

What is Your Attachment Style?



ATTACHMENT, COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN, PARENTING, PARENTING ADVICE By [PsychAlive](#)



What is attachment and why is it important?

Attachment refers the particular way in which you relate to other people. Your style of attachment was formed at the very beginning of your life, during your first two years. Once established, it is a style that stays with you and plays out today in how you relate in [intimate relationships](#) and in [how you parent your children](#). Understanding your style of attachment is helpful because it offers you insight into how you felt and developed in your childhood. It also clarifies ways that you are emotionally limited as an adult and what you need to change to improve your close relationships and your relationship with your own children.

Early Attachment Patterns

Young children need to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver in order for their social and emotional development to occur normally. Without this attachment, they will suffer serious psychological and social impairment. During the first two years, how the parents or caregivers respond to their infants, particularly during times of distress, establishes the types of patterns of attachment their children form. These patterns will go on to guide the child's feelings, thoughts and expectations as an adult in future relationships.

Secure Attachment:

Ideally, from the time infants are six months to two years of age, they form an emotional attachment to an adult who is attuned to them, that is, who is sensitive and responsive in their interactions with them. It is vital that this attachment figure remain a consistent caregiver throughout this period in a child's life. During the second year, children begin to use the adult as a secure base from which to explore the world and become more

independent. A child in this type of relationship is *securely* attached. Dr. Dan Siegel emphasizes that in order for a child to feel securely attached to their parents or caregivers, the child must feel safe, seen and soothed.

Avoidant Attachment

There are adults who are emotionally unavailable and, as a result, they are insensitive to and unaware of the needs of their children. They have little or no response when a child is hurting or distressed. These parents discourage crying and encourage independence. Often their children quickly develop into “little adults” who take care of themselves. These children pull away from needing anything from anyone else and are self-contained. They have formed an *avoidant* attachment with a misattuned parent.

Ambivalent/Anxious Attachment:

Some adults are inconsistently attuned to their children. At times their responses are appropriate and nurturing but at other times they are intrusive and insensitive. Children with this kind of parenting are confused and insecure, not knowing what type of treatment to expect. They often feel suspicious and distrustful of their parent but at the same time they act clingy and desperate. These children have an *ambivalent/anxious attachment* with their unpredictable parent.

Disorganized Attachment:

When a parent or caregiver is abusive to a child, the child experiences the physical and emotional cruelty and frightening behavior as being life-threatening. This child is caught in a terrible dilemma: her survival instincts are telling her to flee to safety but safety is the very person who is terrifying her. The attachment figure is the source of the child's distress. In these situations, children typically disassociate from their selves. They detach from what is happening to them and what they are experiencing is blocked from their consciousness. Children in this conflicted state have *disorganized attachments* with their fearsome parental figures.

[Read More about Identifying Your Child's Attachment Style](#)

Adult Attachment Styles

Secure Personality:

People who formed secure attachments in childhood have *secure* attachment patterns in adulthood. They have a strong sense of themselves and they desire close associations with others. They basically have a positive view of themselves, their partners and their relationships. Their lives are balanced: they are both secure in their independence and in their close relationships.

Dismissive Personality:

Those who had avoidant attachments in childhood most likely have *dismissive* attachment patterns as adults. These people tend to be loners; they regard relationships and emotions as being relatively unimportant. They are cerebral and suppress their feelings. Their typical response to conflict and stressful situations is to avoid them by distancing themselves. These people's lives are not balanced: they are inward and isolated, and emotionally removed from themselves and others.

Preoccupied Personality:

Children who have an ambivalent/anxious attachment often grow up to have *preoccupied* attachment patterns. As adults, they are self-critical and insecure. They seek approval and reassurance from others, yet this never relieves their self-doubt. In their relationships, deep-seated feelings that they are going to be rejected make them worried and not trusting. This drives them to act clingy and overly dependent with their partner. These people's lives are not balanced: their insecurity leaves them turned against themselves and emotionally desperate in their relationships.

Fearful-Avoidant Personality:

People who grew up with disorganized attachments often develop *fearful-avoidant* patterns of attachment. Since, as children, they detached from their feelings during times of trauma, as adults, they continue to be somewhat detached from themselves. They desire relationships and are comfortable in them until they develop emotionally close. At this point, the feelings that were repressed in childhood begin to resurface and, with no awareness of them being from the past, they are experienced in the present. The person is no longer in life today but rather, is suddenly re-living an old trauma. These people's lives are not balanced: they do not have a coherent sense of themselves nor do they have a clear connection with others.

Developing an "Earned Secure Attachment"

The good news is, it's never too late to develop a secure attachment! Although your patterns of attachment were formed in infancy and can follow you throughout your life, it is possible to develop an "Earned Secure Attachment" at any age.

One essential way to do this is by making sense of your story. According to Dr. Dan Siegel, attachment research demonstrates that "the best predictor of a child's security of attachment is not what happened to his parents as children, but rather how his parents made sense of those childhood experiences." The key to "making sense" of your life experiences is to write a coherent narrative, which helps you understand how your childhood experiences are still affecting you in your life today. In PsychAlive's online course with Drs. Dan Siegel and Lisa Firestone, they will walk you through the process of creating a coherent narrative to help you to build healthier, more secure attachments and strengthen your own personal sense of emotional resilience. When you create a coherent narrative, you actually rewire your brain to cultivate more security within yourself and your relationships.

Because our attachment ability is broken in a relationship, it is often best to be fixed in a relationship. According to Dr. Lisa Firestone, “One of the proven ways to change our attachment style is by forming an attachment with someone who had a more secure attachment style than what we’ve experienced. We can also talk to a therapist, as the therapeutic relationship can help create a more secure attachment. We can continue to get to know ourselves through understanding our past experiences, allowing ourselves to make sense and feel the full pain of our stories, then moving forward as separate, differentiated adults. In doing this, we move through the world with an internal sense of security that helps us better withstand the natural hurts that life can bring.”