

HOW ATTACHMENT AFFECTS YOUR TRAUMA

Early attachment with parents or caregivers shapes our abilities and expectations for relationships throughout life. It impacts our sense of self, our ability to regulate our nervous system, our feelings of safety, ability to trust others, our sense of security with emotional attachments, and our feelings about ourselves. We are biologically driven to form attachments to parents or caregivers even when they are also a source of critical, shaming, neglectful, or abusive behaviors. We may turn these negative feelings towards ourselves, which can result in self-criticism, self-loathing, or harmful behaviors; these can evolve into depression, anxiety, or somatic symptoms of pain or illness.

The only attachment style that won't lead to trauma is a secure one. Insecure or inconsistent styles of attachment involve the experience of feeling overwhelmed and unsafe, which creates hyperarousal (on high alert) or hypoarousal (numb) as a means of protection. Developing an "insecure" attachment style is not because the child did something wrong but was formed as the best means of self-protection in light of the insecure caregiving provided.

Researchers have identified four different attachment styles:

Secure Attachment

- Do you generally feel close to others?
- Are you comfortable with closeness, and also with independence?
- Do you feel you communicate effectively and resolve conflicts as they arise?
- Do you feel like you have fairly stable relationships?
- Do you feel safe in being vulnerable with your partner?

Avoidant (Dismissive) Attachment

- Do you feel closer to others when you're away from them?
- Do you feel the urge to pull away when your partner is seeking intimacy?
- Do you distance yourself from stressful situations or conflict?
- Do you feel emotionally removed from others?

Anxious/Insecure (Preoccupied) Attachment

- When you and a loved one disagree or argue, do you feel overwhelmed or extremely anxious?
- If the other person needs a break, do you pursue them until they give in?
- Do you feel the need for lots of reassurance in a relationship?
- If your partner is away, do you question their love for you?

Disorganized (Unresolved) Attachment

- Do you crave emotional intimacy, but also feel it's safer to be on your own where you won't get hurt?
- Was your primary caregiver abusive?
- Did your primary caregiver show love one minute and abuse the next?

(From: <https://brickelandassociates.com/understand-attachment-style-heal-trauma/>)

What is your attachment style? _____

What do you notice about this (the attach/fawn) part of you? (i.e., Do you feel desperate, crave connection, want to be liked, want someone to depend on, engage in people pleasing or self-sacrificing, or do you fear abandonment? Do you worry you aren't good enough, loveable, or have trouble setting boundaries? Do you put up with abusive behavior, or run when you get close to others?) See worksheet 18 for other ideas.

Assume these (above) are triggered reactions. What happens when you notice them as just signs that you are triggered? What changes?

What is your most triggered reaction? (i.e., people pleasing, trouble setting boundaries, pushing others away)

When was the last time you engaged in a triggered reaction or pattern?

What would you rather your response be instead of the triggered reaction?

What is a boundary you may need to set in order to do this? Or is there another way to change your response?
