



Safe Base Attachment

What Attachment Style is
being created in your home?



Thrive with Jessie White

Attachment Styles

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Secure

Attachment

This is created when children have consistent, emotionally attuned and contingent communication with their parents/primary care-giver. Relationships that have contingency build in, especially at times of emotional need, offer children experiences of connection, feeling understood and protected. This form of communication (contingency) enables a feeling of being seen, safe, soothed and secure {the 4 S's of security}. Parents who see their child's internal world beneath their behaviour, keep their children safe from harm and the sense of threat, who tune in and soothe distress, are building with repetition a model of security.

Dr Dan Seigel and Mary Hartzell present the ABCs for secure attachment in their Parenting from the Inside out book: Attunement; aligning internal states, often accomplished by the sharing of non-verbal signals.

Balance; balance of body, emotion and state of mind is obtained in unison with another.

Coherence; when a child is internally integrated and able to interpersonally connect to others it is helped by the healthy relationship with their parent/care-giver.

We are hardwired to connect with others.

Having a secure relationship as a child involves;

1. Proximity seeking

2. Safe haven, going to a parent or partner in times of distress for comfort

3. An internal sense of integration that is developed through a child – parent relationship in which the child knows they can come to feel both internally integrated and interpersonally connected with others.

When children have repeated experiences with their parents/primary care-giver which are built upon contingent connection, it creates for children an internal sense of well-being that enables them to go into the world to explore and make new connections with others.

The Circle of Security program talks about this as a circle of a child needing the parent to support their exploration in the world, the parent welcoming the child's coming to them (proximity seeking) and being bigger, stronger, wise and kind safe haven (secure base).



Insecure Attachment

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When the ABCs are not experienced regularly our proximity seeking, safe haven and secure base do not develop optimally. This will result in insecure attachments from the repeated experiences of nonattuned, noncontingent communication.



Avoidant Attachment

Avoidantly attached children have had parents who are repeatedly unavailable and rejecting of them. Closeness and emotional connection are avoided by the child as the parent has taught them these things are not safe either verbally or non-verbally. The parent often grew up in a similar emotional desert and haven't made sense of those difficult experiences. They've had to adapt their attachment needs being unmet.



Ambivalent

Attachment

Ambivalently attached children experience the parent's communication as inconsistent and at times intrusive. The child cannot depend upon attunement and connection.

The parent is usually inconsistently available and has unreliable communication. The child develops anxiety and uncertainty about who and when they can depend on others. They never know what to expect. The ambivalence creates feelings of insecurity in the parent – child relationship. This pattern of relating can continue forward into how the child relates in the larger social world and into their future.



In the above two insecure attachment styles, the child has had to learn ways to adapt to their world in ways that places them at the centre of caring for themselves. Makes them responsible for their own safety and security. Children try to make sense of their experiences and they do their best to adapt bringing these adaptive forms of connecting into all future relationships. These once useful adaptive forms can become unhealthy and maladaptive in adult relationships. The attachment we have in our family of origin organises and builds our brains and minds.

One vital part of this brain organisation is how we engage in social relationships be that with our families, friends, teachers, lovers. New relationships either teach new ways of relating or simply reinforce the maladaptive ways. So children either learn that the world is a deeply barren emotionless place (Avoidance) or an emotionally unreliable one filled with uncertainty (ambivalence).

Disorganised

Attachment

When children's attachment needs aren't being met, combined with that their parent's behaviour is a source of the disorientation or terror, they may develop a disorganised attachment. Life is filled with repeated experiences of communication from the parent which is overwhelming, frightening and chaotic. When the parent is the cause of the alarm/fright/terror/confusion the child's biological system goes haywire. The biological system is constructed as mentioned above, to seek attachment and connection, we are motivated to seek proximity, to become close with a care-giver in times of distress for comfort and to be soothed.

When the source of the terror is also meant to be the source of safety and security, confusion happens and the child is stuck. Mary Main and Erik Hesse named this 'fright without solution'.

The child has no way to making sense of this situation, no way to develop adaptive ways to survive. Resulting in disorganisation and chaos externally and internally for the child.

Disorganised attachments are commonly found when children are abused by their parents.

When the parents are abusive the child's brain growth is stunted. The neural pathways are impaired, leading to difficulty regulating emotions, trouble with social communication, academic reasoning is challenging, tendency towards interpersonal violence and a predisposition to dissociation.

What form of abuse are we meaning?
Physical yes and also when repeated experiences of the parent's behaviour being frightening or other ways disorientating for the child {rage, anger, and intoxication}. The source of the fear is the source of comfort!



Why are parents disorganising their children? Not with malice or intent.

Research is showing it is because these parents have unresolved trauma or loss that has not been processed that is impacting upon their treatment and interactions with their children. Having loss and trauma in your life does not predispose you to creating disorganised attachments, it is the unresolved, the experiences that haven't been made sense of that are designing present behaviour from past experiences.

Becoming aware, healing and making sense of your past, will benefit you and your child.



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We all
deserve
secure
attachments!