

Knowing Your Attachment Style Could Be Foundational to Healing Trauma

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Creating a Lifelong Emotional Template

Research has confirmed the widely held belief that the earliest attachments with parents or caregivers shape your abilities and expectations for relationships throughout life. Those earliest relationships impact one's sense of self and expectations in relationships throughout life.

Already in your earliest infancy, you begin to learn if the essential people in your life, such as parents or other caregivers, are reliable to keep you safe. In these critically formative years, the realization isn't cognitive but rather is experienced by your nervous system.

You find out early on if you are lovable as you are and thus become imbued with a deep sense of security; or unacceptable as is, and thus relegated to coping with incomprehensible emotional pain.

Secure attachment also teaches your nervous system how to "regulate." Regulation is essentially how the nervous system handles stress, emotions, and how it manages energy. A healthy nervous system manages energy well. It regulates or manages the incoming stimulation with a release of a corresponding amount of energy.

The Four Attachment Styles

Studying babies and young children has provided some crucial insights for online school psychologists into how people develop various degrees of acceptance, safety, and a sense of security in their emotional attachments.

Researchers have characterized these degrees of attachment as different attachment styles. The names given to these attachment styles are both descriptive as well as indicative of what can be expected in lifelong relationships by their owners.

These are the four attachment styles. Learning how they initially form and how they can be altered promotes both greater self-understanding as well as helpful insights into navigating adult relationships.

1. Secure – Autonomous
2. Avoidant – Dismissive
3. Anxious/Insecure – Preoccupied
4. Disorganized – Unresolved

Attachment styles help explain how people respond differently when dealing with:

- Emotional intimacy
- Conflict
- Communication and understanding of needs and emotions (your own and others)
- Expectations in a relationship

The ideal attachment style is a secure attachment between caregiver and child. Studies show that only 60% of adults have a secure attachment style. The other 40% of people fall into the other three attachment styles: avoidant, anxious/insecure, or disorganized.

1. Secure Attachment

No one's childhood is perfect. If you experienced a secure emotional bond, growing up, that means that your parents or caregivers were consistent enough of the time. Your caregiver's behavior provided you the feeling of being safe and protected. You felt that they were emotionally present and accepting.

As an adult, you stand a better chance of developing emotional intimacy more easily. You can balance closeness with another with independence, and can communicate effectively and resolve conflicts as they arise. You trust your partner in relationships and feel safe, making yourself vulnerable.

2. Avoidant (Dismissive) Attachment

For some babies and small children, it was necessary to depend on a caregiver who was unaware of their needs or emotionally unavailable. Crying or expressing emotions may have been discouraged.

As an adult, you will find that your independence is non-negotiable. Relying on someone else, having others depend on you, or being close may feel uncomfortable. You may carry around a feeling of being emotionally detached or afraid of making relationships, having learned that depending on someone else is unsafe.

3. Anxious/Insecure (Preoccupied) Attachment

As a child, you may have had a parent who responded to your needs inconsistently. Perhaps your parents, entangled in their own anxiety, responded to you in hurtful or critical ways. These responses created a sense of insecurity, being uncertain of what to expect, and could present a hefty challenge to an online school psychologist.

As an adult, you find that you always need a lot of reassurance and responsiveness in your relationships. It may get to the point that you don't feel safe unless you're overly dependent on those relationships. Arguing or even disagreeing with a loved one may give you the feeling of being overwhelmed or extremely anxious.

4. Disorganized (Unresolved) Attachment

Disorganized attachment combines avoidant and anxious attachment styles. Sometimes your caregiver displayed love, while at other times, that caregiver wasn't present at all. Perhaps your caregiver was frightening, abusive, or inappropriate and then loving once more.

Disorganized attachment is the primary attachment style for those who have survived complex developmental trauma. As an adult, you may vacillate between craving emotional intimacy and avoiding it, feeling safer to be on your own where you won't get hurt. Your relationships as an adult tend to be inconsistent or confusing.

Attachment Styles and Trauma

The only attachment style that won't lead to trauma is a secure one. Since the other styles don't teach the child how to regulate emotions in those earliest relationships, the child is left vulnerable to becoming a trauma baby. Insecure or inconsistent styles of attachment involve the experience of feeling overwhelmed and unsafe, which creates hyperarousal (on high alert) or hyperarousal (numb) as a means of protection.

Lacking a Secure Attachment is not Your Fault

It is important to remember that the attachment style learned in childhood was the optimal way to cope or manage with life's experience. Developing an "insecure" attachment style is not because the child did something wrong, but is merely a reflection of the child's survival instincts. It was formed as the best means of self-protection in light of the insecure caregiving provided.

Healing Through Emotionally Corrective Relationships

The road to healing is working with a trauma therapist and experiencing emotionally secure relationships. A therapeutic relationship is sometimes referred to as an emotionally corrective relationship because the therapist provides a consistent and secure interaction while remaining fully present for the client.

Problematic attachment styles are not carved in stone. A person can change his attachment style to become more secure. Learning about attachment and making those changes, for many, is a journey of healing that is filled with self-compassion. And it is often the key to developing healthier, more rewarding relationships.

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