

What's My Attachment Style and Why Does It Matter?

By [Sharon Martin, LCSW](#) <https://blogs.psychcentral.com/imperfect/2017/02/whats-my-attachment-style-and-why-does-it-matter/>



If you're in an unhappy relationship, feel stuck in a pattern of failed relationships, or can't seem to find Mr. (or Ms.) Right, your attachment style may be the reason.

We all learn about human relationships from our first relationships - those with our parents or primary caregivers. Understanding your attachment style can help you get to the root of your relationship troubles.

Ideally, parents provide security and safety and children learn to trust that their parents will meet their needs. Parents provide comfort and help calm their children when they're upset or afraid. As a result, children form a bond with their parents that builds a secure emotional foundation. Children can then confidently explore the world knowing their parents will keep them safe.

We know that humans are meant to connect to and depend on each other. Our survival hinges on it! Depending on others is healthy even in adult relationships. We are more successful and happy when we can form healthy, trusting attachments to other humans.

"We don't have to do it all alone. We were never meant to." - Brene Brown

There are three primary attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and anxious. I have described each attachment style below.

Secure Attachment

- You had your needs met as a child. Your caregivers were attentive and responsive to your needs helping you to feel safe and cared for.
- You feel comfortable being close and emotionally intimate.
- You seek and maintain close, stable relationships.
- You feel comfortable expressing your feelings and needs.

Avoidant Attachment

- Your caregivers were probably distant, cold, or unresponsive. As a result, you became more independent and self-reliant, not wanting to depend on inconsistent people.
- Close relationships tend to feel smothering and like they're impeding your independence.
- You pull away from intimacy when it feels too intense.
- You need a lot of time to yourself.
- You may resist commitment.

Anxious Attachment

- Your caregivers were inconsistent in attending to your needs. As a result, you hold on tight in order to try to get your needs met.

- You crave intimacy and can never get enough closeness.
- You question whether your partner really loves you or whether you're lovable and seek frequent reassurance.
- An anxious attachment can be described as “needy” or “clingy.”
- You desperately seek security and attention from your partner, but this can push him/her away.

Why does my attachment style matter?

Attachment theory originated with work of John Bowlby, who studied mothers and infants, but we now recognize that our attachment style is still at play in our adult romantic relationships. The parent-child attachment sets the stage for our ability to trust that our adult partners will meet our emotional needs.

Our attachment style becomes a blueprint for the rest of our intimate relationships. Our attachment style impacts our choice of romantic partners and how we relate to them. We replay these attachment patterns over and over with new people as a way to find evidence for our beliefs about ourselves. This is why people often feel stuck in the same kinds of relationship patterns. For example, many anxiously attached people date or marry avoidants who can never seem to give them enough closeness and reassurance. This confirms the anxiously attached person's fears of abandonment and belief that s/he is flawed or unlovable.

Understanding your attachment style is useful not only because it gives you insights into your relationship with your parents and how you felt as a child, but it can also help you understand difficulties you have in your adult relationships. Ultimately, understanding your attachment style can help you figure out how you can change in order to have more fulfilling relationships. In other words, having a healthy relationship is about choosing the “right” partner and about developing a healthy, secure attachment.

How can I become more securely attached?

Although attachment patterns are well established, you can shift toward a more secure attachment style by learning new skills and practicing a lot.

A few ways to start changing your attachment style are:

- Notice your relationship patterns. Becoming more aware of your anxious or avoidant behaviors is the first step in change.
- Pay attention to what you need and how you feel.
- Share your feelings with your partner.
- Recognize cognitive distortions and challenge them.
- Communicate your relationship needs and expectations clearly to your partner.
- Take good care of yourself.
- Do things that make you feel good about yourself; acknowledge your strengths and successes.
- Work with a therapist (shifting your attachment style is hard work).
- Spend time with people who model healthy relationships.

I hope this post has shed a bit of light on understanding your attachment style and how it influences your adult relationships. For additional information, I recommend the book Attached by Amir Levine and Rachel Heller. As always, be patient and gentle with yourself as you challenge yourself to change.