**What Is Attachment?**

Throughout life, each of us will form thousands of relationships. These bonds take many forms. Some are enduring and intimate-our dearest friend-while others are transient and superficial-the chatty store clerk. Together, relationships in all forms create the glue of a family, community, and society. This capacity to form and maintain relationships is the most important trait of humankind, for without it none of us would survive, learn, work, or procreate.

The first and most important of all relationships are attachment bonds. Initially, these are created through interactions with our primary caregivers, usually parents. First, relationships help define our capacity for attachment and set the tone for all of our future relationships.

**What are signs and symptoms of developmental or relational attachment trauma?**

Attachments influence the developing brain, which in turn affects future interactions with others, self-esteem, self-control, and the ability to learn and to achieve optimum mental and physical health. Symptoms can include the following:

* Low self esteem
* Needy, clingy or pseudo-independent behavior
* Inability to deal with stress and adversity
* Lack of self-control
* Inability to develop and maintain friendships
* Alienation from and opposition to parents, caregivers, and other authority figures
* Antisocial attitudes and behaviors
* Aggression and violence
* Difficulty with genuine trust, intimacy, and affection
* Negative, hopeless, pessimistic view of self, family and society
* Lack of empathy, compassion and remorse
* Behavioral and academic problems at school
* Speech and language problems
* Incessant chatter and questions
* Difficulty learning
* Anxiety
* Depression
* Apathy
* Susceptibility to chronic illness
* Obsession with food: hordes, gorges, refuses to eat, eats strange things, hides food
* Repetition of the cycle of maltreatment and attachment disorder in their own children when they reach adulthood
* Sensory Processing Disorder

**How Therapy helps?**

We use an approach that combines Eye Movement Desensitization Response (EMDR), Integrative Family Attachment Trauma Protocol (IATP), and Trust Based Relationship Intervention (TBRI©). These are evidence based therapy modalities that provide an approach that heals the entire family, providing behavioral changes that allow the child to improve their emotional regulation skills. The family is guided through a process that involves a series of specific EMDR interventions in addition to parenting strategies to strengthen and build the attachment in the relationships. The parenting strategies are at the foundation of our work, since traditional behavior methods are not a successful approach for children with attachment/trauma challenges.

**FAQ**

Is it Possible for a Biological Child to Have Attachment Challenges?

We have learned through neuroscience that various well-intentioned and unavoidable situations could possibly have a negative impact on the attachment of a child. Necessary medical interventions, chronic ear infections, asthma, stress for the mother during pregnancy, difficult birth, and hospitalization especially in the first three years could affect a child’s ability to trust adults. “Even in utero and after birth, for every moment of every day, our brain is processing the nonstop set of incoming signals from our senses. Sight, sound, touch, smell, taste—all of the raw sensory data that will result in these sensations enter the lower parts of the brain and begin a multistage process of being categorized, compared to previously stored patterns, and ultimately, if necessary, acted upon.” Perry, Bruce D. Dr. [**The** *Boy Who Was Raised As a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook: What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us About Loss, Love and Healing*](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/125120). 2007. Web. Pre-genetic disposition may also impact a child’s emotional development and self-regulation ability, children who are genetically wired to be more anxious may possibly interpret facial expressions and body language in a negative manner. According to Seigel and Hartzell (2003) a parent’s own unresolved issues from their childhood may impact their ability to effectively respond in parenting, causing them to become frozen in their ability to adapt to their own role of caring for their children in a clear and consistent manner. This has the potential to have a generational effect in parenting. We genuinely believe that parents do the best that they can with what they have been given (through their childhood experiences). If parents do not know how to meet their children’s needs because they did not experience this, they need to be shown.

Is it Ever Too Late to Heal Attachment Challenges?

Neuroscience has revealed that brain plasticity is possible throughout life. This provides an opportunity to rewire the brain and the response to relationships. Awareness is such a powerful tool and parents are generally eager to learn, it can be helpful to be shown by someone who has the knowledge either through professional training, research, or experience.  We can learn to re-wire the brain through pattern-repetitive behavior that will forms new connections (new blueprints in our brain). Parenting psycho-education is vital for helping parents learn to attune to their children’s needs, how to regulate them (mind and body) and how to form healthy attachment relationships that will serve as a resiliency factor throughout the lifespan.  Alvarado, (2008) “when relationships hurt, we learn not to trust in relationships, whether at work, school or home.” we work with people to help change the blueprints that people carry with them to form new understanding about people and the world around us.” This is a core belief for our therapists in our center and is the foundation of our work.

Resources

<http://www.attachmentparenting.org/principles/api>

http://www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/understanding-attachment/treatment/

**What is Trauma?**

Traumatization is stress frozen in place –locked into a pattern of neurological distress that doesn’t go away by returning to a state of equilibrium. Traumatization promotes ongoing disability that can take many mental, social, emotional and physical forms. Much like stress, trauma is experienced uniquely by each person. Traumatized children have impaired wiring in the brain’s limbic system and altered levels of stress hormones, resulting in anxiety, depression, and self-regulation problems. Effective treatment and parenting rewires the limbic system and reduces the biochemistry of stress.

What Kinds of Experiences Can be Traumatic?

The ability to recognize emotional trauma has changed radically over the course of history. Until recently psychological trauma was noted only in men after catastrophic wars. The women's movement in the sixties broadened the definition of emotional trauma to include physical and sexual abuse of women and children. Now, the impact of psychological trauma has extended to experiences that include:

* Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, fires, floods, hurricanes, etc.
* Physical assault, including rape, incest, molestation, domestic abuse and serious bodily harm
* Serious accidents, such as automobile or other high-impact scenarios
* Experiencing or witnessing horrific injury, carnage or fatalities

Other often overlooked potential sources of psychological trauma include

* Adoption
* Falls or sports injuries
* Surgery, particularly emergency, and medical interventions especially in first 3 years of life
* Serious illness, especially when accompanied by very high fever
* Neurological disruption caused by experiences in the womb
* Birth trauma
* NICU after birth
* Hearing about violence to or sudden death of someone close
* An auto accident considered minor by adults
* The breakup of a significant relationship
* A humiliating or deeply disappointing experience
* Forced separation very early in life from the primary caregiver
* Chronic mis-attunement of a caregiver to a child's attachment signals ("mal-attachment")
* Moving, changing schools, or change in life circumstances
* Bullying
* Isolation/lack of healthy attachments
* Sudden loud noises for babies or young children
* Recurrent medical issues early in life for example: Ear infections, asthma, seizures, reflux, allergies
* Caregivers with insecure attachment styles of their own or unresolved baggage of their own
* Genetic pre-disposition

## How Therapy can help?

Trauma intervention is needed to allow the brain to process the event to prevent triggers of emotions in the future. All ages can benefit from therapy to process the trauma through neuroscience there is evidence of the plasticity of the brain to heal until death. Trauma is a sensory experience and it is an experience like no other, commonly marked by a state of terror and powerlessness. Individuals of all ages can experience trauma, including infants and children. Even when we do not consciously recall our trauma experiences (because of our age or protective functions such as repression) our body holds the memory, as does our mind. Regardless of the level of perceived intensity of effect on an individual, treatment promotes resilience later in life. Traumatizing events can take a serious emotional toll on those involved, *even if the event did not cause physical damage*.

**ADULT ATTACHMENT ISSUES**

Do you have difficulty in relationships of any kind: friends, lovers, family, colleagues? Does it feel like you can’t get one, can’t seem to keep one or just haven’t found the “right” one? You may have what is called “Adult Attachment Disorder” or simply adult attachment issues. An inability to connect, to form satisfying relationships, has its foundations in our earliest experiences. The quality of our first relationships with our caregivers—whether you felt seen, valued, your needs were met in a loving and timely way—determine our ultimate experience of ourselves, our capacity to feel safe and connect with the world and the quality of our relationships with others.

How Can Therapy Help?

Our evidence-based therapy utilizing Eye Movement Desensitization (EMDR) and Attachment based therapy can help you change the effects of an “adult attachment disorder” with our nurturing processes and experiences within a safe and caring environment. Here we gently and safely guide you to discover your early experiences, beliefs, and coping strategies that keep you from having the love you want or keeping the love you find. EMDR and attachment based therapy goes a lot deeper than talk therapy. The goal is to free a person from the unresolved emotions and triggers so that he or she becomes freer to live in the present. Using EMDR to process traumatic events allows you to work through the emotions and sensory memories stored with them. In re-examining them, you are able to feel those feelings now, work through them now and defuse them once and for all. The released emotional pain is no longer repressed and allowed to fester. You will discover the roots of current relationship issues and heal them at the source, giving you an experience of your authentic self. You will begin to experience yourself as lovable, capable, and worthy and will learn strategies to continue to build your newfound feelings of safety and potential as well as the skills to build healthy relationships and be more successful in every area of your life.

**FAQ**

How Can I Have Attachment Issues – My Parents Loved Me?

Even if your parents loved you, they may not have been capable of meeting your needs. As babies, when we reach out and no one reaches back, when we express needs and no one listens, we often give up. Or if our caregiver is present some of the time and neglectful or abusive at others we become confused and keep reaching, keep hoping someone will be there. In this process, we decide things about ourselves, such as “I must be unlovable” or “something must be wrong with me.” We then begin a lifelong quest to either avoid real intimacy or to find it, but when it shows up, in our desperation, we often unconsciously push it away. This longing and/or dissatisfaction often leads to anxiety, depression, co-dependency, addictions, fear of intimacy, rigidity, and wanting to hurt or be hurt as well as a failure to thrive as adults.

Is it Too Late to Heal My Attachment Challenges?

The brain *remains flexible throughout life*, nonverbal communication retains the capacity to change. Studies in people over age ninety show us images of mature brains that continue to produce new neural pathways at a time when older pathways are dying. The same experiential and social factors that profoundly shape the brain initially can also be instrumental in repairing the causes and symptoms of stress related disorders.

**RESOURCES:**

<http://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/Content/Consumer_Updates/Adult_Attachment_Relationships.aspx>

https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/experimentations/201707/six-ways-developmental-trauma-shapes-adult-identity