

Attachment styles

Attachment styles are a great lens to understand struggles to connect in close relationships. The human attachment system is biological and ensures that we survive our long, dependent childhoods. Our attachment patterns are formed in early childhood, many when we are preverbal, and so can be very hard to reach just by talking about them. These same patterns persist into adulthood and can be very challenging in our current relationships. Understanding attachment wounds and how to heal towards secure attachment can make a world of difference.

Secure attachment roughly translates to feeling safe in the world and confident that if you need help and you reach out for help, appropriate support will come back to you.

Insecure attachment is everything else and can be thought of in three categories:

Ambivalent - You often get some good love and support in response when you reach out, but not always. Often enough, the support ends or is unavailable while you still need it. This experience sets you up to be constantly worried about when you will stop feeling loved, held, and seen and can lead to you calling out louder and more often. Your perception is that you need to ask repeatedly to receive a fraction of what you need. The repeated requests can lead to people avoiding your demands and complaints. This experience hurts and reinforces your belief that you need to ask *more* to get anything. Along the way to healing ambivalent attachment, you learn to relax and trust both another and yourself.

Avoidant - When you reach out, you are ignored or met with a response that does not meet your needs. You learn not to reach out and to be self-reliant. You may not understand emotions and may look down on people who seem needy or overly emotional. Along the way of healing avoidant attachment patterns, you realize that being isolated isn't what you want. You want connection, touch, and belonging, but you're unsure how to go about it, and you certainly don't want to be corrected, smothered, or overwhelmed by emotion.

Disorganized - When you reach out, you are hurt or ignored. When you don't reach out, you are still hurt or ignored. Your perception is that there is no correct answer. You want attention and love because you are hardwired for love and connection. Yet what you want and what you fear are the same thing. It's the classic double-bind situation, and it's both paralyzing and exhausting. Along the way to healing disorganized attachment, patterns are a slow building of reliable, safe, consistent care and trust that the provider of care will consistently be who they say they are.