupied attachment style. If you can't think of any clear memories from your childhood, then try to recall what relatives may have told you about you as a child or perhaps even a recent memory that supports your attachment style.

The following are some examples of early memories which might help to guide you during this exercise:

EXAMPLES OF EARLY MEMORIES:

Mary clearly remembers the day that she got lost from her mother at the mall. Every detail, including how she felt, who helped her, and the relief she experienced once she found her mother, are still vivid in her memory.

Boz recalls being terrified of the dark after he woke up one night to find out his parents weren't home. It took him years to recover from this, as he struggled to trust his parents afterward.

Natalia's early memory is her first sleepover at her friend's house. She was so excited...yet the fear of sleeping so far from her Mom gave her such a terrible stomach ache that she decided to stay at home.

EXAMPLES OF STORIES ABOUT YOU AS A CHILD:

You cried all the time!
You were inconsolable...

I couldn't take a step without you wrapping yourself around my leg!

You wouldn't sleep in your own room. You crawled into bed beside me until you were three.

1b. Make a note of your early memories:

EARLY MEMORY	PEOPLE INVOLVED	PEOPLE'S REACTIONS	MY FEELINGS

EXERCISE 2 | INCONSISTENT PARENTING

2a. Caregivers of children with an anxious attachment style often parented inconsistently. This means that they could be supportive and attentive at times, but neglectful or punitive on other occasions. This can make it difficult for a child to make sense of their caregiver's actions. What is your interpretation of inconsistent parenting?

2b. Fill in the following table based on your understanding of inconsistent parenting

CHILDHOOD NEEDS	MET/UNMET	HOW I EXPRESSED THIS NEED	MY BELIEFS ABOUT MYSELF AS A RESULT
Example: security (other examples include praise, love, attention, etc.)	Hard to say - sometimes Dad tucked me in at night, but sometimes he wasn't home for nights on end...	When he was home I clung to him at bedtime and cried if he didn't respond quickly enough	I sometimes worry that people will get fed up of me when they get to know me.

EXERCISE 3 | UNCOVERING YOUR EMOTIONS

Emotions are an excellent indicator of your deep level functioning. Especially when they seem disproportionate or they overwhelm you. Think of the formative moments in your life and try to identify the emotions that you felt during these times. These moments may be positive or negative.

FORMATIVE MOMENT	THE EMOTION(S) I FELT	FIELD OF LIFE	PEOPLE INVOLVED
<i>Example: My tenth Christmas</i>	<i>happy, but also quite nervous that something would go wrong</i>	<i>family</i>	<i>Mom, Dad, and my sister</i>

EXERCISE 4 | UNVEILING YOUR SENSE OF SELF-ESTEEM

4a. Your sense of self-esteem is essentially how positive you feel about yourself and your life. If you have healthy self-esteem, then you likely generally have a positive outlook. However, if you have low self-esteem, then you might struggle to see your positive aspects and modify your behaviour to become what you think others want you to be. Complete the following sentences as honestly as you can:

1. I am naturally good at
2. I am brilliant at
3. My family says I am great at
4. My friends think I am good at
5. At work/school I am praised for being
6. I am happy when I am able to
7. Something that I am proud of about myself is

8. When I think of myself, the first thing that comes to mind is

4b. Reflect on the above statements:

- Putting a checkmark next to the things you want to keep or improve
- Putting an X next to the things that you are unhappy about and want to change/improve
- Circling the ones that you think are in some way related to your attachment style

How many of the circled ones correspond to the ones with an X?

For example: At work I am praised for being helpful and supportive. I think this might be related to my attachment style as I'm willing to sacrifice my happiness for others.

How many of the circled ones correspond to the ones with a checkmark?

For example: I am a loving person - I think this relates to my attachment style because I'm eager for the important people in my life to understand how much they mean to me.



EXERCISE 5 | SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

Do your thoughts about yourself influence your actions and their consequences? Before you fill in the following table, we should cover the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Due to a cycle of negative thinking's influence on your feelings and actions, you may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Self-fulfilling prophecies are when our subconscious beliefs and expectations influence our actions and result in a specific outcome.

For example:

Elaine is 28 and single. She has repeatedly experienced rejection in the past with men that she has liked, but she has recently become close with her new work friend, Mauricio, and she has been hoping he will ask her out, but so far, he hasn't. Elaine is certain that if she asks Mauricio out on a date that he will say no, but she manages to pluck up the courage to do it regardless. The next time she sees Mauricio in the corridor, Elaine tucks her chin into her neck and mutters "I know you're probably not interested, but I was wondering if you'd like to go out for dinner or something? Don't worry if you're busy." Just as Elaine predicted, Mauricio turns her down. This is a clear-cut example of how someone's thoughts affected their actions and resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Based on this information, please check all that apply and offer a real-life example. If it does not apply, write N/A.



I HAVE...	BY...	I GOT BACK...	SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY?
<p>Kept my distance even from those who say they care/love me</p>	<p><i>Pulling away even when they are trying to express their concern</i></p>	<p><i>People stopped trying and distanced themselves from me</i></p>	<p><i>Yes - I feel disliked because I push others away and eventually, they stop trying</i></p>
<p>Sacrificed my own wants and needs</p>			
<p>Become clingy and needy</p>			
<p>Overshared feelings and emotions too quickly</p>			
<p>Minimized my emotional expressions or thoughts</p>			
<p>Not trusted anyone else</p>			

EXERCISE 6 | SELF-DEVELOPMENT TECHNIQUES

The following exercises can help you to determine what is truly important to you in life, and help you to uncover an honest sense of who you are:

6a. WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

Awareness of your personal values can be hugely helpful when determining a sense of self. Your values are the traits and characteristics that you admire in yourself or others. For example, maybe you have a friend who's empathetic and trustworthy, or perhaps you have one that is particularly gregarious - it's up to you to figure out what your values are and whether you're living your life according to them. They will keep you on the right track to leading a fulfilled life that's true to your sense of self and help you to engage in rewarding relationships.

What values are important to you?

For example: I am an honest and loving person, but I admire people that are outgoing so this is a value that I would like to develop.

6b. WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY?

What makes you feel like the best version of yourself? Everyone has things or people that make them feel truly at home in their own skin. Identifying these things can help determine the things that you value the most and tell you a lot about who you are as a person.

For example: I feel happiest when I am around my friends. They make me feel relaxed and comfortable.

6c. ARE MY CHOICES MY OWN?

Do you typically ask other people to choose what you watch together? Where you go for food? Maybe you say "yes" to others just to make them happy. Whereas these specific things might be trivial, they might indicate that you make choices based on someone else's interests rather than on your own. Perhaps ask yourself whether you would make the same choices if you were by yourself. Having a solid sense of self means choosing activities that are grounded in your interests and goals.

For example: I usually just go along with what other people suggest - especially on nights out. I don't really like to rock the boat. Sometimes I wish that we could do something a bit different for a change though, such as watch a movie.

6d. IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTHS

Having a solid sense of self means that you acknowledge that you have strengths. This might be difficult for you if you struggle with low self-esteem, but we all have strengths, and it's important to recognize them if we want to achieve the goals that we set for ourselves. Furthermore, making the best of your skill-set means that you're more likely to have a healthy sense of self and increased self-esteem.

For example: I'm an intelligent and warm person. I think other people like to be in my company for this reason. Maybe I can use these attributes to help me to achieve my goal of asserting my opinions more often around others.

EXERCISE 7 | IDENTIFYING YOUR PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

7a. Identifying your personality characteristics.

What personal characteristics can you identify as being a product of your attachment style?

For example:

- a) I'm sensitive to other people's needs - perhaps to the detriment of my own
- b) I'm a little needy regarding my partner's intentions
- c) I'm a very loving and affectionate person

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

Some examples of personality characteristics (but feel free to think of others!):

- Nervousness
- Creative
- Addictive
- Generous
- Warmth
- Private
- Helpful
- Honest
- Hostility
- Sensitive
- Adaptable
- Patient
- Scepticism
- Explosive
- Curious
- Fair
- Self-control
- Self-reliance
- Empathetic
- Apprehensive
- Trusting
- Energetic
- Perfectionism
- Impulsive
- Courageous

EXERCISE 8 | FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIAL GROUPS

Our attachment style often influences how we behave in our friendships and social groups. Use the following exercises to determine how your social groups operate, as well as what you need from these groups to feel fulfilled within them.

8a. From the words below, pick five that best describes your social support system (feel free to think of others that aren't listed):

- Meaningful
- Long term
- Turbulent
- Co-dependent
- Harmonious
- Awkward
- Supportive
- Formally cordial
- Expressive
- Chaotic
- Intimate
- Bitter
- Uncomfortable
- Intense
- Small
- Expansive
- Secretive
- Lonely
- Professional
- Love-hate
- Short term
- Distant
- Social
- Companion
- Intellectual
- Learning-based
- Competitive
- Stable
- Tempestuous
- Unstable
- One-sided
- Remote
- Hollow

8b. What do you look for in a social support system? Check all that apply or think of new ones.

- Connection
- Sense of belonging
- Fun
- Understanding
- Validation
- Support
- Close bonds

8c. What are my typical behaviors toward members of my social support system? What role am I used to playing in my group? (again, we encourage you to think of ones that aren't listed).

- Clingy
- Understanding
- Agreeable
- Caretaker,
the "mom/dad"
- Strict
- Jealous
- Strong-minded
- Crazy fun

8d. Reflecting on the last two questions, how do you think your support group members support your needs?

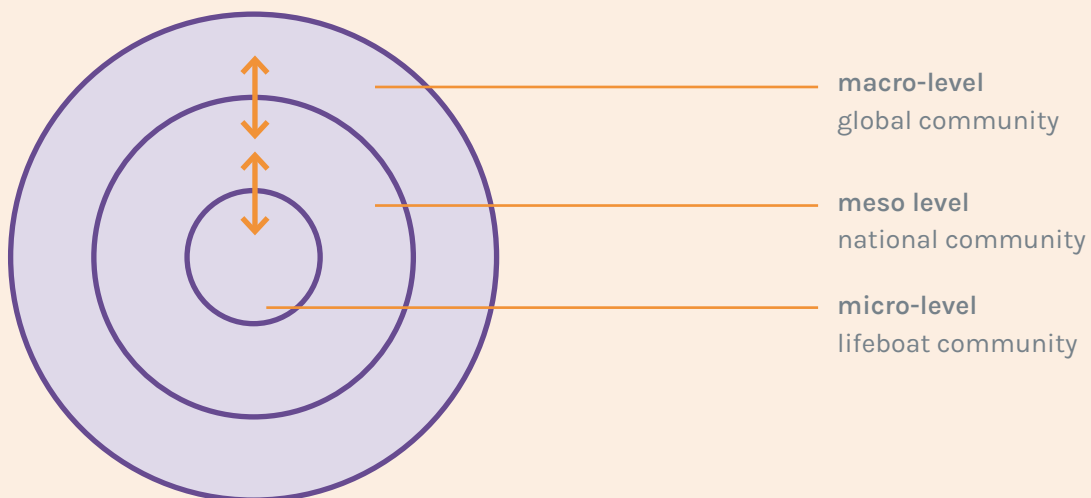
For example: I don't feel like they are supportive of my need to connect with others as they sometimes push me away.

8e. Take a look at the following graph. Write down people or relationships that are part of your circles:

Macro level: the people in your wider community, e.g. your work colleagues

Meso level: the groups that you associate with, such as wider friend group

Micro level: the significant people in your life, such as your partner, best friends, etc.



8f. Reflecting on these relationships, what are some recurrent issues that you come across with the relationships you have on a:

Micro-level:

Meso level:

Macro-level:

Examples of issues are trust difficulties, dependence tendencies, miscommunications, lack of interest, lack of chemistry, difficulties forgiving, struggles connecting in big groups, etc.

8g. Which of these issues that you wrote down are the most bothersome to you:

For example: I find it hard to trust people's intentions in my wider friend group - this prevents them from becoming close friends.

8h. Where do you believe these issues stem from?

For example: it might come from believing that people won't really like me when they get to know me better.

8i. Regarding the bothersome issues to you, what are the...

Predicting factors | Perpetuating factors | Protective factors

Note: predicting factors are things that trigger your problematic issues. It might be someone not answering their phone, not replying to messages quickly enough, or using a certain tone of voice. Perpetuating factors are things that maintain these problems, for example, conflict within a friend group, or feeling down about yourself around others. Protective factors are those which you do to protect yourself from experiencing negative emotions, such as isolating yourself, freezing people out, or being too accepting.

EXERCISE 9 | INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Take a moment to think back on your intimate relationships. It doesn't matter how long the relationships were - just reflect on what they meant to you. Consider the following roles within the relationship(s) that have been important to you...

Relationship 1.

Your role as a partner: (e.g., the caretaker, the cheerleader, the giver, the boss, etc.)

Your partner's role in the relationship:

Relationship 2. (not required)

Your role as a partner:

Your partner's role in the relationship:

Relationship 3. (not required)

Your role as a partner:

Your partner's role in the relationship:

Relationship 4. (not required)

Your role as a partner:

Your partner's role in the relationship:

EXERCISE 10 | IDENTIFYING YOUR TRIGGERS IN A RELATIONSHIP

We all have individual triggers in a relationship. However, there are typical triggers that are associated with the anxious attachment style.

10a. Use the following sections to help identify your triggers in specific areas within an intimate relationship:

Communication

E.g., silence from the other person, calls me oversensitive, etc.

Expressions of affection

E.g., retreating when you try to hold hands

Time spent together

E.g., only spends time with me late at night after being out with his friends

Values or beliefs

E.g., jokes about my religious beliefs

10b. Now that you have identified your triggers in a relationship, try to identify what you need in a relationship to prevent your attachment traits from being triggered:

Communication

E.g., someone who sends me daily texts or phone calls.

Expressions of affection

E.g., holds my hand in public, expresses affection in public

Time spent together

E.g., spends time with me and my friends/family and invites me to spend time with him/her

Values or beliefs

E.g. shares my political ideology

10c. What calming actions can you take if you recognize that your attachment traits are being triggered?

That your partner can do with you

E.g., verbal reinforcement

That you can do for yourself

E.g., deep breathing, turn off my phone

Grounding strategies for myself

E.g., name four friends that I know I can call if I need to, name the color of things around me

10d. List 10 things that make you feel safe in a relationship (examples: understanding, consistency, words of affirmation, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Place a * next to the ones that you think are a direct product of your attachment style

EXERCISE 11 | IDENTIFYING YOUR SUPERPOWERS

Use the following table to help you identify your attachment related superpowers. Do your best to reconsider attributes that you currently view as a challenge or weakness – you may start to recognize them as a strength instead.

My newly recognized superpowers (think of as many as you can).

IN THE DATING SCENE	IN RELATIONSHIPS	INTIMACY/BEDROOM	AT WORK
<i>Curious and sensitive</i>	<i>Caring and attentive</i>	<i>In tune with my partner's needs</i>	<i>Close attention to detail</i>

PART II

The Avoidant Style Exercise Workbook



EXERCISE 1 | EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

How we interpret our childhood can help us to understand how our attachment style developed. Try to think of an early memory that aligns with your avoidant attachment style symptoms. If you can't think of any clear memories from your childhood, then try to think of stories that people told you about you when you were a child.

The following are some examples of early memories which might help to guide you during this exercise:

EXAMPLES OF EARLY MEMORIES

Mary clearly remembers the day that she got lost from her mother at the mall. Every detail, including how she felt, who helped her, and the relief she experienced once she found her mother, are still vivid in her memory.

Natalia's early memory is her first sleepover at her friend's house. She remembers feeling so happy - she never wanted to leave and was sad when her parents came to get her.

Boz recalls being terrified of the dark after waking up one night to find out his parents weren't home. It took him years to recover from this, as he struggled to trust that his parents wouldn't leave him alone again.

EXERCISE 2 | PERCEIVED REJECTION

Caregivers of children with an avoidant attachment style may have been rejecting of their child's needs – or else the child interpreted their actions in this manner. These caregivers may do their best to avoid emotions and displays of intimacy, and as a result, they may not understand their child's needs or wants.

2a. What is your interpretation of rejection?

For example: I understand rejection as my needs being turned down or people not liking me.

2b. Based on this information and your understanding of your attachment style, write down how your interpretation of rejection aligns with the early memories that you wrote above:

EXERCISE 3 | UNMET NEEDS

The caregivers of avoidant children typically avoid displays of emotion and intimacy. Thus, this attachment style is often the result of unmet emotional needs. Let's dig a little deeper. Write down the basic childhood needs that you remember, ones that you see with your children, or ones that you see in other people in general. Fill out the table below:

CHILDHOOD NEEDS	MET/UNMET EXAMPLE	HOW I EXPRESSED THIS NEED	CONSEQUENCES IN CHILDHOOD	INTERNALIZED BELIEF
<i>For example: Security (other examples might include love, food, play, etc.)</i>	<i>Unmet - woke up in the middle of the night, and parents were not there</i>	<i>I cried and resented my parents when they came home</i>	<i>Lack of trust in my parents and myself</i>	<i>No one is there for me when I need them</i>

EXERCISE 4 | SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

Do your thoughts about yourself influence your actions and their consequences?

Before you fill in the following table, we should cover the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies. Due to a cycle of negative thinking's influence on your feelings and actions, you may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Self-fulfilling prophecies are when our subconscious beliefs and expectations influence our actions and result in a specific outcome.

For example: Elaine is 28 and single. She has repeatedly experienced rejection in the past with men that she has liked, but she has recently become close with her new work friend, Mauricio, and she has been hoping he will ask her out, but so far, he hasn't. Elaine is certain that if she asks Mauricio out on a date that he will say no, but she manages to pluck up the courage to do it regardless. The next time she sees Mauricio in the corridor, Elaine tucks her chin into her neck and mutters "I know you're probably not interested, but I was wondering if you'd like to go out for dinner or something? Don't worry if you're busy."

Just as Elaine predicted, Mauricio turns her down. This is a clear-cut example of how someone's thoughts affected their actions and resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Based on this information, please check all that apply and offer a real-life example. If it does not apply, write N/A



I HAVE...	BY...	I GOT BACK...	SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY?
Kept my distance even from those who say they care/love me	<i>Pulling away even when they are trying to express their concern</i>	<i>People stopped trying and distanced themselves from me</i>	<i>Yes - I felt disliked because I push others away and eventually, they stop trying</i>
Kept my distance even from those who say they care/love me			
Seemed distant and aloof			
Felt uncomfortable sharing personal stuff with others			
Minimized my emotional expressions or thoughts			
Not trusted anyone else			
Always only relied on myself			

EXERCISE 5 | IDENTIFYING YOUR PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

5a. Our formative years can impact the development of our personality. Which of your personality characteristics can you identify as potentially being a product of your attachment style?

For example:

- a) I'm highly independent
- b) I'm successful and dedicated to my job
- c) I can be a little distant towards the people in my life

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

Examples of personality characteristics:

- Confidence
- Creative
- Addictive
- Generous
- Warmth
- Independence
- Helpful
- Honest
- Hostility
- Sensitive
- Adaptable
- Patient
- Skepticism
- Explosive
- Curious
- Fair
- Self-control
- Self-reliance
- Empathetic
- Apprehensive
- Trusting
- Energetic
- Perfectionism
- Impulsive
- Courageous

EXERCISE 6 | UNVEILING YOUR SENSE OF SELF-ESTEEM

Your sense of self-esteem is essentially how positive you feel about yourself and your life. If you have healthy self-esteem, then you likely generally have a positive outlook. However, if you have low self-esteem, then you might struggle to see your positive aspects and modify your behaviour to become what you think others want you to be.

Alternatively, the avoidant attachment style is sometimes associated with an inflated sense of self-esteem. If this is the case for you, then you might positively evaluate yourself to the extreme. What's more, someone with inflated self-esteem may look down on others for seeking support.

The following exercises may help you to gain an understanding of your levels of self-esteem:

6a. Complete the following sentences as honestly as you can:

1. I am naturally good at
2. I am brilliant at
3. My family says I am great at
4. My friends think I am good at
5. At work/school I am praised for being

6. I am happy when I am able to

7. Something that I am proud of about myself is

8. When I think of myself, the first thing that comes to mind is

9. My view of self is _____ in comparison to my view of others

6b. Reflect on the above statements:

- Put a checkmark next to the things you want to keep or improve
- Put an X next to the things that you are unhappy about and want to change/improve
- Circle the ones that you think are in some way related to your attachment style

How many of the circled ones correspond to the ones with an X? For example: At work I am praised for being resourceful and independent. I think this might be related to my attachment style as I don't need to get validation from others, but sometimes I feel isolated.

How many of the circled ones correspond to the ones with a checkmark? For example: I am successful and confident, especially in my job, and I think it relates to the traits of my attachment style.

How many of those answers were fully honest vs. answers that you gave to keep up an image of yourself

EXERCISE 7 | SELF-DEVELOPMENT TECHNIQUES

The following exercises can help you to determine what is truly important to you in life, and help you to uncover an honest sense of who you are:

7a. WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

Awareness of your personal values can be hugely helpful when determining a sense of self. Your values are the traits and characteristics that you admire in yourself or others; for example, maybe you have a friend who's empathetic and trustworthy, or perhaps you have one that is particularly gregarious - it's up to you to figure out what your values are and whether you're living your life according to them. They will keep you on the right track to leading a fulfilled life that's true to your sense of self and help you to engage in rewarding relationships.

What values are important to you?

For example: I am a hardworking and dedicated person, but I admire people that are able to show affection so this is a value that I would like to develop.

7b. WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY?

What makes you feel like the best version of yourself? Everyone has things or people that make them feel truly at home in their own skin. Identifying these things can help determine the things that you value the most and tell you a lot about who you are as a person.

For example: I feel happiest having quiet nights in with family watching movies.

7c. ARE MY CHOICES MY OWN?

Do you typically ask other people to choose what you watch together? Where you go for food? Maybe you say “yes” to others just to make them happy. Whereas these specific things might be trivial, they might indicate that you make choices based on someone else’s interests rather than on your own. Perhaps ask yourself whether you would make the same choices if you were by yourself. Having a solid sense of self means choosing activities that are grounded in your interests and goals.

For example: I usually just suggest the things that I want to do. People are usually happy to go along with what I suggest.

7d. IDENTIFY YOUR RESOURCES

Having a solid sense of self means that you acknowledge that you have strengths. This might be difficult for you if you struggle with low self-esteem, but we all have strengths, and it's essential to recognize them if we want to achieve the goals that we set for ourselves. What's more, making the best of your skillset means that you're more likely to have a healthy sense of self and increased self-esteem.

For example: I'm a confident and outgoing person. I think other people like to be in my company for this reason. Maybe I can use these attributes to help me to become more affectionate towards the significant people in my life.

EXERCISE 8 | DISCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

8a. We all have strengths and weaknesses, and some of these can be attributed to our attachment style. Out of the strengths and weaknesses discussed in your attachment profile, which ones do you identify with related to your attachment style? Try to think of 3 or 4.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES

8b. For each strength, or each weakness you wrote down, now think/write:

An episode when it/they has been protective/helpful to you.

For example: Although I don't let others get close to me, this has prevented me from getting hurt in the past.

An episode where this/they have been problematic for me.

For example: Not letting others get close to me prevented me from establishing close relationships.

8c. Write down your most successful accomplishment.

For example: A promotion at work.

What characteristic helped you towards achieving this accomplishment?

For example: My self-sufficiency.

8d. What is the most important role you have fulfilled?

For example: at work, at home, with friends

8e. When you faced a significant obstacle, what strengths helped you to overcome this obstacle? For example: I was able to get over a recent break up because I know my self worth and value.

8f. What strengths do others recognize in you that you are surprised to hear about? For example: I'm always surprised when people tell me that I'm lovable

If you cannot think of skills that others recognize in you, think of compliments you receive (at work or outside of it) and write these down.

8g. What do you think is still missing in your life? What strengths or skills do you still want to achieve?

For example: I want to have a long-lasting romantic relationship. I think I may have to work on my boundary issues and develop my ability to let others in to my life for this to happen.

What is getting in the way of you achieving them?

For example: trust in others, support system, intrinsic motivation, commitment to long term projects, the ability to maintain relationships in the workplace, capacity to work in a team.

EXERCISE 9 | FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIAL GROUPS

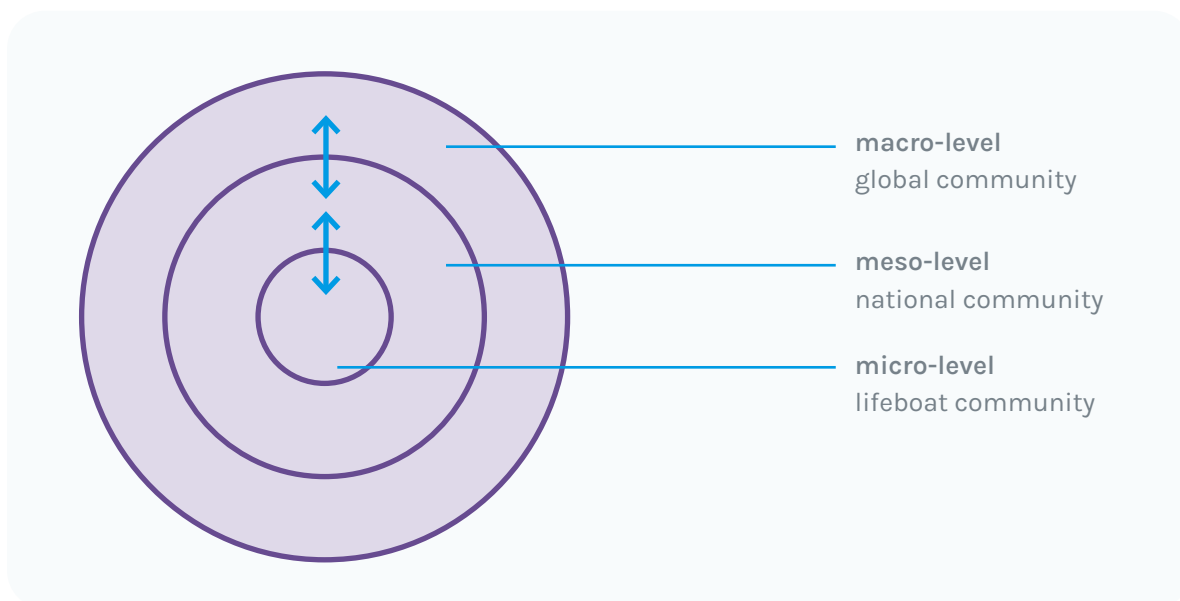
Our attachment style often influences how we behave in our friendships and social groups. Use the following exercises to determine how your social groups operate, as well as what you need from these groups to feel fulfilled within them.

9a. Take a look at the following graph. Write down people or relationships that are part of your circles:

Macro level: the people in your wider community, e.g. your work colleagues

Meso level: the groups that you associate with, such as wider friend group

Micro level: the significant people in your life, such as your partner, best friends, etc.



9b. Reflecting on these relationships, what are some recurrent issues that you come across with the relationships you have on a:

(Examples of issues are trust difficulties, dependence tendencies, miscommunications, lack of interest, lack of chemistry, difficulties forgiving, struggles connecting in big groups, etc.)

Micro-level:

Meso level:

Macro-level

9c. Which of these issues that you wrote down is the most bothersome to you:

For example: I find it hard to trust people's intentions in my wider friend group - this prevents them from becoming close friends

9d. Where do you believe these issues stem from?

For example: I think this might stem from my belief that my parents wouldn't be there for me when I really needed them.

9e. Regarding the issues that bother you, try to break them down into the following sections:

Predicting factors | Perpetuating factors | Protective factors

Note: predicting factors are things that trigger your problematic issues. It might be someone not answering their phone, not replying to messages quickly enough, or using a certain tone of voice. Perpetuating factors are things that maintain these problems, for example, conflict within a friend group, or feeling down about yourself around others. Protective factors are those which you do to protect yourself from experiencing negative emotions, such as isolating yourself, freezing people out, or being too accepting.

EXERCISE 10 | INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Take a moment to reflect on your intimate relationships, regardless of the length of the relationship.

Relationship 1.

Your role as a partner: (e.g., the avoidant, the cheerleader, the giver, the boss, etc.)

Your partner's role in the relationship:

Relationship 2. (not required)

Your role as a partner:

Your partner's role in the relationship:

Relationship 3. (not required)

Your role as a partner:

Your partner's role in the relationship:

Relationship 4. (not required)

Your role as a partner:

Your partner's role in the relationship:

EXERCISE 11 | IDENTIFYING YOUR PERSONAL TRIGGERS IN A RELATIONSHIP

We all have individual triggers in relationships. However, there are typical triggers that are associated with the avoidant attachment style.

11a. Use the following sections to help identify your triggers in specific areas within an intimate relationship:

Communication

E.g., partner starts asking too many questions

Expressions of affection

E.g., partner wants public displays of affection

Time spent together

E.g., my partner wants to spend time with my family

Values or beliefs

E.g., wants to share everything with me

11b. Now that you have identified your triggers in a relationship, try to identify what you need in a relationship to prevent your attachment traits from being triggered:

Communication

E.g., someone who gives me time to process my thoughts

Expressions of affection

E.g., someone who respects my boundaries

Time spent together

E.g., respects that I may need short breaks to be by myself

Values or beliefs

E.g., does not judge my beliefs

11c. What actions can you take if you recognize that your attachment traits are being triggered?

That your partner can do for you

E.g., verbalize understanding for my boundaries

That you can do for yourself

E.g., deep breathing, turn off my phone

Grounding strategies for myself

E.g., name the color of things around me and three things that I can hear

11d. List 10 things that make you feel safe in a relationship (examples: understanding, consistency, words of affirmation, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Place a * next to the ones that are a direct product of your attachment style

EXERCISE 12 | IDENTIFYING YOUR SUPERPOWERS

Use the following table to help identify your attachment related superpowers. Do your best to reconsider attributes that you view as a challenge or weakness – you may even start to recognize them as a strength instead!

IN THE DATING SCENE	IN RELATIONSHIPS	INTIMACY/BEDROOM	AT WORK
<i>Example: Enigmatic</i>	<i>Respectful of time alone</i>	<i>Not clingy after a fling</i>	<i>Work well independently</i>

PART III

The Disorganized Style Exercise Workbook



Reflection

Some of the information we have gone through in the disorganized profile might have felt upsetting or triggering to you. We encourage you to take a few minutes to tune in to the feelings and emotions that you might be experiencing, as well as any changes that you notice within your body. Now is not the time for judgment, but instead a moment when you should be kind and understanding towards yourself.

If any of the following activities feel uncomfortable for you, try to refer back to this reflection exercise to process your feelings.

EXERCISE 1 | EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

1a. How we interpret our childhood can help us understand how our attachment style developed. If it feels comfortable for you, try to take a moment to think of an early memory or perhaps something that happened to you that you heard about from someone else. It's not a question of judgment, but just observing situations that occurred in the past.

For example: I remember Mom and Dad left me at home alone when I was little. I was really frightened and hungry and I didn't know when they would come home.

1b. If you can, without becoming overly upset, try to remember some situations where you may have felt fear.

EXERCISE 2 | UNCOVERING YOUR NEEDS

The disorganized attachment style may often cause you to exist in a state of alertness as your childhood was unpredictable. Write down basic childhood needs that you remember from your childhood, or that you see with your children or people in general. You can fill any column in first; sometimes people find it easier to work back from what they think about themselves when identifying their childhood needs:

CHILDHOOD NEED	THE PEOPLE INVOLVED	WAS THIS NEED MET OR UNMET	INTERNALIZED BELIEF
Security (other examples might include love, food, play, etc.)	My mom and Dad	Unmet - I never really felt safe	That I'm not worthy of love and security

EXERCISE 3 | UNCOVERING YOUR EMOTIONS

Emotions are a good indicator of your deeper functioning. Especially when they seem disproportionate or they overwhelm you. It might also be easier for you to start with identifying your emotions rather than the events that caused them. If you have difficulty recognizing or naming your emotions, then this link to an emotional vocabulary chart may help.

<https://www.englishlearnsite.com/vocabulary/emotions-feelings-word-vocabulary/>

Think of the formative moments in your life and try to identify the emotions that you felt during these times. These moments may be positive or negative. Use the following table to check all that apply and offer a real-life example. Try not to presume that you were overreacting emotionally.

MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE	WHAT EMOTION WAS PRESENT	FIELD OF LIFE (WORK, FAMILY, ETC.)	PEOPLE INVOLVED (RELATIVE, COLLEAGUE, BOSS, ETC.)
<i>My 7th Christmas - there were no presents or special dinner</i>	<i>Sadness and disappointment</i>	<i>Family-Home</i>	<i>Mom. Dad didn't come home.</i>

One more question: what do you think is absent from your table? Can you think of any emotions that you feel like you should have experienced but didn't?

For example: joy, light-heartedness, love, etc.

EXERCISE 4 | IDENTIFYING YOUR PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

4a. Our formative years can impact the development of our personality. Which of your personality characteristics can you identify as potentially being a product of your attachment style? Try to think of both positive and less-than positive ones. Use the examples below as a guide.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Examples of personality characteristics:

- Confidence
- Warmth
- Hostility
- Scepticism
- Self control
- Apprehensive
- Perfectionism
- Creative
- Independence
- Sensitive
- Explosive
- Self reliance
- Trusting
- Impulsive
- Addictive
- Helpful
- Adaptable
- Curious
- Empathetic
- Energetic
- Courageous
- Generous
- Honest
- Patient
- Fair

4b. Based on the characteristics you wrote down above, which of the following is:

1. The most challenging for you?

2. The most challenging for your family/friends?

3. The most difficult to handle at work?

4. The one you would like to change? (if any)

5. The one you would like to cultivate more?

6. The one that gets you in trouble?

EXERCISE 5 | UNVEILING YOUR SENSE OF SELF-ESTEEM AND SENSE OF SELF

5a. Your sense of self-esteem is essentially how positive you feel about yourself and your life. If you have healthy self-esteem, then you likely generally have a positive outlook. However, if you have low self-esteem, then you might struggle to see your positive aspects and modify your behaviour to become what you think others want you to be.

Use the following sections to help unveil your sense of self-esteem:

1. I am naturally good at
2. I am brilliant at
3. My family says I am great at
4. My friends think I am good at
5. At work/school I am praised for being
6. I am happy when I am able to
7. Something that I am proud of about myself is

8. When I think of myself, the first thing that comes to mind is

9. My view of self is _____ in comparison to my view of others

Reflect on the above statements:

- Put a checkmark next to the things you want to keep or improve
- Put an X next to the things that you are unhappy about and want to change/improve
- Circle the ones that you think are in some way related to your attachment style

How many of the circled ones correspond to the ones with an X?

For example: I am clingy and needy around the people in my life, but when they attempt to get close to me I push them away. I think this stems from my attachment style.

How many of the circled ones correspond to the ones with a checkmark?

For example: I am loving and grateful for the important people in my life, but I sometimes struggle to believe that they love me.



EXERCISE 6 | SELF-DEVELOPMENT TECHNIQUES

A disorganized attachment style is typically characterised by an intense inner conflict. Self-development techniques can help you to build an authentic sense of self. The following exercises can help you determine what is truly important to you in life, and help you uncover an honest sense of who you are:

6a. WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

Awareness of your personal values can be hugely helpful when determining a sense of self. Your values are the traits and characteristics that you admire in yourself or others. For example, maybe you have a friend who's empathetic and trustworthy, or perhaps you have one that is particularly gregarious - it's up to you to figure out what your values are and whether you're living your life according to them. They will keep you on the right track to leading a fulfilled life that's true to your sense of self and help you to engage in rewarding relationships.

What values are important to you?

For example: I am an honest and loving person, but I admire people that are outgoing so this is a value that I would like to develop.

6b. WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY?

What makes you feel like the best version of you? Everyone has things, people, situations, or places that make them feel truly at home in their own skin. Identifying these things can be helpful in determining the things that you value the most and can tell you a lot about who you are as a person.

For example: I feel happiest having quiet nights in watching movies when I am in a relationship.

6c. HOW DO I MAKE MY CHOICES?

Do you typically ask other people to choose what you watch together? Where you go for food? Maybe you say "yes" to others just to make them happy. Whereas these specific things might be trivial, they might indicate that you make choices based on someone else's interests rather than on your own. Perhaps ask yourself whether you would make the same choices if you were by yourself. Having a strong sense of self means choosing activities that are grounded in *your* interests and goals.

If this is too much too soon, perhaps just ask yourself what you really like: What's your favorite food, films, activity, downtime?

For example: I usually just go along with what other people suggest - especially on nights out. I don't really like to rock the boat. Sometimes I wish that we could do something a bit different for a change though, such as watch a movie or go for pizza instead of fancy restaurants.

6d. IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTHS

Having a strong sense of self means that you acknowledge that you have strengths. This might be difficult for you if you struggle with low self-esteem, but we all have strengths, and it's important to identify them if we want to achieve the goals that we set for ourselves. What's more, making the best of your skill set means that you're more likely to develop a healthy sense of self and increased self-esteem.

Remember, if you've made it this far in life, you've clearly got an abundance of strengths – you've just got to account for them!

What do you think your strengths are?

For example: I'm an intelligent and interesting person with a lot to offer other people.

Maybe I can use these attributes when meeting new people.

EXERCISE 7 | DISCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

7a. We all have strengths and weaknesses, and some of these can be attributed to our attachment style. Out of the ones discussed above and in your attachment profile, which do you identify with? Do your best to also think of ones that weren't mentioned.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES

7b. For each strength, or each weakness you wrote down, now think/write:

An episode where it has been protective/helpful to you

For example: Although I want to get to know people better, I don't let others get close to me as this has prevented me from getting hurt in the past.

A time that it hurt you in some way.

For example: Not letting others get close to me prevented me from establishing close relationships.

7c. Write down your most successful accomplishment.

For example: I feel really positive to have made it as far as I have

Which characteristic do you think helped you achieve this accomplishment?

For example: I am resilient - I don't give up easily

Was it a part of a strength or a weakness written above?

For example: This characteristic is part of my strengths, but I wouldn't be as resilient without having to cope with my weaknesses

7d. What is the most important role you have fulfilled?

For example: Being an aunt is very important to me

Which characteristic helped you with this role?

For example: my loving and affectionate traits

Was it a part of a strength or a weakness written above?

7e. When you faced a significant obstacle, what strengths helped you to overcome the obstacle?

For example: problem solving skills, resilience, empathy, etc.

7f. Which strengths do others recognize in you that you are surprised to hear about?

For example: people tell me that I'm funny/that I'm hard-worker, etc.

If you cannot think of strengths/skills that others recognize in you, think of compliments you receive (at work or outside of it) and write these down.

7g. What do you think is still missing? What strengths or skills do you still want to achieve?

For example: I want to have a long-lasting romantic relationship. I think I may have to work on my boundary issues and develop my ability to let others in to my life for this to happen.

What is getting in the way of achieving them: (for example trust in others, a support system, intrinsic motivation, commitment to long term projects, the ability to maintain relationships in the workplace, capacity to work in a team)

EXERCISE 8 | FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIAL GROUPS

8a. Our attachment style often influences how we behave in our friendships and social groups. Use the following exercises to determine how your social groups operate, as well as what you need from these groups to feel fulfilled within them. From the words below, pick five that best describes your social support system (feel free to think of ones that aren't listed):

- Meaningful
- Long term
- Turbulent
- Co-dependent
- Harmonious
- Awkward
- Supportive
- Formally cordial
- Expressive
- Chaotic
- Intimate
- Bitter
- Uncomfortable
- Intense
- Small
- Expansive
- Secretive
- Lonely
- Professional
- Love-hate
- Short term
- Distant
- Social
- Companion
- Intellectual
- Learning-based
- Competitive
- Stable
- Tempestuous
- Unstable
- One-sided
- Remote
- Hollow

8b. What do you look for in a social support system? Check all that apply (and try to think of more).

- Connection
- Sense of belonging
- Fun
- Understanding
- Validation
- Support
- Parent
- Close bonds

8c. What are my typical behaviors toward members in my social support system? (again, feel free to think of others).

- Clingy
- Understanding
- Agreeable
- Caretaker, the "mom/dad"
- Strict
- Jealous
- Strong-minded
- Crazy fun

8d. Reflecting on the last two questions: how do your behaviors support your needs from your social support?

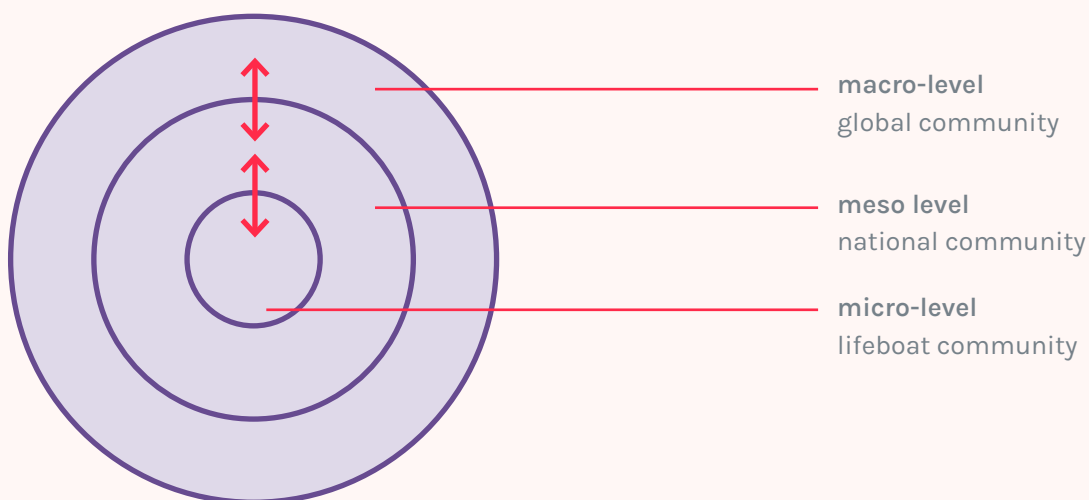
For example: I push others away/I cling onto others

8e. Take a look at the following graph. Write down people or relationships that are part of your circles:

Macro level: the people in your wider community, e.g. your work colleagues

Meso level: the groups that you associate with, such as wider friend group

Micro level: the significant people in your life, such as your partner, best friends, etc.



8f. Reflecting on these relationships, what some recurrent issues you come across with the relationships you have on a:

(Examples of issues are trust difficulties, dependence tendencies, miscommunications, lack of interest, lack of chemistry, difficulties forgiving, struggles connecting in big groups, etc.)

Micro-level:

Meso level:

Macro-level

8g. Which of these issues that you wrote down are the most bothersome to you:

For example: I find it hard to trust people's intentions in my wider friend group - this prevents them from becoming close friends

8h. Where do you believe these issues stem from?

For example: I think it comes from my belief that people don't hang around after they get to know me

8i. Place each problematic issue that you wrote down in one of these three columns:

Predicting factors | Perpetuating factors | Protective factors

Note: predicting factors are things that trigger your problematic issues. It might be someone not answering their phone, not replying to messages quickly enough, or using a certain tone of voice. Perpetuating factors are things that maintain these problems, for example, conflict within a friend group, or feeling down about yourself around others. Protective factors are those which you do to protect yourself from experiencing negative emotions, such as isolating yourself, freezing people out, or being too accepting.

EXERCISE 9 | INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Take a moment to reflect on the intimate relationships that were important to you, regardless of the length. Try to remember factors like the kind of family they had, how you would have described the relationship (conflicted, passionate, violent, etc.), how long did it last, how many times did you break up, etc.

Relationship 1.

Your partner's profile:

What the relationship was like:

Relationship 2. (not required)

Your partner's profile:

What the relationship was like:

Relationship 3. (not required)

Your partner's profile:

What the relationship was like:

Relationship 4. (not required)

Your partner's profile:

What the relationship was like:

EXERCISE 10 | IDENTIFYING YOUR TRIGGERS IN A RELATIONSHIP

10a. We all have individual triggers in a relationship. Furthermore, as a disorganized attacher, your triggers may change slightly depending on how you feel in your current situation. Use the following sections to help you identify your triggers in intimate relationships:

Communication

E.g., partner starts asking too many questions

Expressions of affection

E.g., partner wants public displays of affection

Time spent together

E.g., my partner wants to spend time with my family

Values or beliefs

E.g., wants to share everything with me

10b. Now that you have identified your triggers in a relationship, try to identify what you need in a relationship to prevent your attachment traits from being triggered:

Communication

E.g., someone who gives me time to process my thoughts

Expressions of affection

E.g., someone who respects my boundaries

Time spent together

E.g., respects my time alone

Values or beliefs

E.g., does not judge my beliefs

10c. What actions can you take if you recognize that your attachment traits are being triggered?

That your partner can do for you

E.g., verbalize understanding for my boundaries

That you can do for yourself

E.g., deep breathing, turn off my phone

Grounding strategies for myself

E.g., name the color of things around me and three things that I can hear

10d. List 10 things that make you feel safe in a relationship (examples: understanding, consistency, words of affirmation, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Place a * next to the ones that are a direct product of your attachment style

EXERCISE 11 | IDENTIFYING YOUR SUPERPOWERS

Use the following table to help you identify your attachment related superpowers. Do your best to consider attributes that you might currently view as a challenge or weakness – you may start to recognize them as a strength instead.

IN THE DATING SCENE	IN RELATIONSHIPS	INTIMACY/BEDROOM	AT WORK
<i>Example: Enigmatic</i>	<i>Loving, but respectful of time alone</i>	<i>Committed to the person's needs</i>	<i>Eager to improve</i>

PART IV

The Secure Style Exercise Workbook



EXERCISE 1 | EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

1a. How we interpret our childhood can help us to understand how our attachment style developed. Try to think of an early memory that aligns with your secure attachment style. (If you do not have any clear memories from your childhood, try to think of a recent memory or a story that your relatives might have told you about your childhood that supports your attachment style).

EXAMPLES OF EARLY MEMORIES

Mary specifically remembers the day she got lost from her mother at the mall. Every detail, including how she felt, who helped her, and the relief she experienced once she found her mother, are still clear in her memory.

Natalia's early memory is her first sleepover at a friend's house. She remembers feeling so happy that she never wanted to leave and was sad when her parents came to get her.

Boz recalls being terrified of the dark. He remembers the stories his mom read to reassure him and the big cardboard sword his father made to help him beat the monsters in his room.

1b. Note your early memories if you can:

EARLY MEMORY	PEOPLE INVOLVED	PEOPLE'S REACTION	HOW I FELT

1c. As someone with a secure attachment, you likely had caregiver(s) that parented consistently. This means that you probably had your needs met and you felt safe, loved, and valued as a child. Based on this information, what is your interpretation of security? For example: My dad was always there to tuck me into bed at night. It always made me feel safe.

How does your interpretation of security align with the early memories you wrote above?

With an attachment style that is the consequence of successfully met needs, let's dig deeper. Write down the basic childhood needs that you remember from your own childhood, see with your own children, or other people in general. Fill out the table below:

CHILDHOOD NEEDS	MET/UNMET (GIVE EXAMPLE)	HOW I EXPRESSED THIS NEED	CONSEQUENCES IN CHILDHOOD	MY BELIEFS ABOUT MYSELF AS A RESULT
<i>Example: Security (other examples might include love, food, play, etc.)</i>	<i>Met - My dad tucked me in so I felt safe.</i>	<i>I used to pull at his sleeve at bedtime and cry if he didn't respond quickly enough.</i>	<i>I felt secure in other relationships and around other people.</i>	<i>I believe that I am worthy of love and safety.</i>

EXERCISE 2 | IDENTIFYING YOUR PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

2a. Identifying your personality characteristics

Our formative years can impact the development of our personality. Which of your personality characteristics can you identify as potentially being a product of your attachment style? Try to consider your less-than-positive traits - you might even discover that you share some with the other attachment styles!

For example:

- a. I am pretty resilient - I can bounce back from rejection pretty well.
- b. I trust my partner. We don't have a perfect relationship, but that's OK.
- c. I just assume that everything is going to work out because it always has.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

Examples of personality characteristics:

- Confidence
- Creative
- Addictive
- Generous
- Warmth
- Independence
- Helpful
- Honest
- Hostility
- Sensitive
- Adaptable
- Patient
- Skepticism
- Explosive
- Curious
- Fair
- Self control
- Self reliance
- Empathetic
- Balanced
- Apprehensive
- Trusting
- Energetic
- Perfectionism
- Impulsive
- Courageous

EXERCISE 3 | SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

3a. Do your thoughts about yourself influence your actions and their consequences?

Before you fill in the following table, we should cover the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy. Due to a cycle of negative thinking's influence on your feelings and actions, you may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Self-fulfilling prophecies are when our subconscious beliefs and expectations influence our actions and result in a specific outcome.

For example, Elaine is 28 and single. She has repeatedly experienced rejection in the past with men that she has liked, but she has recently become close with her new work friend, Mauricio, and she has been hoping he will ask her out, but so far, he hasn't. Elaine is sure that if she asks Mauricio out on a date that he will say no, but she manages to pluck up the courage to do it regardless. The next time she sees Mauricio in the corridor, Elaine tucks her chin into her neck and mutters, "I know you're probably not interested, but I was wondering if you'd like to go out for dinner or something? Don't worry if you're busy." Just as Elaine predicted, Mauricio turns her down. This is a clear-cut example of how someone's thoughts affected their actions and resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy.



3b. Based on this information, please check all that apply and offer a real-life example. If it does not apply, write N/A. (Remember, as a secure attacher, you may have less negative examples of self-fulfilling behavior but it doesn't mean that you don't have negative thoughts which can affect how you act. Try to think of extra examples of how negative thoughts may have created a self-fulfilling prophecy for you. We will provide some blank spaces for you to fill in).

I HAVE...	BY...	THE RESULT OF THIS WAS...	WERE YOU BEING A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY?
<i>Example: Been open and straightforward</i>	<i>Being easy-going and asserting my wants</i>	<i>I got what I wanted and needed</i>	Yes
Been open and straightforward			
Kept calm in stressful situations			
Been aware of my emotion and expressed it			
Valued and trusted people			
Shown empathy and caring			
Set boundaries with flexibility when needed			
Relied on others for help			
Comfortable trusting people			
Accepted criticism without significant distress			

EXERCISE 4 | UNVEILING YOUR SENSE OF SELF-ESTEEM

Your sense of self-esteem is essentially how positive you feel about yourself and your life. If you have healthy self-esteem, then you likely generally have a positive outlook. However, if you have low self-esteem, then you might struggle to see your positive aspects and modify your behaviour to become what you think others want you to be. As a secure attacher, you may be more likely to have a healthy sense of self-esteem. However, your life experiences may have affected how positive you feel about yourself and your life.

Complete the following sentences as honestly as you can:

1. I am naturally good at
2. I am excellent at
3. My family says I am great at
4. My friends think I am good at
5. At work/school I am praised for being

6. I am happy when I am able to

7. Something that I am proud of about myself is

8. When I think of myself, the first thing that comes to mind is

9. My view of myself is

in comparison to my view of others (e.g. favorable, unfavorable, etc.)

EXERCISE 5 | SELF-DEVELOPMENT EXERCISES

The following exercises can help you to determine what is truly important to you in life, and help you to uncover an honest sense of who you are:

5a. WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

Awareness of your values can be hugely helpful in determining a sense of self. Your values are the traits and characteristics that you admire in yourself or others. For example, maybe you have a friend who's empathetic and trustworthy, or perhaps you have one that is particularly gregarious - it's up to you to figure out what your values are and whether you're living your life according to them. They will keep you on the right track to leading a fulfilled life that's true to your sense of self and help you engage in rewarding relationships.

What values are important to you?

5b. WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY?

What makes you feel like the best version of yourself? Everyone has things or people that make them feel truly at home in their own skin. Identifying these things can help determine the things that you value the most and tell you a lot about who you are as a person.

What makes you happy?

5c. ARE MY CHOICES MY OWN?

Do you typically ask other people to choose what you watch together? Where you go for food? Maybe you say “yes” to others just to make them happy. Whereas these things might be trivial, they may indicate that you make choices based on someone else’s interests rather than on your own. Perhaps ask yourself whether you would make the same choices if you were by yourself. Having a solid sense of self means choosing activities that are grounded in *your* interests and goals.

Is it easy for you to make decisions? To let someone else make them? Are you flexible when you allow someone else to make choices?

5d. IDENTIFY YOUR RESOURCES

Having a solid sense of self means that you acknowledge that you have resources. We all have strengths, and it's essential to identify them if we want to achieve the goals that we set for ourselves. What's more, increased awareness of your skillset means that you're more likely to have a healthy sense of self and improved self-esteem.

Our personal resources come from an understanding of our strengths and weaknesses. Both can be useful if we know how to balance them.

EXERCISE 6 | DISCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

We all have strengths and weaknesses, and some of these can be attributed to our attachment style.

6a. Out of the strengths and weaknesses discussed above and in your profile, which ones do you identify with related to your attachment style (possibly even consider those associated with the insecure attachment styles)? Think of 3 or 4.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES

6b. For each strength, or each weakness you wrote down, now think/write:

An episode when it has been protective/helpful to you.

For example: I typically have a positive opinion of others. This helped me to be rational about a certain friend's intentions when I felt like they did wrong by me.

A time when it has hurt you in some way:

For example: I am able to regulate other people's emotions pretty well, but on a particular occasion I felt like a certain person took advantage of that.

Events influenced by this:

For example: this caused me to feel uncomfortable around them because they were too reliant on me.

Give a characteristic of yourself that defines your personality:

For example: I am a positive person. People see me as upbeat.

6c. Write down your most successful accomplishment:

For example: I graduated college

Which characteristic helped you succeed in this accomplishment?

For example: I am hard-working and resilient

6d. What is the most important role you have fulfilled?

For example: partner, lover, daughter, friend

Which characteristic helped you with this role? For example: being trustworthy or open

Is this characteristic associated with a strength or weakness that you wrote above?

6e. When you faced a significant obstacle, what skills helped you to overcome this obstacle?**6f. What skills do others recognize in you that you are surprised to hear about?**


If you cannot think of skills that others recognize in you, think of compliments you receive (at work or outside of it) and write these down

6g. What is still missing? What strengths or skills do you still want to achieve?

What is getting in the way of you achieving them?

For example: trust in others, support system, intrinsic motivation, commitment to long term projects, the ability to maintain relationships in the workplace, capacity to work in a team.

Do you think that the weaknesses you mentioned above are related to your attachment style in any way? How so?



6h. By now, you've probably come to predict that your sense of agency is affected by your attachment style; similar to low levels of self-esteem, having an insecure attachment style may leave you more susceptible to having a poor sense of agency. As a secure attacher, you may be confident about your level of control and impact over your world. Still, if you feel like you might benefit from improving your sense of agency, it might be useful to ask yourself the following questions:

Do you prefer doing things immediately or put them on the long finger?

Are you listening to your gut/intuition when you make a decision?

Do you act spontaneously or considerately? In what areas of your life?

How is your concentration? In different situations?



EXERCISE 7 | FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIAL GROUPS

Our attachment style often influences how we behave in our friendships and social groups. Use the following exercises to determine how your social groups operate, as well as what you might need from these groups (if anything) to feel fulfilled within them. Even secure attachers sometimes wish to improve their social skills in certain ways!

7a. From the words below, pick five that best describes your social support system (feel free to think ones that aren't listed):

- Meaningful
- Long term
- Turbulent
- Co-dependent
- Harmonious
- Awkward
- Supportive
- Formally cordial
- Expressive
- Chaotic
- Intimate
- Bitter
- Uncomfortable
- Intense
- Small
- Expansive
- Secretive
- Lonely
- Professional
- Love-hate
- Short term
- Distant
- Social
- Companion
- Intellectual
- Learning-based
- Competitive
- Stable
- Tempestuous
- Unstable
- One-sided
- Remote
- Hollow

7b. What do you look for in a social support system? Check all that apply to you or try to think of ones that aren't listed:

- Connection
- Sense of belonging
- Fun
- Understanding
- Validation
- Support
- Parent
- Close bonds
- Professional partnership
- Social acceptance
- Someone to do stuff with
- For emergencies

7c. What are your typical behaviors toward members in your social support system? (Again, feel free to think of ones that aren't listed)

- Judgmental
- Understanding
- Agreeable
- Caretaker, the "mom/dad"
- Strict
- Jealousy
- Strong-minded
- Crazy fun
- Distant
- Straightforward
- Direct
- No tolerance for BS
- Chill
- Easy to get along

7d. Reflecting on the last two questions: how do your behaviors support your needs from your social support?

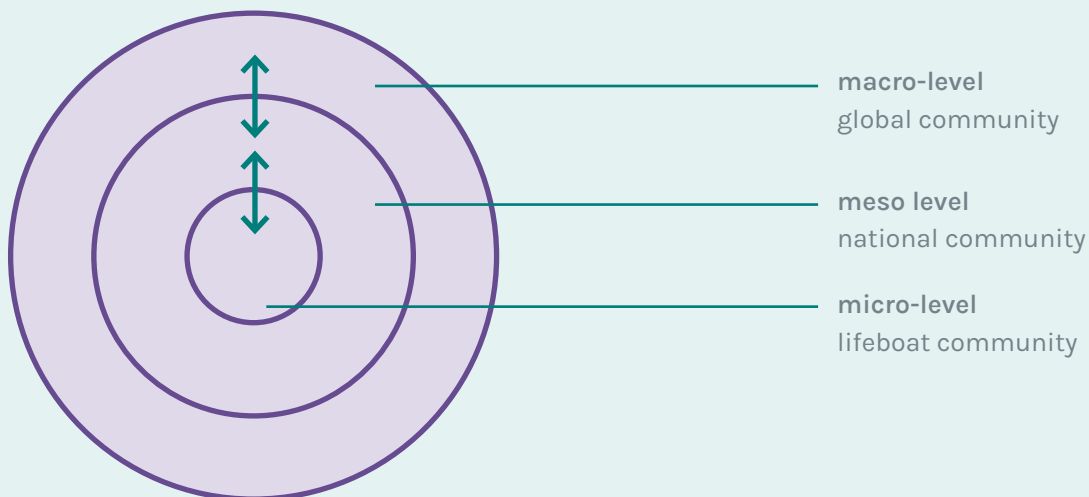
For example: I show others that they can trust me and I can count on others when needed

7e. Take a look at the following graph. Write down people or relationships that are part of your circles:

Macro level: the people in your wider community, e.g. your work colleagues

Meso level: the groups that you associate with, such as wider friend group

Micro level: the significant people in your life, such as your partner, best friends, etc.



7f. Reflecting on these relationships, what are some recurrent issues/mishaps you come across with the relationships you have on a:

Micro-level:

Meso level:

Macro-level

Examples of issues are trust difficulties, dependence tendencies, miscommunications, lack of interest, lack of chemistry, difficulties forgiving, struggles connecting in big groups, etc.

7g. Which of these issues you wrote down are the most bothersome to you:

7h. Where do you believe these issues stem from?

7i. Regarding your bothersome issues, place each one in one of these three columns:

Predicting factors | Perpetuating factors | Protective factors

Note: predicting factors are things that trigger your problematic issues. It might be someone not answering their phone, not replying to messages quickly enough, or using a certain tone of voice. Perpetuating factors are things that maintain these problems, for example, conflict within a friend group, or feeling down about yourself around others. Protective factors are those that you do to protect yourself from experiencing negative emotions, such as isolating yourself, freezing people out, or being too accepting.

EXERCISE 8 | INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Having a secure attachment doesn't guarantee a secure relationship; secure partners may attract insecure partners, and circumstances can impact the trajectory of a relationship. However, being securely attached often influences how someone with this attachment style behaves in an intimate relationship.

Reflect on your intimate relationships (regardless of how long they lasted).

Relationship 1.

Your role as a partner: (e.g., the avoidant, the cheerleader, the giver, the boss, etc.)

Your partner's role in the relationship:

Relationship 2. (not required)

Your role as a partner:

Your partner's role in the relationship:

Relationship 3. (not required)

Your role as a partner:

Your partner's role in the relationship:

Relationship 4. (not required)

Your role as a partner:

Your partner's role in the relationship:

EXERCISE 9 | IDENTIFYING YOUR TRIGGERS IN A RELATIONSHIP

We all have individual triggers in a relationship – you might even find that you have ones that are indicative of traits of an insecure attachment style.

9a. Use the following sections to help identify your triggers in specific areas within an intimate relationship:

Communication

E.g., partner keeps asking too many questions

Expressions of affection

E.g., my partner wants public displays of affection

Time spent together

E.g., my partner wants to spend time with my family

Values or beliefs

E.g., wants to share everything with me

9b. Now that you have identified your triggers in a relationship, try to identify what you need in a relationship to prevent your attachment traits from being triggered:

Communication

E.g., someone who gives me time to process my thoughts

Expressions of affection

E.g., someone who respects my boundaries

Time spent together

E.g., respects my time alone

Values or beliefs

E.g., does not judge my beliefs

9c. What actions can you take if you recognize that your attachment traits are being triggered?

That your partner can do for you

E.g., verbalize understanding for my boundaries

That you can do for yourself

E.g., deep breathing, turn off my phone, listen to music

Grounding strategies for myself

E.g., name the color of things around me, things I can smell, things I can hear

9d. List 10 things that make you feel safe in a relationship:

For example: understanding, consistency, words of affirmation, etc.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Place a * next to the ones that are a direct product of your attachment style

EXERCISE 10 | IDENTIFYING YOUR SUPERPOWERS

Use the following table to help you identify your attachment related superpowers. Do your best to reconsider attributes that you might currently view as a challenge or weakness – you may even start to recognize them as a strength instead.

IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS	IN OTHER RELATIONSHIPS (FRIENDS, FAMILY, ETC.)	IN THE BEDROOM/ INTIMACY	AT WORK
<p><i>For example: I'm trusting and open with my partners</i></p>	<p><i>I respect other people's boundaries</i></p>	<p><i>I can communicate my needs and listen to those of my partners</i></p>	<p><i>I'm a great team member and people seem to like working with me</i></p>

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Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: <https://positivepsychology.com/act-acceptance-and-commitment-therapy/>

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Centre for Mindfulness: <https://www.ummhealth.org/center-mindfulness>

Coherent Breathing: <https://www.verywellmind.com/an-overview-of-coherent-breathing-4178943>

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: <https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral>

Emotion-Focused Therapy: <https://iceeft.com/what-is-eft/>

Inner Smile Meditation: www.attachmentproject.com/inner-smile/

Internal Family Systems: <https://ifs-institute.com/>

Lick Your Rats Study: <https://learn.genetics.utah.edu/content/epigenetics/rats/>

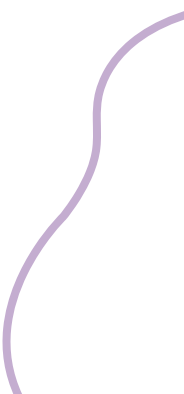
Meditation: <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/types-of-meditation>

Polyvagal Therapy: <https://www.brightontherapypartnership.org.uk/introduction-to-polyvagal-theory-by-tony-buckley/>

Psychodynamic Therapy: <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/types/psychodynami>

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