

Attachment Style Guide

(Prepared for Whiz Kids Trauma Awareness Training)

SECURE Attachment Behaviors:

- comfortable being alone
- comfortable in close relationships
- enjoys connection with others as well as time alone
- ability to regulate emotions
- ability to seek emotional support
- can ask for help when needed
- reflective about their interactions with others
- easily trusting others; assumes others have positive intentions
- easy to connect with
- selfless and generous = ability to be emotionally available
- effective communication skills
- ability to manage conflict well
- high self-esteem = confident and decisive
- has a sense of their preferences and what feels right to them
- ability to set boundaries
- can tolerate loss or disconnection to stay true to themselves

*People with **SECURE** attachment, as children, typically had...*

- Caregiver(s) who were responsive, consistent, sensitive & emotionally attuned
- These children are generally more likely to see others as supportive and helpful and themselves as competent and worthy of respect.
- As adults, they are more likely to be satisfied with their relationships, feeling secure and connected to their partners without feeling the need to be together all the time. Their relationships are likely to feature honesty, support, independence, and deep emotional connections.

AVOIDANT Attachment Behaviors:

- Checking out mentally during stressful conversations
- Pulling away when things are going well
- Considering change as a way to introduce insecurity into a relationship or situation
- Idealizing past situations
- Complaining of being controlled, smothered, suffocated and/or that a relationship is too needy or demanding
- Often rejecting the attempts of others to nurture, help or give.

*People with **AVOIDANT** attachment, as children, typically had...*

- Caregiver(s) who were emotionally and/or physically distant, disengaged, unavailable or rejecting
- These children are less effective in managing stressful situations. They are likely to withdraw and resist seeking help
- They tend to distance themselves from others to reduce emotional stress

- As adults, they often “shut down” emotionally when a potentially hurtful scenario arises. They may insist on maintaining their independence and isolate from others

Strategies with **AVOIDANT** Attachment:

- **Stop chasing:** This will feel completely counter-intuitive because it probably seems like your chasing is the only thing keeping the connection. The reality is that your anxiety, whether warranted or not, feels engulfing to the other. Creating some space can give the other a chance to become less reactive and hopefully more connected.
- Don't rely on the choices of the other to ease your anxiety. **Connect with your own support system to help with your fear.** Trusting that you are going to be ok no matter what happens with the other will help tremendously.
- **Learn to communicate** to the other what you think they are feeling and why. This way of communicating can provide an emotional mirror that will help the avoidant person gain more personal awareness.
- **Understand** that if you want deep connection in this relationship, you may be working with someone who will have great difficulty reciprocating.
- **Recognize** that when the avoidant person shuts down and becomes dismissive that means they are anxious and are trying to clamp down on the experienced emotions. It's not about you, don't take it personally.

Practice Integrating Your Brain

Avoidant Attachment:

- ▷ Become aware of non-verbal signals. Try watching TV without the sound on.
- ▷ Build autobiographical memories. Write down the details of what you did today.
- ▷ Pay attention to any desires you have to be closer to people in your life. Reach out to another person to express your feelings of wanting to connect.

AMBIVALENT Attachment Behaviors:

- Anxiously attached people tend to seek approval and reassurance from others but seldom find relief.
- Anxiously attached people are often **self-critical** and **insecure**; maintaining the deep-seated belief that they will be rejected by those around them. This belief causes them to be **emotionally desperate**, often becoming angry and resentful when others don't reassure them enough.
- Anxiously attached people may vacillate between angry outbursts and pleas for forgiveness and support. This typically contributes to other's distancing behaviors and creates a **pursuer-distancer** dynamic that reinforces feelings of rejection and engulfment.
- Anxiously attached people tend to have **difficulty asking** for what they want from others. They give up important parts of themselves for the sake of maintaining the relationship at all costs but then become **bitter and resentful** of others when this happens.

People with **AMBIVALENT** attachment, as children, typically had...

- Caregiver(s) who were inconsistent, alternating behavior between responsive, neglectful, and intrusive.
- These children lack self-confidence and stick close to their primary caregivers.
- They may display exaggerated emotional reactions and keep their distance from their peers.
- As adults, they may feel desperate for love or affection and feel that their partner must “complete” them or fix their problems. While they long for safety and security in their romantic relationships, they may also be acting in ways that push their partner away rather than invite them in.

Strategies with **AMBIVALENT** Attachment:

- **Validate** how they are feeling, even if what they are feeling is irrational. Anxiously attached folks tend to feel crazy already, invalidating their feelings only makes it worse.
- **Lean into the relationship.** It may feel like the person is a black hole of neediness that you have to escape but running from this particular black hole will only cause it to expand. Be clear about when you are accessible and available and when you are not. Be consistent in upholding your own boundaries.
- **Stand firm.** The more you run the more they will chase. Set clear boundaries in a loving empathic manner. Statements like “I want _____ too but when you do _____ it makes it difficult for me” can help the other better understand their role in things.

Practice Integrating Your Brain

Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment:

- ▷ Cultivate the ability to name your internal emotional states (“name it to tame it”). Simply describe what you feel, you don’t need to explain it.
- ▷ Write in a journal. Use your left hemispheres drive to tell a logical, linear, language-based story.
- ▷ Pay attention to when your attachments system goes into overdrive. Focus on keeping an internal state of calm at these times.

DISORGANIZED Attachment Behaviors:

- Feel fear and anxiety when forming close relationships; Untrusting
- Suffer from negative self-image and extremely damaging self-talk
- Often feel intense loneliness because of a genuine desire to connection but a stress and fear response when acting out of that desire
- Often results in erratic behavior that drives away potential connection
- Can work hard towards a goal then feel very vulnerable when they achieve it
- Struggle with sabotaging positive experiences that follow a different narrative than past abuse
- Can see signs of rejection when none exists
- Doesn’t have cohesive, coherent stories about themselves or relationships
- Unhealthy ways of self-soothing; can demonstrate hostile or aggressive behaviors under stress

People with **DISORGANIZED** attachment, as children, typically had...

- Caregiver(s) who were extreme, erratic (moods, rules); frightening in some way, ignored or didn't see child's needs.
- They fail to develop an organized strategy for coping with separate distress, and tend to display aggression, disruptive behaviors and social isolation.
- They are more likely to see others as threats than sources of support.
- As adults, they generally try to avoid their feelings because it is easy to get overwhelmed by them. They can experience unpredictable or abrupt mood swings and fear getting hurt by a romantic partner. They can be simultaneously drawn to a partner or potential partner and fearful of getting too close.

Strategies with **DISORGANIZED** Attachment:

- **Model secure relating style**; narrate your thinking around the behavior of others and how you respond
- **Notice their negative self-talk** and look for contradictory past examples you can mirror back to them
- **Be consistent** with your words, actions and boundaries much like you would see to be with a toddler or young child. This helps offer containment—something a person with disorganized attachment likely did not have from caregivers growing up.
- **Notice** when they feel safe, relaxed and calm and share these observations with him/her to help them know themselves
- **Observe** trends when they feel fearful or negative and help them connect the dots of what is triggering for them
- Encourage them to build a toolbox of **self-regulating behaviors** that are good for them
- “It makes a lot of sense that if _____ was true in the past you would feel/want/need/decide _____ when _____ happens.”

Practice Integrating Your Brain

Disorganized Attachment:

- ▷ Keep a journal and be sure to write about times when you feel triggered or your internal world may feel fragmented.
- ▷ When investigating your past, try to use the RAIN approach: recognize the trauma or loss, accept that it has occurred and may be in a state of being unresolved, investigate the nature of the experience in our past and present lives, and have non-identification with the experiences (meaning the events don't define you).
- ▷ SIFT. Pay attention to your sensations, feelings, thoughts and images, as they arise.

Sources: <https://www.michaelhilgerslpc.com/anxious-attachment-style/>

Commonly Known As:

Secure

Positive Sense of Self
Positive View of Others
(Trusts Self & Trusts Others)

Comfortable with Intimacy &
Autonomy



Also Called:

Ambivalent/Clingy

Negative Sense of Self
Positive View of Others
(Untrusting of Self but Trusts Others)

Preoccupied with Relationships

Low Anxiety of Abandonment

High Anxiety of Abandonment

High Proximity Seeking

Low Proximity Seeking



Peppermint Patty

Secure



Lucy van Pelt

Preoccupied

Schroeder



Dismissing

Charlie Brown



Fearful

Also Called:

Avoidant/Anxious Avoidant

Positive Sense of Self
Negative View of Others
(Trusts Self but Untrusting of Others)

Dismissing of Intimacy &
Strongly Independent



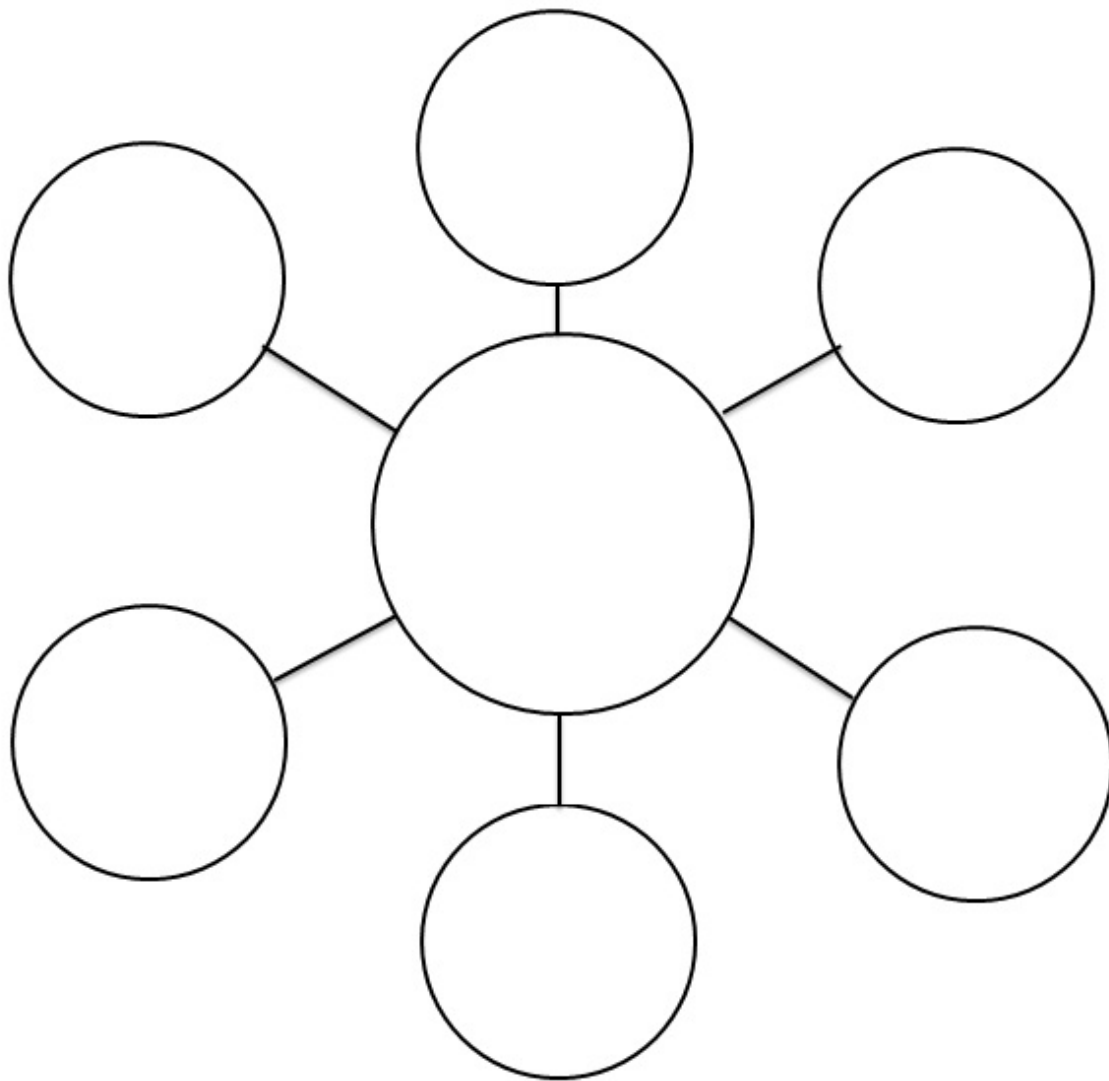
Also Called:

Disorganized; Anxious Fearful

Negative Sense of Self
Negative View of Others
(Untrusting of Self & Others)

Fearful of Intimacy & Socially
Avoidant





Child Attachment Pattern	Parenting Tendencies	Child's Wired Assumptions
Secure	<i>Secure</i> attachment pattern: Sensitive, attuned, responsive to baby's bid for connection; an ability to read child's cues and predictably meet child's needs. Parent reliably "shows up" for child.	My parent isn't perfect, but I know I am safe. If I have a need she will see it and respond quickly and sensitively. I can trust that other people will do that, too. My inner experience is real and worthy of being expressed and respected.
<i>Insecure: Avoidant</i>	<i>Dismissing</i> attachment pattern: Indifference to child's signals and needs; lack of attunement to child's emotional needs.	My parent may be around a lot, but he doesn't care about what I need or how I feel, so I'll learn to ignore my own emotions and avoid communicating my needs.
<i>Insecure: Ambivalent</i>	<i>Preoccupied</i> attachment pattern: Sometimes attuned, sensitive, and responsive to child's signals and needs, and sometimes not. Sometimes intrusive.	I never know how my parent will respond, so I have to stay constantly on edge. I can't ever let my guard down. I can't trust that people will predictably be there for me.
<i>Insecure: Disorganized</i>	<i>Unresolved</i> attachment pattern: At times severely unattuned to child's signals and needs; disorienting; either frightening, frightened, or both.	My parent is terrifying and disorienting. I'm not safe, and there is no one to keep me safe. I don't know what to do. I am helpless. People are scary and unreliable.

The Seven Desires of Every Heart

Mark and Debra Laaser

Desires

How these desires are triggered.

Heard and Understood

Listened to, i.e. Feelings, Needs, Struggles and Opinions

Those not heard or understood growing up may struggle to find their voice. To be able to speak about what they feel, need or desire, OR they may talk a lot.

Affirmed

Approved of who we are and what we do.

Those who didn't get affirmed struggle to know if they ever got things right. Any criticism, however constructive, might take them back to guilt feelings of always being wrong. Even if complimented, they might not believe it.

Blessed

Special because of who we are; loved for who we are. We don't have to do anything.

The lack of blessing causes shame and a constant need to find blessing - i.e. the need for approval, but it never seems to accomplish the desired result. Others are put off by their self-centeredness and complaints.

Safe

Free from fear and anxiety. Free to explore the world and take new risks.

Growing up with a lack of safety creates feelings of fear and anxiety in the present. People will get triggered by any perception on their part that things are not safe. Perception is key - Perceiving danger when not.

Touched

Attributes to well-being. Safe, non-sexual touch. Sexual touch is the energy inside us to be productive, passionate and creative.

Lack of healthy touch leads to chronic touch deprivation. When people long deprived of touch relate to others who do not touch they feel unloved and unsupported. When a spouse says no to sex they get deep abandonment triggers.

Chosen

Selected, chosen for a special relationship. Accepted, desired. The desire to be desired. Marriage is the desire to be passionately desired.

Not being chosen leaves wounds of feeling unattractive and unlikable. People with such wounds constantly compare themselves to others; anyone perceived to look or act better or achieved successful things will trigger unworthiness. Won't believe compliments.

Included

Belonging; Broader than chosen we long to belong, to be in community. We long to be a part of something larger than ourselves. Gives sense of well-being, security.

Those not included as children may spend their adult lives constantly trying to fit in or avoiding social situations altogether. Not being invited triggers feelings of pain. Trying to fit in they will say yes when they mean no.

When we confuse the desire to be affirmed with the desire to be blessed, we wind up thinking that the way to get blessed is to do things. We try to earn a blessing or prove our value.

We are born needing to hear...

I am beloved; cherished, precious, loved greatly.

I am lovable; attractive, deserving love and affectionate.

I am adequate; fully sufficient, fit, suitable.

I am uniquely gifted; one of a kind, special talent.

I am worthy; adequate, great merit, character or value.

I have purpose - the reason for which something exists; an intended or desired result, end, aim, goal.

GOAL : Name the trigger, trace it back to the origin, make a choice in the present.

3 Stages of Response to Loss

John Bowlby,
British Psychologist,
Attachment & Loss Theory

Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider, *Why Does Patriarchy Persist?* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018)

As relational, responsive creatures, we resist disruptions in connection and move to repair. Protest is functional anger of hope. Rupture is inevitable and healthy attachment is constituted by a capacity to **repair**.
([Still-Face Experiment](#)) Dr. Edward Tronick



Protest



Despair



Detachment

Despair: Loss of trust in the possibility of relationship following rupture/ separation.

Detachment: Trauma response. Mal-adaptive and harmful to self and others. Irreparable rupturing of relation gives way to defensive disconnection from relationship and parts of ourselves.

John Bowlby's Attachment Theory



Protest – when separated initially, the child protests by crying, calling out, and searching for the lost person

Despair – as the period of separation continues, the child shows signs of feeling hopeless that the mother will ever return

Detachment – final step, child emotionally separates self from the mother. Child responds in an indifferent manner when mom returns.

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Incarcerated Relative



Mother treated violently



Substance Abuse



Divorce