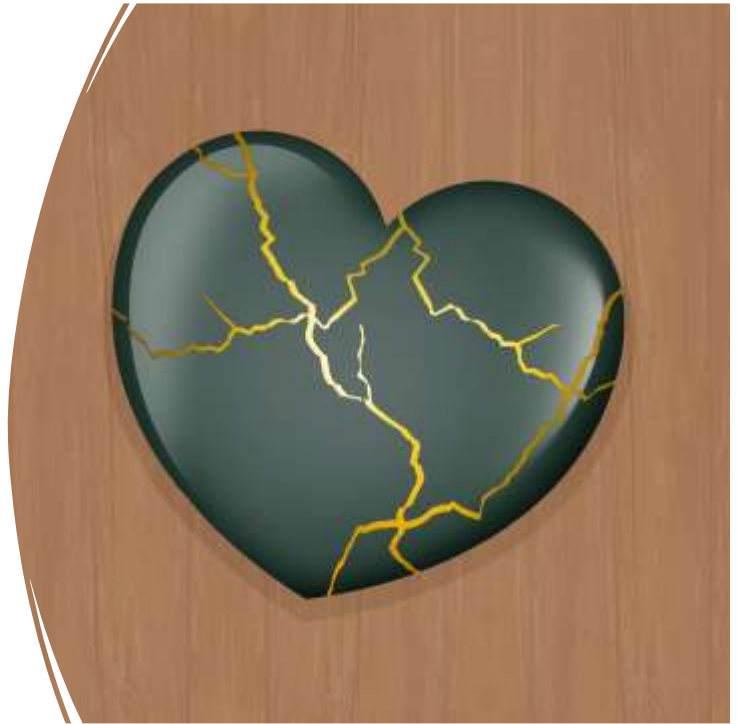


# Attachment Patterns & Implications for Relationships

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1

## Secure Attachment Pattern

### Secure Attachment Experience in Childhood

- Parent is source of comfort
- Child is easily soothed
- Child develops trust and positive expectations in relationships
- Child begins developing capacity to understand the inner state of self and others

### Secure Attachment Pattern in Adulthood

- Relationships are source of happiness overall
- Comfort with closeness
- Capacity to reflect upon the inner state of self and others

2



3

## Non-Secure Attachment Patterns

(Reference: Mary Main and Eric Hesse)

### Childhood Patterns



### Adulthood Patterns

#### **Non-secure/Avoidant**

Parent withdraws when child exhibits feelings or needs for closeness. Child manages anxiety through avoidance of feelings & needs for closeness.

#### **Non-secure/Ambivalent-Resistant--**

Parent shows affection but is not attuned to when and what the child needs. Child manages anxiety by becoming more intense, demanding, controlling of parent.

#### **Non-secure/Dismissive—**

Feelings and closeness increase anxiety. Vulnerability does not feel safe. The adult manages anxiety through avoidance of feelings and closeness.

#### **Non-secure/Preoccupied—**

The adult is highly anxious in relationships and manages the anxiety with controlling behaviors, intensity in expression and seeking of needs.

4

# Disorganized Attachment Patterns

(Reference: Mary Main and Eric Hesse)

Childhood Pattern



Adulthood Pattern

## Disorganized

Wants closeness with parent but fearful of closeness with parent. As child reaches school age, child tends to become either caregiver or punishing towards parents. Dissociation risk.

## Unresolved/Disorganized

Disorganized, dysregulated, and disoriented when loss or abuse memories are triggered. Easily triggered. Dissociation risk. The child can become a trigger. The relationship can become a trigger.

5

## Earned Secure Attachment

Experienced a difficult childhood, but through therapy and/or emotionally corrective relationships, the individual is now able to:

- Tell a coherent story about childhood. Stays regulated and organized in thinking. Does not become confused or illogical.
- Mentalize the internal state in self and others.
- Express emotions.
- Provide and receive emotional support.



6

Secure attachment is associated with the mentalizing state (Fonagy and Bateman)

### The mentalizing state:

- Reflective, curious, non-expert
- Humble, owning mistakes
- Genuine
- Attuning to non-verbal and verbal
- Non-judgmental
- Balancing affective and cognitive processes
- Balanced between self and other focus

7

Attachment designations are not all or nothing

- Scores are given from 1 to 9 for secure, dismissive, or preoccupied categories according to the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI).
- A higher score for a particular category indicates a primary classification, a mid-range score indicates a secondary classification.
- A secure designation may not have a secondary classification, but may have a sub-type: a small tendency toward preoccupied or dismissive attachment.
- Most secure individuals have some underlying tendencies toward dismissive or preoccupied patterns. Underlying tendencies are more apparent in stressful situations.


8



Research shows...

- Criminality and personality disorders associated with poor mentalization, a history of abuse, and non-secure with unresolved/disorganized attachment status.
- A secure individual may move toward non-secure in difficult relationships.
- In heterosexual couples, researchers have discovered an association between violence and preoccupation in female partners and dismissive derogatory in male partners.

9



Language we can use with clients to encourage exploration of attachment patterns

“We all develop relationship patterns, or what are called attachment patterns, to cope in whatever way we need to in our environment growing up – family environment and social environment.

Our nervous system is designed to self-protect in whatever way we can. Often, patterns that developed early in life aren't the best patterns for developing healthy relationships as adults.

But even if we developed healthy patterns overall, we may have some self-protective tendencies from early life that surface when we're under stress.

We automatically begin making positive shifts in the way we interact with others as we develop more self-awareness. Another word for this self-awareness is “mentalization.”

10

## Preoccupied attachment in relationships

### Preoccupied attachment – relationship rules

#### I must . . .

- Make you see me/hear me however I can
- Control you to make sure you don't go away
- Be loud and demanding so you will listen
- Stay in conflict with you to remain connected

#### Fearful subtype:

- I will take care of you to be connected to you
- I will watch your face to anticipate what you need

### Healthy relationship rules - earned security

#### I can . . .

- Validate myself
- Let go of what I can't control
- Listen and communicate in healthy ways
- All things to be as they are

- Let go of taking care of you
- Relax and communicate in healthy ways

11

## Dismissive attachment in relationships

### Dismissive attachment – relationship rules

#### I must . . .

- take care of my own needs by myself.
- stay at a distance.
- not ask for help.
- not show or ask for affection.
- not show needs or feelings.
- not show vulnerability.

#### Derogatory subtype:

- denigrate you to feel safe and in control.
- hurt you when I feel hurt to feel in control.

### Healthy relationship rules - earned security

#### I can . . .

- accept support
- accept closeness
- ask for support or assistance
- show affection
- express feelings
- allow myself to be vulnerable

- tolerate not being in control
- express feelings of hurt

12



Positive  
impact of  
therapist  
mentalizing

- Modeling—Owning a misstep, acknowledging a feeling of concern, staying present
- Secure-based responses to non-secure words or behaviors
- Holding a safe, non-judgmental space in which to explore their inner world and reflect upon the inner world of others