

# Attachment Styles

by John Gallagher

## Attachment styles

Secure attachment is a style of relating to others that involves feeling safe and trusting others, while insecure attachment is a style that involves struggling with trust and intimacy. People with a secure attachment style had caregivers in childhood who were attuned to their needs and were consistently available, responsive and dependable. Securely attached children develop self-reflection and empathy. People with insecure attachment styles had caregivers who were unresponsive, dismissive, inconsistent or abusive. There are three types of insecure attachment styles: avoidant, anxious-ambivalent and disorganised. People with an avoidant attachment had consistently unavailable, unresponsive, insensitive, rejecting or punitive caregivers. Avoidant people conceal their distress, avoid intimacy and do not express their feelings and needs. People with an anxious-ambivalent attachment had caregivers who were inconsistent or unpredictably responsive and attuned to their needs. As a result, anxious-ambivalent people tend to escalate their distress, fear abandonment and are insecure and clingy in relationships. People with disorganised attachment experienced their caregivers as a source of needs satisfaction and danger. They lack an integrated self and struggle with emotional regulation due to psychological trauma or sexual abuse. Secure, avoidant and anxious are organised attachment styles as they are consistent patterns of beliefs and behaviours. Disorganised attachment style is inconsistent and unpredictable. Attachment styles are not fixed and can reconfigure depending on whom we are with and our environment. However, we generally have a predominant attachment style which unconsciously drives our perceptions, attitudes and behaviour. Moreover, our innate temperament (Big Five Personality Types) will also influence our attachment style. And I believe our cognitive preferences (Myers-Briggs Personality Types) also influence our attachment style.

## Secure (I'm okay, your okay)

- Have experienced consistent attunement and satisfaction of needs
- Good enough and consistent parenting
- Positive thoughts about self and others
- Regulated and spontaneous
- Balance between autonomy and seeking support
- Positive self-concept and trusting of others
- Emotional health, resilience, positive affect, concentration
- Social confidence and initiative
- Comfortable with intimacy and autonomy
- Maintains healthy boundaries
- Can recount their childhood experiences in a coherent manner

## Avoidant / Avoidant-Dismissive (I'm okay, your not okay)

- Have experienced emotional neglect
- Dismissive or controlling parenting
- Positive thoughts about self and negative thoughts about others
- Over-regulated and self-reliant
- Superficial self-esteem and rigid autonomy
- Detached from socio-emotional right brain

Cut off from feelings and preference for rationalisation (disembodied mind)  
Mistrust of others, distances from people, isolates  
Deactivating strategies, over-regulated, distress concealing  
Overt Narcissism, Obsessive, Schizoid  
Inflated self-worth compensating unconscious feelings of inferiority  
They appear to be coping but hide their distress  
Difficulty trusting other people  
Push people away  
Counter-dependence on others

### **Anxious-Ambivalent (I'm not okay, your okay)**

Negative thoughts about self and positive thoughts about others  
Inconsistent parenting  
Displays considerable distress when separated from a parent or caregiver but does not seem reassured or comforted by the parent's return (ambivalence)  
Preoccupied with the proximity of the caregiver  
Self-doubting and fearful of autonomy  
Overwhelmed by feelings  
Hyperactivating strategies, under-regulated, distress alerting  
Attention-seeking and rejecting  
Seeks closeness with and reliance on others  
Clinging and resentful  
Histrionic  
Covert narcissism, unconscious superiority  
Fear of abandonment  
Constant need for assurance  
Pro-dependence on others

### **Disorganized / Fearful-Avoidant / Unresolved (I'm not okay, your not okay)**

Negative thoughts about self and others  
Abusive and unpredictable parenting  
Parents have a childhood history of disorganized attachment  
Behaviours associated with anxious and avoidant attachment styles.  
Dissociation, PTSD  
Put up walls to protect themselves  
Don't trust others  
Hypervigilant

### **Parenting styles**

Parenting styles are transmitted unconsciously from one generation to the next. We introject the attitudes and behaviours of our parents and repeat these patterns with our own children. If we have an insecure attachment style, we probably have or had a parent with an insecure attachment who never experienced good enough care and attunement in their childhood. Therefore, their ability to become an emotionally mature and responsive parent was compromised. We can break the link in the chain of insecure attachment by cultivating self-awareness and striving to develop a healthy relationship with ourselves and healthy

relationships with others. We may need to experience being in a supportive and healthy relationship with a caring person or a therapist. This is known as earned secure attachment.

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