

When you were young, which of these did you feel more often:

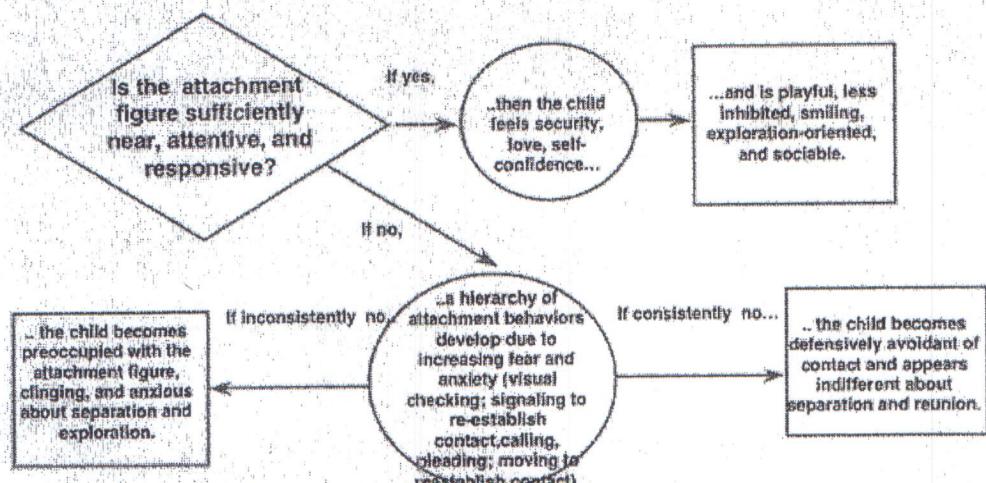
- No matter what I do, my parents love me.
- I can't seem to please my parents, no matter what I do.
- My parents don't really notice me.

The answers to such questions reveal more than about our childhood: they also tend to predict how we act in our closest relationships as adults.

Our childhood shapes our brain in many ways — and so determines our most basic ways of reacting to others — for better and for worse. If we felt well-loved in childhood, we tend to be secure in our relationships — but if not, then we're more prone to chronic problems. When it comes to the engrained self-defeating habits that we bring to our adult relationships from childhood, understanding why we have these habits in the first place is a first step toward becoming free of their grip.

The brains of abused and neglected children are not as well integrated as the brains of non-abused children. This helps explain why abused and neglected children have significant difficulties with emotional regulation, integrated functioning, and social development. Conscience development and the capacity for empathy are largely functions of the frontal cortex. When development in this area of the brain is hindered, there are important social and emotional difficulties. It is very interesting that the frontal cortex is sensitive to face recognition and eye contact. Abused and neglected children frequently have disorders of attachment because of their birth-parents lack of sensitive responsive interactions with the child.

## The Development of Attachment



Adults have four attachment styles: secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive avoidant, and fearful avoidant. The secure attachment style in adults corresponds to the secure attachment style in children. The anxious-preoccupied attachment style in adults corresponds to the anxious/ambivalent attachment style in children. However, the dismissive avoidant attachment style and the fearful avoidant attachment style, which are distinct in adults, correspond to a single avoidant attachment style in children.

### **Secure attachment**

Securely attached people tend to agree with the following statements: "It is relatively easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me."

### **Anxious-preoccupied attachment**

People who are anxious or preoccupied with attachment tend to agree with the following statements: "I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them." People with this style of attachment seek high levels of intimacy, approval, and responsiveness from their partners.

### **Dismissive-avoidant attachment**

People with a dismissive style of avoidant attachment tend to agree with these statements: "I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me." People with this attachment style desire a high level of independence. The desire for independence often appears as an attempt to avoid attachment altogether. They view themselves as self-sufficient and invulnerable to feelings associated with being closely attached to others. They often deny needing close relationships.

### **Fearful-avoidant attachment**

People with a fearful style of avoidant attachment tend to agree with the following statements: "I am somewhat uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I sometimes worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others." People with this attachment style have

mixed feelings about close relationships. On the one hand, they desire to have emotionally close relationships. On the other hand, they tend to feel uncomfortable with emotional closeness. These mixed feelings are combined with negative views about themselves and their partners

Looking at the following diagram which are you? And which is your partner?

I react well to my partner with regard to.....

I don't react well to my partner with regard to.....

Now get specific as to what you do that makes the situation worse.....

|                       |          | Thoughts About Self  |   |
|-----------------------|----------|--|---|
|                       |          | Positive   | Negative  |
| Thoughts About Others | Positive | Secure Attachment<br>Higher self-esteem<br>Higher sociability    | Anxious Attachment<br>Lower self-esteem<br>Higher sociability |
|                       | Negative | Dismissive Attachment<br>Higher self-esteem<br>Lower sociability | Fearful Attachment<br>Lower self-esteem<br>Lower sociability  |

Note: *Women fear abandonment*

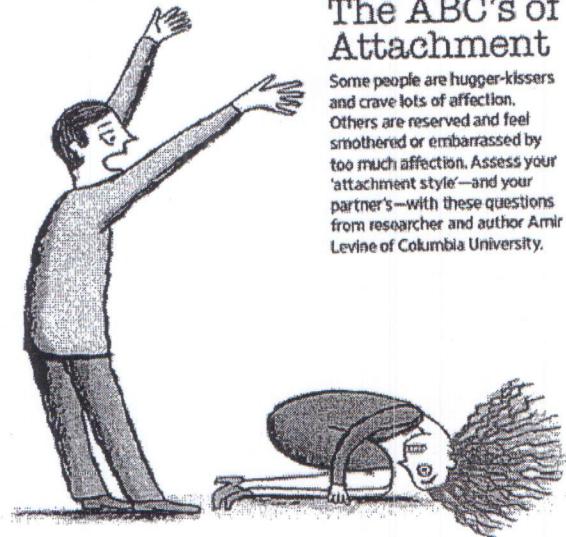
*Men fear being trapped*

How does that show up with her?

With you?

# Show Me the Love...Or Not

Smothering or Standoffish, People Can Be Happy With Their Emotional Opposites



## The ABC's of Attachment

Some people are hugger-kissers and crave lots of affection. Others are reserved and feel smothered or embarrassed by too much affection. Assess your attachment style—and your partner's—with these questions from researcher and author Amir Levine of Columbia University.



Do you tend to shut down during an argument?  
If you feel overwhelmed when bombarded with too much emotion, you may have an Avoidant attachment style.

Does your partner devalue you, jokingly or otherwise, say by getting irritated about the way you eat or joking about your weight?

A partner who focuses on faults and makes unfavorable comparisons with past partners may have an Avoidant attachment style.



Do you feel your partner keeps you at a distance emotionally, physically or both?  
Being irritated or unnerved by too much closeness is a hallmark of the Avoidant attachment style.



Do you feel that you love your partner more than he or she loves you?  
Being constantly on the lookout for signs of rejection is a hallmark of the Anxious attachment style.

## Insecure attachments lead to

### Being over controlled

- Flat affect or constantly cheerful persona
- Attempts to ingratiate people
- Tries to avoid conflict
- High masked dependency
- High social desirability
- Overlap of alcohol and violence
- Some drunk driving arrests
- Chronic resentment
- Attachment pre-occupied
- Avoidant passive aggressive

### Under controlled

- Violent and angry both inside and outside the home
- History of anti social behaviour (theft, fraud, violence)
- High acceptance of violence
- Macho attitudes to violence
- Usually abused physically as a child
- Low empathy
- Can associate with criminal subculture
- Attachment: Dismissing

### Anti Social

- Rarely if ever arise de novo in adulthood
- Heart rate decrease during intimate confrontation
- Early indication through hyper activity, impulsivity Attention deficit disorder
- Recidivist in crimes
- Criminal activity in teens can remain high until mid 40's

### On the Edge

- Emotions tend to spiral out of control, leading to extreme anxiety, sadness, rage, excitement
- Tends to feel unhappy, depressed or despondent
- Tends to feel in-adequate, inferior or a failure
- Tends to feel he will be rejected or abandoned by those who are emotionally significant
- Is unable to soothe or confront self when distressed, requires someone else to be involved
- Tends to feel helpless, powerless, or at the mercy outside of his control
- Tends to be angry (Consciously and unconsciously)
- Tends to be anxious
- Tends to criticism with feelings of rage or humiliation
- Tends to be overly needy or dependent, requires lots of re-assurance or approval
- Tends to feel mis-understood, mistreated or victimized
- Tends to become irrational when emotions stirred up, doesn't function well
- Tends to get into power struggles
- Tends to "catastrophise" often sees problems as unsolvable
- Emotions seem to change rapidly and unpredictably

**To be more secure:** Some of the top researchers in this area, have studied what they call “**security priming**,” which refers to the basic process of “activating” secure attachment in people’s minds.<sup>4,5</sup> This priming is accomplished in a few different ways: 1) having people close their eyes and visualize the experience of being loved and cared for; 2) having people read stories that include characters supporting and caring for each other; and 3) having people view images of others in warm and comforting embraces (especially mothers with infants). When people think about secure attachment in this way they experience a variety of positive psychological changes, including less insecurity, even after they leave the laboratory.<sup>6</sup> “...*those repeatedly primed with attachment security reported more positive relationship expectations, more positive self-views, and less attachment anxiety.*”<sup>7</sup>

Here is the bottom line, and what many psychologists would advise: immerse yourself in secure attachment. Focus your mind on the experience of feeling supported and loved. Spend time around people (family, close friends, and others) who you have observed to be “secure,” and pay attention to how they think, feel, and behave. Their secure tendencies are likely to rub off on you. Keep close by whatever images, proverbs, music (“*Stand by Me*” by Ben E. King is a great example), or stories that remind you of the experience of feeling secure. It may take some time and patience to overcome “clinginess,” but heed Freud’s words of wisdom (paraphrased from the original): You should not strive to eliminate your complexes but to get into accord with them.