ADULT ATTACHMENT STYLES

REFERENCE GUIDE

Secure

Avoidant

Ambivalent

Disorganized

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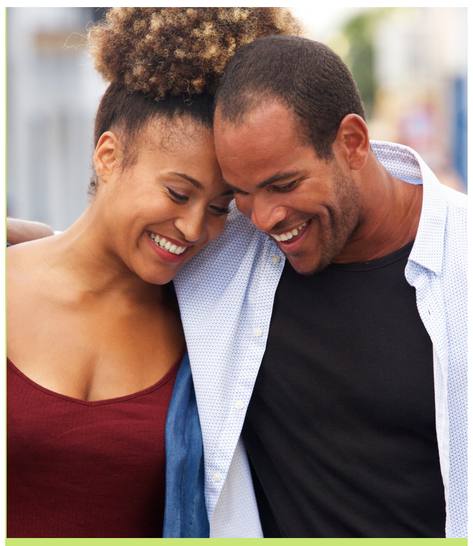
Use this this handy reference guide to better understand how each of the four attachment styles presents in a clinical setting for adult relationships.

The attached chart maps each attachment style to a variety of defining characteristics and traits.

Please note that when using this chart as a guide, it's important to remember that attachment styles fall on a spectrum (from low to severe) and can be changeable, depending upon the factors and conditions of relational distress.

The good news, is that all styles can learn secure attachment skills for healthier relationships.

	SECURE	AVOIDANT (DISMISSIVE)	AMBIVALENT (PREOCCUPIED)	DISORGANIZED (FEARFUL-AVOIDANT)
PRESENTING CHARACTERISTICS [how an individual relates within the context of an adult relationship]	• Attuned, present, safe • Easy flow between connection & aloneness • Playful • Practices repair • Expresses needs • Loving touch and eye gaze	• Disconnected, non-emotional • Lacks co-regulation • Alienated, existence issues • Lack of belonging • Abrupt • Isolated (loner) • Distress with closeness	• Craves connection, simultaneously pushes others away • Ignores caring behaviors • Lack of self-soothing • Fear of abandonment • Difficulty trusting • Misreads cues (negatively) • Separation distress	• Sudden state shifts • Extreme dysregulation • Situational or chronic • Mix of avoidant & ambivalent • Chaotic, acts out • Views relationships as dangerous • When extreme (or severe), personality disorder
CAREGIVER PATTERNS [primary caregiver's response to child's distress]	• Attuned, present, safe • Repairs mis-attunement • Aligns with a child's state • Active listening • Comfortable with connection and individuation • Reflects cues correctly • Consistent responsiveness • Protective	• Vacant, not present • Rejecting • Only present when tasking • Doesn't relate emotionally • Not attuned to needs • Regularly non-responsive • Closeness begets withdrawal	• Role reversal • On-again/off-again parenting • Intrusive, no boundaries • Intermittent reward • Self-absorbed, preoccupied with own attachment wounds • Inconsistent responsiveness	• Set up to fail • Threatening • Triggered by unresolved trauma • Chaotic, confusing • Abusive (emotional, physical and/or sexual) • Punishing, shaming • Mix of non-responsive and inconsistent

NARRATIVE STYLE [how an individual articulates or tells the facts and events of their life]	• Easy to follow • Engaged and engaging • Flow, coherent, vivid, alive • Emotionally nuanced • Authentic	• Few words • Lacks emotional vividness • Factual • Positive • Focuses on future & denies past wounds	• Overuse of words • Overly emotional • Negative complaints • Mixes past/present tenses • Pressure to speak	• Loss of voice & word recall • Gaps, long pauses & mix of tenses • Incoherent, hard to follow
OBJECT RELATIONS [how an individual views themselves internally in relation to others]				
	Many Positive Pairs	**Overfocus on SELF**	**Overfocus on OTHER**	**Scared and/ or Frozen SELF**
BRAIN DOMINANCE [predominant processing]	• Integrated • Flow of energy & info between left & right hemispheres	• Oriented to the left hemisphere • Focused on the future • Logic, reason	• Oriented to the right hemisphere • Stuck in the past • May flood with emotions	• Lack of linkage in the Associative Cortex • Amgydala often stuck in trauma
CORRECTIVE EXPERIENCES [how an indiviual overcomes previously held or distorted beliefs]	• Easy recovery from conflict • Relaxation in the relational field • Unflappability	• *Kind Eyes* exercise to heal attachment gaze • *Welcome to the World* exercise to be met, celebrated & restore belonging	• Develop a sense of Self, so not so lost in the Other • Practice receiving • Connect consistency & caring behaviors	• Clarity vs. confusion • *Competent Protector Safety* exercise • Untangle survivel instinct from the love / attachment system

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