

Attached: The New Science of Adult Attachment and How It Can Help You Find—and Keep—Love

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Attachment theory is a vast and complex field of research that pertains to child development and parenting as well as to romantic relationships. In this book we limit ourselves to romantic attachment and romantic relationships.

Introduction The New Science of Adult Attachment

after a few weeks I lose interest and start to feel trapped. It shouldn't be this hard to find someone I'm compatible with.

Each case seems unique and personal; each stems from an endless number of possible root causes.

But while Greg's behavior presented me with ample evidence of his dissatisfaction, he interspersed pushing me away with just enough affection and apologies to keep me from breaking up with him.

Basically, secure people feel comfortable with intimacy and are usually warm and loving; anxious people crave intimacy, are often preoccupied with their relationships, and tend to worry about their partner's ability to love them back; avoidant people equate intimacy with a loss of independence and constantly try to minimize closeness.

In addition, people with each of these attachment styles differ in: their view of intimacy and togetherness the way they deal with conflict their attitude toward sex their ability to communicate their wishes and needs their expectations from their partner and the relationship

Just over 50 percent are secure, around 20 percent are anxious, 25 percent are avoidant, and the remaining 3 to 5 percent fall into the fourth, less common category (combination anxious and avoidant).

In fact, one of the main messages of this theory is that in romantic situations, we are programmed to act in a predetermined manner.

Today, however, we know that attachment styles in adulthood are influenced by a variety of factors, one of which is the way our parents cared for us, but other factors also come into play, including our life experiences.

It predicted his distancing, his finding fault in Tamara, his initiating fights that set back any progress in their relationship, and his enormous difficulty in saying “ I love you. ” Intriguingly, the research findings explained that though he wanted to be close to her, he felt compelled to push her away — not because he wasn’t “ into her ” or because he thought “ she’s not good enough ” (as Tamara had concluded). On the contrary, he pushed her away because he felt the closeness and intimacy increasing.

Although it’s not impossible for someone to change his or her attachment style — on average, one in four people do so over a four - year period — most people are unaware of the issue, so these changes happen without their ever knowing they have occurred (or why).

Attachment theory is based on the assertion that the need to be in a close relationship is embedded in our genes.

This mechanism, called the attachment system, consists of emotions and behaviors that ensure that we remain safe and protected by staying close to our loved ones. The mechanism explains why a child parted from his or her mother becomes frantic, searches wildly, or cries uncontrollably until he or she reestablishes contact with her. These reactions are coined protest behavior, and we all still exhibit them as grown - ups.

In a very dangerous environment, it would be less advantageous to invest time and energy in just one person because he or she would not likely be around for too long; it would make more sense to get less attached and move on (and hence, the avoidant attachment style). Another option in a harsh environment is to act in the opposite manner and be intensely persistent and hypervigilant about staying close to your attachment figure (hence, the anxious attachment style). In a more peaceful setting, the intimate bonds formed by investing greatly in a particular individual would yield greater benefits for both the individual and his or her offspring (hence, the secure attachment style).

People with a secure attachment style know how to communicate their own expectations and respond to their partner’s needs effectively without having to resort to protest behavior.

There are specific applications for people who are dating, those in early stages of relationships, and those who are in long - term ones, for people going through a breakup or those who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

Adult attachment theory teaches us that Karen’s basic assumption, that she can and should control her emotional needs and soothe herself in the face of stress, is simply wrong.

Getting attached means that our brain becomes wired to seek the support of our partner by ensuring the partner’s psychological and physical proximity. If our partner fails to reassure us, we are programmed to continue our attempts to achieve closeness until the partner does.

Attachment principles teach us that most people are only as needy as their unmet needs. When their emotional needs are met, and the earlier the better, they usually turn their attention outward. This is sometimes referred to in attachment literature as the “ dependency paradox ”: The more effectively dependent people are on one another, the more independent and daring they become.

Karen’s self - blaming view of herself as too needy and Tim’s obliviousness to his attachment role are not surprising and not really their fault. After all, we live in a culture that seems to scorn basic needs for intimacy, closeness, and especially dependency, while exalting independence. We tend to accept this attitude as truth — to our detriment.

The common belief was that a proper distance should be maintained between parents and their children, and that physical affection should be doled out sparingly. In *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, a popular parenting book in the 1920s, John Broadus Watson warned against the dangers of “ too much mother love ”

Before the groundbreaking work of Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby, the founders of attachment theory in the fifties and sixties, psychologists had no appreciation of the importance of the bond between parent and child.

Your happiness is something that should come from within and should not be dependent on your lover or mate. Your well - being is not their responsibility, and theirs is not yours. Each person needs to look after himself or herself. In addition, you should learn not to allow your inner peace to be disturbed by the person you are closest to. If your partner acts in a way that undermines your sense of security, you should be able to distance yourself from the situation emotionally, “ keep the focus on yourself, ” and stay on an even keel. If you can’t do that, there might be something wrong with you. You might be too enmeshed with the other person, or “ codependent, ” and you must learn to set better “ boundaries. ” The basic premise underlying this point of view is that the ideal relationship is one between two self - sufficient people who unite in a mature, respectful way while maintaining clear boundaries.

The worst possible scenario is that you will end up needing your partner, which is equated with “ addiction ” to him or her, and addiction, we all know, is a dangerous prospect.

Numerous studies show that once we become attached to someone, the two of us form one physiological unit. Our partner regulates our blood pressure, our heart rate, our breathing, and the levels of hormones in our blood.

Normally, under stressful conditions the hypothalamus becomes activated. And indeed this is what happened in the experiment to the women when they were alone awaiting the shock — their hypothalamus lit up. Next, they tested the women who were holding a stranger’s hand while they waited. This time the scans showed somewhat reduced activity in the hypothalamus.

And when the hand that the women held was their husband's ? The dip was much more dramatic — their stress was barely detectable. Furthermore, the women who benefited most from spousal hand - holding were those who reported the highest marital satisfaction — but we'll get back to this point later.

How can we be expected to maintain a high level of differentiation between ourselves and our partners if our basic biology is influenced by them to such an extent ?

Well before brain imaging technology was developed, John Bowlby understood that our need for someone to share our lives with is part of our genetic makeup and has nothing to do with how much we love ourselves or how fulfilled we feel on our own.

He discovered that once we choose someone special, powerful and often uncontrollable forces come into play. New patterns of behavior kick in regardless of how independent we are and despite our conscious wills. Once we choose a partner, there is no question about whether dependency exists or not. It always does. An elegant coexistence that does not include uncomfortable feelings of vulnerability and fear of loss sounds good but is not our biology.

Despite variations in the way people with different attachment styles learn to deal with these powerful forces — the secure and anxious types embrace them and the avoidants tend to suppress them — all three attachment styles are programmed to connect with a special someone. In fact, chapter 6 describes a series of experiments that demonstrate that avoidants have attachment needs but actively suppress them.

Paradoxically, the opposite is true ! It turns out that the ability to step into the world on our own often stems from the knowledge that there is someone beside us whom we can count on — this is the “ dependency paradox. ”

If you want to take the road to independence and happiness, find the right person to depend on and travel down it with that person.

She found that having an attachment figure in the room was enough to allow a child to go out into a previously unknown environment and explore with confidence. This presence is known as a **secure base**. It is the knowledge that you are backed by someone who is supportive and whom you can rely on with 100 percent certainty and turn to in times of need. A secure base is a prerequisite for a child's ability to explore, develop, and learn.

When participants felt that their goals were supported by their partner, they reported an increase in self - esteem and an elevated mood after the discussion. They also rated higher the likelihood of achieving their goals after the discussion than before it. Participants who felt that their partner was more intrusive and / or less supportive, on the other hand, were less open to discussing their goals, did not confidently examine ways for achieving those goals, and tended to downgrade their goals during the course of the discussion.

It seems, then, that our partners powerfully affect our ability to thrive in the world. There is no way around that. Not only do they influence how we feel about ourselves but also the degree to which we believe in ourselves and whether we will attempt to achieve our hopes and dreams.

Part One Your Relationship Toolkit—Deciphering Attachment Styles

two dimensions essentially determine attachment styles: Your comfort with intimacy and closeness (or the degree to which you try to avoid intimacy). Your anxiety about your partner's love and attentiveness and your preoccupation with the relationship.

When you start dating someone new, however, you aren't likely to whip out our quiz and start grilling your date about his or her past relationships.

The attitudes that people display toward intimacy and closeness and the degree to which they are preoccupied with their relationships determine their attachment style.

In dating situations, your thinking will shift from “ Does he or she like me ? ” to “ Is this someone I should invest in emotionally ? Is he or she capable of giving me what I need ? ” Going forward with a relationship will become about choices you have to make.

Sends mixed signals. Seems distant and aloof yet vulnerable at the same time (which you find irresistible).

Devalues you (or previous partners) — even if only jokingly. Jokes about how lousy you are at reading maps or how “ cute ” it is that you're roly - poly.

Doesn't make his / her intentions clear — leaves you guessing as to his / her feelings. Stays with you for a long time but doesn't say “ I love you. ”

Reliable and consistent. Phones when s / he says s / he'll phone.

Makes decisions with you (not unilaterally). Discusses plans, doesn't like to decide without hearing your opinion first. Makes plans that take your preferences into account. Doesn't assume s / he knows best.

Flexible view of relationships. Isn't looking for a particular type of partner;, e.g., a certain age or appearance.

Not afraid of commitment or dependency. Doesn't worry that you are trying to impinge on his / her territory or freedom.

Doesn't view relationship as hard work. Doesn't talk about how much compromise and effort a relationship takes.

Closeness creates further closeness (rather than distancing). After an emotional or revealing conversation, reassures you and is there for you. Doesn't suddenly get cold feet !

Naturally expresses feelings for you. Usually tells you early on how s / he feels about you. Uses those three words " I love you " generously.

Wants a lot of closeness in the relationship. Agrees to go on joint vacations, move in together, or spend all your time together early in relationship (although might not initiate it). Likes a great deal of physical contact (holding hands, caressing, kissing).

Plays games to keep your attention / interest.

Acts out — instead of trying to resolve the problem between you. Threatens to leave during an argument (but later changes his / her mind). Doesn't express his / her needs but eventually acts upset about an accumulation of hurts.

Research shows that avoidants hardly ever date one another. They simply lack the glue that keeps things together.

They have an innate understanding of what a romantic partnership means — namely, that your partner's well - being is your own and vice versa.

This does sound daunting, but before you call it quits, it is important to know that if you're sensitive and nurturing enough to calm their fears — which is very doable — you will win a greatly loving and devoted partner. Once you are receptive to their basic needs for warmth and security, their sensitivity can become an asset; they'll be very much in tune with your wants and will be helpful and dedicated. What's more, they will also gradually learn how to communicate their fears and emotions better and you will need to second - guess them less and less.

If you're still in doubt, here are what we call the five Golden Rules to help you home in on his or her attachment style: Determine whether s / he seeks intimacy and closeness.

Assess how preoccupied s / he is with the relationship and how sensitive s / he is to rejection.

Part Two—The Three Attachment Styles in Everyday Life

Living with a Sixth Sense for Danger: The Anxious Attachment Style

This is an important lesson for someone with an anxious attachment style: If you just wait a little longer before reacting and jumping to conclusions, you will have an uncanny ability to decipher the world around you and use it to your advantage. But shoot from the hip, and you're all over the place making misjudgments and hurting yourself.

Activating strategies are any thoughts or feelings that compel you to get close, physically or emotionally, to your partner. Once he or she responds to you in a way that reestablishes security, you can revert back to your calm, normal self.

THE ATTACHMENT SYSTEM: FINDING YOUR WAY TO THE COMFORT ZONE

He correctly concluded that Shauna hit the “ ignore ” button and then turned off her phone, cues that might have gone unnoticed by someone with a different attachment style.

Protest Behavior — Letting Your Attachment System Get the Best of You

- Excessive attempts to reestablish contact: Calling, texting, or e - mailing many times, waiting for a phone call, loitering by your partner's workplace in hopes of running into him / her.
- Withdrawing: Sitting silently “ engrossed ” in the paper, literally turning your back on your partner, not speaking, talking with other people on the phone and ignoring him / her.
- Keeping score: Paying attention to how long it took them to return your phone call and waiting just as long to return theirs;
- Acting hostile: Rolling your eyes when they speak, looking away, getting up and leaving the room while they're talking (acting hostile can transgress to outright violence at times).
- Threatening to leave: Making threats — “ We're not getting along, I don't think I can do this anymore, ” “ I knew we weren't really right for each other, ” “ I'll be better off without you ” — all the while hoping s / he will stop you from leaving.
- Manipulations: Acting busy or unapproachable. Ignoring phone calls, saying you have plans when you don't. Making him / her feel jealous:

There is one last reason you will probably meet and date a fair share of avoidant people. Consider the following three facts:

People with an avoidant attachment style tend to end their relationships more frequently.

People with a secure attachment style usually don't go through many partners before they find one that they happily settle down with.

Studies have found that avoidants are unlikely to be in a relationship with other avoidants, because they lack the emotional glue to stay together.

The messages that come across from someone secure are very honest, straightforward, and consistent. Secures are not afraid of intimacy and know they are worthy of love.

If You're Anxious, You Should Be Dating Someone Secure Because: You: want closeness and intimacy. They: are comfortable with closeness and don't try to push you away. You: are very sensitive to any signs of rejection (vigilant attachment system). They: are very consistent and reliable and won't send mixed messages that will upset you. If you become distressed, they know how to reassure you. You: find it hard to tell them directly what you need and what's bothering you (effective communication), and use protest behavior instead. They: see your well-being as a top priority and do their best to read your verbal and nonverbal cues. You: need to be reassured and feel loved. They: feel comfortable telling you how they feel, very early on, in a consistent manner. You: need to know exactly where you stand in the relationship. They: are very stable; they also feel comfortable with commitment.

Amir suggested spelling things out point - blank, as in " I love you very much; I need to know that you are there for me all the time. I want to know I can talk to you every day and not just when it's convenient for you. I don't want to have to cover up my wish to spend time with you for fear of driving you away. "

When she met someone she really liked, she obsessed about him less and didn't resort as much to protest behavior. Gone (or at least reduced) were the oversensitivity and the defensiveness that made her act in self - defeating ways.

Remind yourself that you might feel bored at first — after all, there is less drama when your attachment system isn't activated.

By dividing attachment behavior along gender lines, we can fall into the common trap of equating avoidance with masculinity. Research findings, however, prove that there are many men who are far from being avoidant — they communicate freely, are loving and affectionate, do not retreat during conflict, and are consistently there for their partner (i.e., are secure). Another misperception is that we associate the anxious attachment style with femininity when in fact most women are secure and there are plenty of men who have an anxious attachment style. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are also women who fit the avoidant description. When it comes to attachment and gender, the most important fact to remember is that the majority of the population — both male and female — are secure.

“ Happiness only real when shared. ”

Susan, who has an avoidant attachment style, describes herself as a free spirit.

Researchers found that avoidants are quicker than other people to pick up on words such as “ need ” and “ enmeshed, ” related to what they consider negative characteristics of their partner’s behavior, but slower to recognize words like “ separation, ” “ fight, ” and “ loss, ” associated with their own attachment - related worries. Avoidants, it appears, are quick to think negatively about their partners, seeing them as needy and overly dependent — a major element in their view of relationships — but ignore their own needs and fears about relationships.

These studies also tell us that avoidants such as Susan aren’t such free spirits after all; it is the defensive stance that they adopt that makes them seem that way. In Susan’s account, notice how she makes a point of putting down those who depend on their significant others. Other studies have found that faced with a stressful life event, such as divorce, the birth of a severely disabled child, or military trauma, avoidants ’ defenses are quick to break down and they then appear and behave just like people with an anxious attachment style.

TOGETHER BUT APART: THE COMPROMISE THAT SATISFIES NO ONE

A **deactivating strategy** is any behavior or thought that is used to squelch intimacy. These strategies suppress our attachment system, the biological mechanism in our brains responsible for our desire to seek closeness with a preferred partner.

Some Common Deactivating Strategies Saying (or thinking)

- “ I’m not ready to commit ” — but staying together nonetheless, sometimes for years.
- Focusing on small imperfections in your partner: the way s / he talks, dresses, eats, or (fill in the blank) and allowing it to get in the way of your romantic feelings.
- Pining after an ex - girlfriend / boyfriend — (the “ phantom ex ” — more on this later).
- Flirting with others — a hurtful way to introduce insecurity into the relationship.
- Not saying “ I love you ” — while implying that you do have feelings toward the other person.
- Pulling away when things are going well (e.g., not calling for several days after an intimate date).
- Forming relationships with an impossible future, such as with someone who is married. “
- Checking out mentally ” when your partner is talking to you.
- Keeping secrets and leaving things foggy — to maintain your feeling of independence.
- Avoiding physical closeness — e.g., not wanting to share the same bed, not wanting to have sex, walking several strides ahead of your partner.

Many avoidants confuse self - reliance with independence. Even though it's important for each of us to be able to stand on our own two feet, if we overrate self - reliance, we diminish the importance of getting support from other people, thus cutting ourselves off from an important lifeline.

Another problem with self - reliance is the “ self ” part. It forces you to ignore the needs of your partner and concentrate only on your own needs, shortchanging you of one of the most rewarding human experiences: It prevents you (and the person you love) from the joy of feeling part of something bigger than yourself.

Another thought pattern that makes you keep your partner at a distance is “ seeing the worm instead of the apple. ”

Carole's experience is typical of people with an avoidant attachment style. They tend to see the glass half - empty instead of half - full when it comes to their partner.

Imagine if you were a parent and couldn't for the life of you read your infant's cues. You wouldn't be able to tell whether your child was hungry or tired, wanting to be held or wanting to be left alone, wet or sick. How difficult life would be for both of you. Your child would have to work so much harder — and cry so much longer — to be understood. Having an avoidant attachment style can often make you feel like that parent.

Embracing the notion of the “ perfect ” partner is one of the most powerful tools an avoidant can use to keep someone else at bay.

They rarely search inside themselves for the reason for their dissatisfaction, and even more rarely seek help or even agree to get help when their partner suggests they do so. Unfortunately, until they look inward or seek counseling, change is not likely to occur.

The next and harder step requires you to start to identify instances in which you employ these attitudes and behaviors, and then to embark on the voyage of change.

Learn to identify deactivating strategies. Don't act on your impulse. When you're excited about someone but then suddenly have a gut feeling that s / he is not right for you, stop and think. Is this actually a deactivating strategy ?

De - emphasize self - reliance and focus on mutual support. When your partner feels s / he has a secure base to fall back on (and doesn't feel the need to work hard to get close), and when you don't feel the need to distance yourself, you'll both be better able to look outward and do your own thing.

Be aware of your tendency to misinterpret behaviors. Negative views of your partner's behaviors and intentions infuse bad vibes into the relationship. Change this pattern !

Make a relationship gratitude list. Remind yourself on a daily basis that you tend to think negatively of your partner or date.

Nix the phantom ex. When you find yourself idealizing that one special ex - partner, stop and acknowledge that he or she is not (and never was) a viable option.

Forget about " the one. " We don't dispute the presence of soul mates in our world.

Adopt the distraction strategy. As an avoidant, it's easier to get close to your partner if there's a distraction (remember the experiment with a distraction task). Focusing on other things — taking a hike, going sailing, or preparing a meal together — will allow you to let your guard down and make it easier to access your loving feelings.

Secure

Their emotional system doesn't get too riled up in the face of threat (as with the anxious) but doesn't get shut down either (as with the avoidant).

Time and again, research shows that the best predictor of happiness in a relationship is a secure attachment style. Studies demonstrate that individuals with a secure attachment style report higher levels of satisfaction in their relationships than people with other attachment styles.

But what was more interesting was that there was no observed difference between secure couples and " mixed " couples — those with only one secure partner. They both showed less conflict and were rated as better functioning than were the " insecure " dyads.

Stan was taken aback, but responded to Janet's attack without any visible trace of animosity. " I understand that you're frightened and there might be some comfort for you if I feel frightened too, but if you're trying to encourage me to be more efficient at work — which you often do — this isn't the best way to do it. "

People with a secure attachment style, like Stan, are characterized by something very real but not outwardly visible — they are programmed to expect their partners to be loving and responsive and don't worry much about losing their partners ' love. They feel extremely comfortable with intimacy and closeness and have an uncanny ability to communicate their needs and respond to their partners ' needs.

The studies found that secure have more unconscious access to themes such as love, hugs, and closeness and less access to danger, loss, and separation.

- Great conflict busters — During a fight they don't feel the need to act defensively or to injure or punish their partner, and so prevent the situation from escalating.
- Mentally flexible — They are not threatened by criticism. They're willing to reconsider their ways, and if necessary, revise their beliefs and strategies.
- Effective communicators — They expect others to be understanding and responsive, so expressing their feelings freely and accurately to their partners comes naturally to them.
- Not game players — They want closeness and believe others want the same, so why play games ?
- Comfortable with closeness, unconcerned about boundaries — They seek intimacy and aren't afraid of being " enmeshed. " Because they aren't overwhelmed by a fear of being slighted (as are the anxious) or the need to deactivate (as are the avoidants), they find it easy to enjoy closeness, whether physical or emotional.
- Quick to forgive — They assume their partners ' intentions are good and are therefore likely to forgive them when they do something hurtful.
- Inclined to view sex and emotional intimacy as one — They don't need to create distance by separating the two (by being close either emotionally or sexually but not both).
- Treat their partners like royalty — When you've become part of their inner circle, they treat you with love and respect.
- Secure in their power to improve the relationship — They are confident in their positive beliefs about themselves and others, which makes this assumption logical.
- Responsible for their partners ' well - being — They expect others to be responsive and loving toward them and so are responsive to others ' needs.

Last, the secure party engulfs his or her partner in an emotionally protective shield that makes facing the outside world an easier task.

Among the factors that were found to increase a child's chance of being secure were an easy temperament (which makes it easier for parents to be responsive), positive maternal conditions — marital satisfaction, low stress and depression, and social support — and fewer hours with a nonparental caretaker.

What is clear is that even if there is a correlation between attachment style in childhood and in adulthood, it is weak at best.

On average, about 70 to 75 percent of adults remain consistently in the same attachment category at different points in their lives, while the remaining 25 to 30 percent of the population report a change in their attachment style.

Researchers attribute this change to romantic relationships in adulthood that are so powerful that they actually revise our most basic beliefs and attitudes toward connectedness.

You too can provide a secure base by adopting the following secure behaviors:

- Be available: Respond sensitively to their distress, allow them to be dependent on you when they feel the need, check in with them from time to time, and provide comfort when things go wrong.
- Don't interfere: Provide behind-the-scenes support for their endeavors. Help in a way that leaves them with the initiative and the feeling of power. Allow them to do their own thing without trying to take over the situation, micromanage, or undermine their confidence and abilities.
- Encourage: Provide encouragement and be accepting of their learning and personal growth goals. Boost their self-esteem.

As a secure, the opposite is true of you — you believe that there are many potential partners open to intimacy and closeness who would be responsive to your needs. You know you deserve to be loved and valued at all times.

The principles we advocate throughout this book for finding the right partner are employed intuitively by people with a secure attachment style. They include: Spotting “smoking guns” very early on and treating them as deal breakers. Effectively communicating your needs from day one. Subscribing to the belief that there are many (yes, many!) potential partners who could make you happy. Never taking blame for a date's offensive behavior. When a partner acts inconsiderately or hurtfully, securely acknowledge that it says a lot about the other person rather than about themselves. Expecting to be treated with respect, dignity, and love.

they seemed to possess a kind of “sixth sense” and intuitively knew when the child wanted to be held.

This can happen not only when they're inexperienced but also when they respond to their long-term partner's unacceptable behavior, by continuing to give them the benefit of the doubt and tolerate their actions.

For one, as we've seen, people with a secure attachment style view their partners' well-being as their responsibility. As long as they have reason to believe their partner is in some sort of trouble, they'll continue to back him or her.

Secure attachment style are more likely than others to forgive their partner for wrongdoing.

The good news is that people with a secure attachment style have healthy instincts and usually catch on very early that someone is not cut out to be their partner. The bad news is that when secure people do, on occasion, enter into a negative relationship, they might not know when to

call it quits — especially if it's a long - term, committed relationship in which they feel responsible for their partner's happiness.

If you're still in the relationship, remember that just because you can get along with anyone doesn't mean you have to.

Part Three When Attachment Styles Clash

We can interpret her concern as a fundamental need for closeness that is going unmet.

Their conflict is about how close and committed they want to be to each other.

People with an anxious attachment style (lower circle on the right) cope with threats to the relationship by activating their attachment system — trying to get close to their partner. People who are avoidant (lower circle on the left) have the opposite reaction. They cope with threats by deactivating — taking measures to distance themselves from their partners and “ turn off ” their attachment system. Thus the closer the anxious tries to get, the more distant the avoidant acts.

TELLTALE SIGNS OF THE ANXIOUS - AVOIDANT TRAP

- The roller - coaster effect. In the relationship you never sail along on an even keel. Instead, every once in a while, when the avoidant partner makes him / herself available to the anxious partner, the latter's attachment system is temporarily quieted and you achieve extreme closeness — leading to the feeling of a “ high. ”
- The emotional counterbalancing act. If you're avoidant, you often inflate your self - esteem and sense of independence in comparison to someone else. If you're anxious, you are programmed to feel “ less than ” when your attachment system gets activated. Frequently avoidants feel independent and powerful only to the extent that their partner feels needy and incapable. This is one of the main reasons avoidants hardly ever date one another. They can't feel strong and independent in relation to someone who shares the same sentiment as they do.
- Stable instability. The relationship may last for a long time, but an element of uncertainty persists. As illustrated on this page, you may remain together but with a feeling of chronic dissatisfaction, never finding the degree of intimacy that you are both comfortable with.
- Are we really fighting about this ? You may feel that you're constantly fighting about things you shouldn't be fighting about at all. In fact, your fights aren't about these minor problems but about something else altogether — the amount of intimacy between you.
- Life in the inner circle as the enemy. If you are anxious, you find that you're getting treated worse instead of better once you become the person closest to the avoidant partner. We'll explore this further in the next chapter.
- Experiencing the trap. You develop the eerie sense that the relationship is not right for you, but you feel too emotionally connected to the other person to leave.

Typically, if the relationship runs its usual course (we will show you later that this does not have to be so) despite differing intimacy needs, the anxious partner is usually the one who has to make concessions and accept the rules imposed by the avoidant partner.

things don't usually get better — and may get worse. Here's why: Intimacy differences can spill over into more and more areas of life — radically different intimacy needs don't stop with seemingly trivial matters like one person wanting to hold hands more often than the other.

Conflict is often left unresolved because the resolution itself creates too much intimacy. If you are anxious or secure, you genuinely want to work out a relationship problem. However, the resolution itself often brings a couple closer together — this is a scenario that, however unconsciously, the avoidant partner wants to avoid.

With every clash, the anxious person loses more ground: During bitter fights between anxious and avoidant partners, when there are no secure checks and balances in place, people with anxious attachment style tend to get overwhelmed by negative emotions. When they feel hurt, they talk, think, and act in an extreme manner, even to the point of threatening to leave (protest behavior). However, once they calm down, they become flooded with positive memories and are then overcome with regret. They reach out to their partner in an attempt to reconcile. But they are often met with a hostile response, because avoidants react differently to a fight. They turn off all attachment - related memories and remember the worst of their partner.

Studies have found that security “ priming ” — reminding people of security - enhancing experiences they've had — can help them to create a greater sense of security.

Your Relationship with Your Pet as a Secure Role Model ?

Suzanne Phillips, coauthor of the book *Healing Together*, describes our connection with our pets as a source of inspiration for our romantic relationships. In her writing, she points out that we tend to perceive our pets as selfless and loving despite their many misdemeanors: They wake us up at night, destroy our valuables, and demand our undivided attention, yet we tend to overlook these behaviors and feel positively toward them. In fact, our connection with our pets is an excellent example of a secure presence in our lives. We can tap into our attitudes toward our pets as a secure resource within us — we don't assume our pets are doing things purposely to hurt us, we don't hold grudges even when they eat something they shouldn't or make a mess, we still greet them warmly when we come home (even after a rough day at the office), and we stick by them no matter what.

My Working Model — Summarizing the Inventory

They really help each other succeed. I'm also violating the secure base rule of “ availability. ” I need to find a way to be available for Georgia when she needs me.

Once both Georgia and Henry analyzed their working models, they started viewing their situation differently. Henry realized that by ignoring his wife's needs and ridiculing her dependency, he was only making matters worse and causing unhappiness in the relationship. Georgia realized that by using protest behavior she was actually distancing Henry instead of making him want to be there for her, as she assumed.

But moving toward security is not only about tackling problems in your relationship; it's also about having fun together.

he teaches people with insecure attachments how to narrate their past history in a secure fashion.

When you build a secure relationship, both individuals win: If you are the anxious partner, you get the closeness you crave, and if you're the avoidant partner, you'll enjoy much more of the independence you need.

Intimacy clashes are very destructive for the non - avoidant partner, who is constantly being pushed away by the avoidant partner. We can see this happening in the examples we cite throughout the book, in behaviors such as maintaining a high degree of secrecy and then blaming the other person of being jealous and needy,

indifference does not connote security. Avoidants need to actively suppress their attachment needs, but they tend to report being less happy in relationships. Still, they often blame their unhappiness on their partner.

They admit to themselves that in certain areas, their mate is never going to be an active partner, and they stop urging him or her to change. They stop taking personal offense when their mate pushes them away and accept that this is simply his or her nature. They learn to do things on their own that they previously expected to do with their partner. They engage with like - minded friends in activities that their mate is unwilling to participate in. They learn to be thankful for what their mate does do and to overlook what he or she does not do.

- Doug, 53, used to get furious at his wife on a daily basis when she came home hours later than expected. He finally decided to stop getting mad when she walked in and to greet her warmly instead. He made a conscious decision to make home into a place she would want to come home to instead of a battlefield.
- Natalie, 38, always dreamed of sharing her leisure time with her husband. After years of resentment and bitter fights over his refusal to spend weekends together, she decided to change. Today she makes plans for herself. If he wants to join (as rarely happens), he's welcome aboard. But if not, it's "so long and see you later."
- Janis, 43, is married to Larry. Larry, who was married before, doesn't take an active role in raising their joint children. Janis has come to accept that when it comes to the kids

(and several other areas of their life together), she is quite literally on her own. She no longer expects him to participate and no longer gets angry when he refuses to do so.

Do we recommend taking this route ? Our answer is — “ It depends. ” If you’re in an ongoing relationship riddled with intimacy clashes that you have not been able to resolve, and yet you want to remain in the bond for whatever reason, then yes, this is the only way to live in relative peace.

Craig’s inflated self-esteem (an avoidant characteristic) fed off Marsha’s increasing self-doubt (an anxious characteristic).

SIGNS THAT YOU HAVE BECOME “THE ENEMY”

- You are ashamed to let friends and family know how your partner really treats you.
- You are surprised when people tell you how sweet, nice, or considerate your mate is.
- You listen in on your partner’s conversations to learn what is really going on in his or her life.
- Your partner often consults other people, rather than you, about important issues. In an emergency, you feel uncertain that your partner will drop everything in order to be there for you.
- It is more important for your partner to make a good impression on strangers than on you.
- You’re surprised when you see friends being treated considerately by their partners.
- You are the person most likely to be insulted or put down by your mate.
- Your emotional and physical health are low on your partner’s priority list.

THE INNER CIRCLE WHEN YOU’RE TREATED LIKE ROYALTY

- Your well-being comes second to none.
- You are confided in first.
- Your opinion matters most.
- You feel admired and protected.
- Your need for closeness is rewarded with even more closeness.

Craig ignored Marsha when she came to cheer him on during track practice. He tried to hide the fact that they were a couple. He was surprised that Marsha stopped seeing her ex-boyfriend (suggesting that he didn’t value commitment himself). He made devaluing and degrading remarks about her. He compared her unfavorably to his “phantom ex,” Ginger. He responded to Marsha’s worries and self-doubts in a way that made her feel worse. Most important, in all of these actions, he conveyed a strong message that he was not able to properly take care of Marsha’s emotional needs.

You will get overwhelmed by positive memories of the few good times you had together and forget the multitude of bad experiences. You’ll recall how sweet he or she was to you the other

day when you were distressed and conveniently forget that he or she was the one to hurt you in the first place. **An activated attachment system** is immensely powerful.

For humans, the situation is very similar. When we break up with someone, our attachment system goes into overdrive, and just like the rat pups, we can think of nothing but getting back together with our loved one. The fact that one person can take away all our discomfort in a split second makes it very hard to resist the temptation to see him or her again.

The following nine strategies, using attachment principles, will help you get through the painful experience of ending a relationship.

Part Four: Secure the Way—Sharpening Your Relationship Skills

Expressing your needs and expectations to your partner in a direct, nonaccusatory manner is an incredibly powerful tool.

Effective communication works to achieve two goals:

- To choose the right partner. Effective communication is the quickest, most direct way to determine whether your prospective partner will be able to meet your needs.
- To make sure your needs are met in the relationship, whether it is a brand-new one or one of long standing.

The beauty of effective communication is that it allows you to turn a supposed weakness into an asset. If you need to be reassured a lot that your partner loves you and is attracted to you (at least in the initial phase of a relationship), instead of trying to conceal this wish because it is not socially acceptable to sound so needy, you state it as a given. When presented this way, you don't come off as either weak or needy but as self-confident and assertive.

Another advantage of effective communication is that it provides a role model for your partner. You set the tone for the relationship as one in which you can both be honest and in which each has the sacred responsibility to look out for the other's well-being.

With effective communication, you might not be able to solve a problem or resolve your differences in one shot. But you can judge immediately how important your well-being is to your partner: Does s/he try to get to the bottom of your concerns? Does s/he respond to the issue at hand or does s/he try to dodge you? Does s/he take your concerns seriously or does s/he try to belittle you or make you feel foolish for raising them? Does s/he try to find ways to make you feel better or is s/he only busy acting defensive? Is s/he replying to your concerns only factually (as in a court of law) or is s/he also in tune with your emotional well-being?

Often, insecure people cannot get in touch with what is really bothering them. They get overwhelmed by emotions and lash out. Studies show that people with a secure attachment style don't react so strongly, don't get overwhelmed as easily, and can thus calmly and effectively communicate their own feelings and tend to the needs of their partners.

IF YOU'RE ANXIOUS . . . When you start to feel something is bothering you in your relationship, you tend to quickly get flooded with negative emotions and think in extremes.

Men who dated anxious partners reported self-disclosing less often and rated their general level of communication as lower than others.

Say, for example, that you call your partner's cell phone incessantly because you fear he's cheating. He decides that he's had enough and breaks up with you. You're left second-guessing, wondering if you actually pushed him away by acting so clingy or if he decided that you really just weren't right for him. You don't get an answer to your original concern, which is whether he cares enough to listen to your worries, reassure you, and do whatever it takes to make you feel safe and loved.

you feel the need to get away but don't understand why. When you get that feeling, you may assume that you're beginning to be less attracted to your partner, in which case, what is there to talk about? He or she is probably not "the one," so why prolong the agony?

If you are avoidant, the first step, therefore, is to acknowledge your need for space—whether emotional or physical—when things get too close, and then learn how to communicate that need.

that it's not a problem with him or her but rather your own need in any relationship (this bit is important!).

Monica realized that she wasn't helping Andres—it was her way of dealing with such a diagnosis, but it wasn't his.

What if Monique had responded differently and Greg's request had been rebuffed? As always with effective communication, you win either way.

Worries and fears surface more when you are not communicating your concerns and are letting things build up.

If you are anxious—turn to effective communication when you feel you are starting to resort to protest behavior. When something your partner has said or done (or refrained from saying or doing) has activated your attachment system to the point where you feel you're on the verge of acting out—by not answering his or her calls, threatening to leave, or engaging in any other

form of protest behavior—stop yourself. Then figure out what your real needs are and use effective communication instead.

If you are avoidant—the surefire sign that you need to use effective communication is when you feel an irrepressible need to bolt. Use effective communication to explain to your partner that you need some space and that you'd like to find a way of doing so that is acceptable to him or her. Suggest a few alternatives, making sure that the other person's needs are taken care of. By doing so, you're more likely to get the breathing space you need.

Wear your heart on your sleeve. Effective communication requires being genuine and completely honest about your feelings. Be emotionally brave!

Focus on your needs. The idea is to get your needs across. When expressing your needs, we are always referring to needs that take your partner's well-being into consideration as well.

Be specific. If you speak in general terms, your partner may not understand exactly what you really need, which may lower his or her chances of getting it right. State precisely what is bothering you: When you don't stay the night . . . When you don't check up on me every day . . . When you said you loved me and then took it back . . .

Don't blame. Never make your partner feel selfish, incompetent, or inadequate.

Be assertive and nonapologetic. Your relationship needs are valid—period. Though people with different attachment styles may not see your concerns as legitimate, they're essential for your happiness, and expressing them authentically is crucial to effective communication.

12. Working Things Out: Five Secure Principles for Dealing with Conflict

There are two main kinds of conflict—the bread-and-butter type and the intimacy-centered type.

Five Secure Principles for Resolving Conflict

- Show basic concern for the other person's well-being.
- Maintain focus on the problem at hand.
- Refrain from generalizing the conflict.
- Be willing to engage.
- Effectively communicate feelings and needs.

For the anxious, conflict can trigger very basic concerns about their partner's responsiveness to their needs and about rejection or abandonment.

However, to deal with these beliefs, they adopt the opposite approach—they suppress their need for intimacy by shutting down emotionally and adopting a defensive air of independence.

Try to keep a number of truths in mind when you are in the midst of a fight: A single fight is not a relationship breaker. Express your fears! Don't let them dictate your actions. If you're afraid that s/he wants to reject you, say so. Don't assume you are to blame for your partner's bad mood. It is most likely not because of you. Trust that your partner will be caring and responsive and go ahead and express your needs. Don't expect your partner to know what you're thinking. If you haven't told him/her what's on your mind, s/he doesn't know! Don't assume that you understand what your partner means. When in doubt, ask.

Epilogue

The first misconception is that everyone has the same capacity for intimacy. We've been raised to believe that every person can fall deeply in love (this part might well be true) and that when this happens, he or she will be transformed into a different person (this part is not!).

The second common misconception we fell victim to is that marriage is the be-all and end-all. Romantic stories tend to end there, and we are all tempted to believe that when someone gets married, it's unequivocal proof of the power of love to transform; that the decision to marry means they're now ready for true closeness and emotional partnership.

In this book, however, we've shown how mismatched attachment styles can lead to a great deal of unhappiness in marriage, even for people who love each other greatly.

The third hard-to-shed misconception we fell for is that we alone are responsible for our emotional needs; they are not our partner's responsibility.

Again, we must constantly remind ourselves: In a true partnership, both partners view it as their responsibility to ensure the other's emotional well-being.

Don't Lose Sight of These Facts: Your attachment needs are legitimate. You shouldn't feel bad for depending on the person you are closest to—it is part of your genetic makeup. A relationship, from an attachment perspective, should make you feel more self-confident and give you peace of mind. If it doesn't, this is a wake-up call! And above all, remain true to your authentic self—playing games will only distance you from your ultimate goal of finding true happiness, be it with your current partner or with someone else.