



INTEGRATE TO LIVE

Restore Resilience. Cultivate Community. Impact your World

Week 23 Transcript: Adult Attachment Style

This week, we are taking a focused look at the ways our history is defined in distinctive relational patterns. In adult attachment theory, researcher Mary Ainsworth identified four different attachment styles that we can develop as children and carry over into adulthood.

These adult attachment styles are Secure attachment, Insecure avoidant attachment, Insecure anxious/ambivalent attachment and Insecure disorganized attachment.

Children who have secure attachment experience behavior from a parent or caregiver that leave them feeling like the world is a safe and mostly predictable place.

They feel connected and understood because their parent or caregiver attuned to and resonated with their feelings.

The mirror neurons of the child perceive the intention of concern and care. This leaves them feeling loved. They can return to emotional equilibrium and have confidence to explore the world without fear.

When these children become adults they appear good at relationships, not a pushover but not too dominant and willing to resolve conflicts.

A secure child becomes a free adult.

Children who have avoidant attachment experience behavior from a parent or caregiver that is emotionally unavailable. Needs can be met, like being fed, getting homework done, and getting dressed for school, but the emotional needs of the child are not attended to.

When they express emotional distress, they are often told, "You'll be fine". They learn early that sending up emotional flares get little to no response, so they become dismissive of feelings and believe they lack value.

The mirror neurons of the child perceive the lack of intent or desire from the caregiver to see, know, empathize with or understand them.



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Avoidantly attached individuals feel alone on their island, looking out asking, “is anyone out there?” “can anyone see me?” Instead of attuning to their own emotions they ignore them, and find different ways to cope with the stressors of life like avoiding emotional closeness.

They have needs to connect relationally, just like the rest of us, but dismiss them along with all of their other needs. Distance becomes the go-to behavior to calm down their nervous system.

When these children become adults they appear steady, composed, easy-going and intentional. But, they have an underdeveloped right hemisphere of the brain, where we translate and interpret emotional signals.

An insecure-avoidant child becomes a dismissive adult.

Children who have anxious/ambivalent attachment experience behavior from a parent or caregiver that is invasive and inconsistent. These guardians often inaccurately read the child’s needs and run to their aid when they’re fine and then completely ignore their cries for help.

The mirror neurons of the child perceive anxiety, fear and doubt when they express their needs. This is really confusing. Sometimes the child gets their needs met, sometimes they don’t.

Sometimes Mom is a great listener, sometimes Mom can’t calm down enough to offer any kind of helpful support. The child gets the sense that it’s “all about Mom (or Dad or whomever)” and they need to make sure everyone’s OK so that they, in turn, can feel OK.

As the child is discerning if it’s a safe or dangerous world, this unpredictability creates anxiety, uncertainty and a push/pull response.

The child is there to meet their caregivers needs and help them feel better. Caring for the needs of others becomes the go-to behavior to calm their nervous system down.



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When these children become adults they appear anxious, people pleasing, preoccupied and focused on others. They ruminate on what others must be thinking of them and are easily flooded with right brain processing – overwhelmed with fear, doubt and indecision.

Tracking their own emotions becomes complicated because they are over-developed in tracking the emotions of others.

An insecure-anxious/ambivalent child becomes a preoccupied adult.

Children who have disorganized attachment experience behavior from a parent or caregiver that is frightening, disorienting and harmful. This creates a very fragmented experience as the adult figure who is supposed to protect them is the one who is intending harm.

The mirror neurons of the child perceive fear and fury and it leaves them disconnected.

When these children become adults they appear disjointed, disorganized and chaotic. In some cases, they may be abusive toward others or substances and exhibit emotional reactivity and mental disorders.

An insecure-disorganized child becomes an adult with unresolved pain.

Our temperament, and our care-givers response or reaction to it, influences the attachment style we develop. This explains why some siblings have very different experiences growing up in the same home.

Our attachment patterns can be specific to our individual relationships with each parent. Meaning, I can be securely attached to one parent and insecurely attached to the other.

Having an insecure attachment style doesn't mean our parents didn't love us. How they respond to our signals and needs is greatly influenced by how their relational patterns were developed through the care and nurture they received from their parents and guardians.



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The use of distinctions and labels is not meant to limit or define our possibilities. Re-wiring these circuits and bringing integration and healing is both hopeful and possible.

We are not stuck with the relational patterns we developed. We can create more adaptive patterns that lead to more resilient relationships.

I have confidence that as we identify ourselves in these categories we can grow in understanding and awareness. This empowers us to intentionally implement new ways of relating.

Let's get curious this week as we take in these new concepts and ideas. Be sure to download the action guide to support this process and share what you are learning on our group page.