



*"Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen. You are imperfect, you are wired for struggle, but you are worthy of love and belonging."*

Brene Brown, PhD

# BUILD SECURE ATTACHMENT STYLE

## INTIMATE LOVING RELATIONSHIPS ARE BUILT ON EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

As human beings we connect emotionally. Physical connection is not enough. **Without a strong emotional connection, relationships do not even begin - and if emotional connection dwindles, couples can easily drift apart.** Many singles come to counseling for help obtaining a relationship. And couples typically begin counseling because they have become emotionally disconnected... and most do not know what "emotional connection" is.



**EMOTIONAL CONNECTION** Many reasons exist for emotional disconnection. Intimate relationships are based on providing a source of comfort, security, trust and protection. When our partner becomes emotionally disconnected or unresponsive, we can feel lonely, hurt, anxious, and angry.



**SENSE OF SECURITY** Emotional disconnection results in extremely unsettling emotions - inducing anxiety, distress, depressive symptoms and more. Our amygdala - our built-in alarm system - triggers an automatic response when we feel disconnected, alone, and afraid, and it can feel threatening. The amygdala responds and a sense of distress and even panic can set in. This can build resentment, confusion, disconnection, anger, bitterness and more. This relationship distress impacts us 24/7.



**ATTACHMENT STYLE:** Our ability to form connection is part of our subconscious programming and our "attachment style," which is formed early on in childhood by how well we were emotionally attuned to and our overall experiences. This internal imprint determines our "attachment style." Also, we may have had a secure attachment from childhood, but our experiences in adulthood may have faltered our sense of security and lovability, shifting to an insecure attachment style. **The good news, once identified and understood, you can form secure attachment once again.**

## BUILD A BRIGHTER LOVE LIFE

Balancing the way in which you show up in relationships and forming a more "secure attachment" style is possible. The more aware (mindful) you are of your assumptions, false beliefs, reactivity, insecurities, and maladaptive protective strategies the better. Realize there is no such thing as having a "perfect attachment style." Even people with secure attachment styles have ups and downs and will encounter new relationship dynamics.

The goal is to be aware and mindful of your programming so you can make wholehearted, genuine choices in relationships within each moment so you may enjoy rich, authentic connection and love (instead of hiding behind triggers, controlling protective strategies, fears, and subconscious programming from past pains and disappointments, and dysfunctional relating patterns).

## IDENTIFY YOUR RELATING AND ATTACHMENT PATTERNS

Chose **one** of the options below. What is more in line with how you are within a significant relationship?

### **It's harder for me to be patient when...**

People aren't understanding me

I feel stuck doing something I don't enjoy

### **In dating, it's a deal breaker if the other...**

Doesn't make an effort

Comes on too strong

### **Conflict is...**

An opportunity to get something off my chest

Usually unproductive

### **When I get upset at my partner**

Have to express myself to them

Prefer to figure it out on my own, or talk to others about it

### **In a relationship, I'm at my worst when I feel...**

Abandoned or rejected

Pressured or intruded upon

### **In the relationship, I want to feel...**

As connected to my partner as possible

At ease

### **When I'm overwhelmed, I feel better when I**

Vent to someone

Find distraction in something else (exercise, substances, work, etc.)

### **There are certain things I don't tell my partner because**

They could get upset and reject me

It's my business they don't need to know

### **When I am in a relationship and we spend time apart, I**

Feel sad and lonely

Feel relieved to have time to myself

### **My partner is likely to complain that I**

Criticize and find fault with them

Am not as engaged as they want me to be

### **When I feel hurt by my partner, I recover...**

When I get what I need from them

Pretty quickly on my own

### **It would upset me more if my partner told their friends**

Nothing about me

Something embarrassing about me

## IDENTIFY YOUR ATTACHMENT STYLE

**ONLINE ASSESSMENTS:** <https://www.creatingyourbalance.com/resources>

**Attachment styles typically form in childhood where we learn about trust, safety, connection, giving, and receiving.** Print or screen shot your results. Remember, if you find that you have an anxious, avoidant or fearful attachment style, find comfort in the fact that you can reprogram and build a secure attachment style with awareness, skills, practice, and more practice. The attachment styles are described in detail throughout the following pages. You may want to view "4 Attachment Styles," the link is in the CONNECT section of <https://www.creatingyourbalance.com/clients>

**The following pages describe the three main types of Insecure Attachment Styles (not Secure):**

## ATTACHMENT STYLE SUMMARIES

### ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT STYLE (also referred to as Preoccupied or Ambivalent)

- Can be incredibly generous and attentive to those they care about
- Experiences a lot of anxiety in relationships, worries about the status, "label," and state of relationship
- Sensitive to perceiving abandonment - requiring a lot of soothing, reassurance, and attention to cope with hyper-vigilance
- Tend to blame their emotions and anxiety on others (although unintentional, an aspect of early programming)



**How it feels typically?** Relationships are very important to you. Something just feels right about having someone special. Your fantasy of an ideal relationship is one where your partner just "gets" you down to your core. It's imperative to you that there is the promise or possibility of feeling truly understood. This "feeling understood" can at times, unfortunately, be misconstrued into attraction for those who have similar dysfunctions in life. You love to love, however you may end up feeling angry, resentful, or disappointed in a relationship in which you don't feel deeply understood - you may expect them to read our mind and to make matters worse, you may not know how to ask for your needs.

#### Within a Relationship:

- Trouble can start once you settle into commitment or close to it. The person who seemed so promising at first, attentive and understanding, eventually skips a beat or gets distracted with life, and that's when you remember that people aren't always what they seem, no matter how nice, perfect, and giving you are
- You've had a script running, perhaps since childhood, fearing what can happen when you depend on someone, "I need them, but they will disappoint me," causing over-focus on others, as if you can control let-down by predicting it
- You tend to put others' needs first, while not realizing you've abandoned yourself and your own needs
- You feel anxious or hurt even for minor incidents, like slow, short texts, or a curt nod as oppose to a glowing greeting
- Your gut churns with doubt and anxiety - subconsciously assuming you will be disappointed once again
- When your anxiety is on full display, you threaten the relationship, make ultimatums, do and say things you later regret, like "I can't trust you," "You don't even want me," or turn into outright anger, "You don't give a crap about me."
- When triggered it's as if you need to show how much pain you're in to connect - but it shows up extreme ways
- Deep down you are starving for the feeling of security you crave, but instead your behavior can push others away
- When calm, you're good at ironing things out, but each incident reinforces familiar pain, beliefs and assumptions, "You can't be depend on others and if you don't act 'perfect' they will leave you."
- You may wonder if you're too needy for anyone to deal with you. You know you ask for extra, but you also GIVE extra.

**Where it stems from typically?** Can stem from being put in an unfair position to help a parent feel better when they were having a hard time. It is natural to care and pitch in, especially when it's our parents. But we humans are meant to live in larger social constructs of multi-generational families (similar to a tribe, rather than one or two adults raising children. When a child defaults into having to emotionally support an adult (something a child inevitably does not have the resources or know-how to do) they are doing it out of a sense of survival anxiety, which builds a blueprint of what's needed to get love and an insatiable drive to give and care for another in order to get approval.

- This child didn't learn to find safety within - a sense of self-trust and self-worth, along with boundary-setting skills.
- It's familiar to play rescuer, give, over-care and over-perform - as well as over-demand - in your closest relationships.
- May have memories in childhood of being unhappy with the amount of attention and care you received from one or both of your parents. Yet you had a least one caregiver, even if it was a grandparent or nanny, who was there in significant ways and you felt truly loved. Albeit, inconsistent and you couldn't rely on love being there when you needed it. It's the same inconsistency that drives your anxiety now, when relationships deepen, along with your fears and "co-dependence" on another person increases.

## AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT STYLE (also referred to as Dismissive Style)

- You have subtlest feeling of being trapped when a partner comes too emotionally close
- Uncomfortable having needs, and very uncomfortable communicating them
- Sensitive to detecting when another is about to criticize or blame you for something



**How it feels typically?** You're self-reliant and proud of that. You probably don't like to talk about yourself much. You don't chase the spotlight by making your needs known, and it makes you cringe when other people do. Logic and reason are your comfort zones, feelings not so much. This has served you in many ways, yet stifles the capacity to have deep, nourishing, intimate relationship.

**Within a Relationship:** If you're single, you might be interested in a romantic partner or want one someday but you're often unsure because of the potential drawbacks. This leaves you wary about commitment. To test the waters, you may have brief relationships that you end before things get too serious. You believe it's better than disappointing someone later on, or setting yourself up for feeling trapped, disappointed, or vulnerable at some point in the future.

- Prefer someone who "doesn't take themselves too seriously" or is "easygoing"
- Emotional connection may be a new term for you
- Likely to believe that asking for support would be an inconvenience, or even worse an opportunity for you to feel helpless, unseen, and disappointed by those who are supposed to be loving you for WHO you are, not WHAT you are.
- Believe being low maintenance is what it takes to be a good friend, partner, or family member
- Train yourself and others to think that you simply don't have needs, "I don't need much", "My needs are simple."
- If you sense someone is too needy, you feel stressed or inadequate - and are not likely to keep them around
- You may care a lot for your partner, but also need a good amount of distance or "space"
- You may start to feel pressure or stress in a relationship without fully knowing why; this makes you want to flee
- When you recognize an important desire or need of your own, it can be anxiety-producing to acknowledge and communicate it to others - with little confidence in people to meet your needs - this is uncomfortable enough to make you want to forget becoming aware of the need in the first place
- For you, unmet needs and desires aren't the worst thing in the world, as long as you don't focus on them - what triggers you is feeling unfairly blamed, condemned, or judged. This hits a particular nerve and can make you want to avoid more, but if you are unable to escape, you can get uncharacteristically aggressive toward others
- You may not ask for hugs and genuine physical connection as if it's too much to ask. You may feel ok asking for sex however. Also, sex outside of a relationship (and sex addiction) may serve to escape the painful feelings of unmet needs, and/or smothering feelings, or entrapment fears that can get triggered for you in real relationships.

### Where it stems from typically?

- Can you think of 3 specific memories from your childhood when you felt supported, celebrated, or validated by a parent? If you can't come up with 3 right now, that would align with this style.
- It doesn't mean you don't have fond memories. You just might have fonder ones of being by yourself and entertaining yourself - more so than being with people. Perhaps you even preferred it that way.
- Many with strong avoidant tendencies said their fondest memories in childhood involved being by themselves for hours in the woods, daydreaming, or inventing entire plays with stuffed animals in their room.
- If you do have memories of your parents showering you with affection, hugs, and fun times, it's likely that in order to get that, you had to do something "right." They praised/rewarded you for your intelligence, beauty, athletics, or talent.
- The message you got was that you were worthy of love and attention when you made the family look good. As an adult, it doesn't come naturally to believe that support will be there for you without ACCOMPLISHING some THING.

## FEARFUL ATTACHMENT STYLE (also referred to as Disorganized or Disoriented Style)

- Results in a volleying of Anxious Attachment and Avoidant Protective Strategies
- Swing from being afraid of connection to over-analyzing the equality or depth of the relationship
- May feel overwhelmed and “stuck” in relationship, only to fear abandonment the next
- One moment they can smother their partner, and the next they can disappear for days
- This can result in break-ups, or extramarital affairs as coping strategies for fear of engulfment
- Can be the result of difficult or volatile relationships in childhood and/or ADULTHOOD and domestic violence (PTSD)



**How it feels typically?** Relationships can result in dysfunctions on both sides of the spectrum. This is very confusing for the partner involved as they will observe reactivity based on triggers from either being too close or too distant. Reactivity can include silent treatments, anger outbursts, break-ups, emotional volatility or more covert controlling behavior, such as infidelity, as a form of acting out unmet emotional connection needs. You may feel alone and not understand why you cannot find the closeness you have always longed for (and need as a human being). You have a hard time believing that the chocolate bar exists because it has never been visible. Humans were made for connection so even if it may seem you don't want to connect, you have a deep desire for it. However, your behaviors ward off anyone who would otherwise come close.

**Within a Relationship:** As much as you want to be close, you become afraid of the very connection you seek and use anger or high anxiety outbursts to push others away when they get too close and you begin to feel threatened. You may have capacity for empathy however it can be comprised in states of perceived abandonment or perceived engulfment, which can fluctuate over time. You currently have an inability to truly connect to others emotionally.

Moreover, it is highly likely that you do not know how to build, maintain, nor respect the boundaries of others because your needs and boundaries were not known or respected in childhood (or in an abusive adult relationship). You are afraid of closeness and emotional intimacy because it has resulted in pain or terror. Vulnerability is seen as opportunity for someone to hurt you, so you avoid it. However, vulnerability creates intimacy and connection when it is met with acceptance validation and understanding.

### Where it stems from typically?

Attachment styles typically form in childhood where we learn about trust, safety, connection, giving, receiving, etc. Disorganized attachment is formed from extreme unpredictability, confusion, and trauma - emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse. It may also be get more extreme due to painful relationships in adulthood. Understanding both Anxious and Avoidant types can help explain how this Fearful Attachment Style forms. This style requires the most motivation and large investment to resolve. To form secure attachment, you will need to understand how you feel about connection, and your fears surrounding it that were programmed in early childhood or in an abusive relationship. You need to explore most likely in a therapeutic setting your experiences of attachment in conjunction with abuse, neglect, and emotional neglect.