

Adult Attachment Disorder and Treatment

Unresolved childhood attachment issues leave an adult vulnerable to difficulties in forming secure adult relationships. Patterns of attachment continue through the life cycle and across generations. New relations are affected by the expectations developed in past relationships. There is a strong correlation between insecure adult attachment and marital dissatisfaction and negative marital interactions. If an adult does not feel safe with others, he/she will tend to be either rejecting or overly clingy.

Attachment problems are often handed down transgenerationally unless someone breaks the chain. As a parent, an insecurely attached adult may lack the ability to form a strong attachment to their child and provide the necessary attachment cues required for the healthy emotional development of the child thereby predisposing their child to a lifetime of relationship difficulties.

Depending on the genetic personality style of the individual and the early life events experienced, insecurely attached adults fall in one of two categories of insecure attachment:

AVOIDANT

Intense anger and loss

Hostile

Critical of others

Sensitive to blame

Lack of empathy

Views others as untrustworthy

Views others as undependable

Views self as unlovable or "too good" for others

Relationships feel either threatening to one's sense of control, not worth the effort, or both

Compulsive self-reliance

Passive withdrawal

Low levels of perceived support

Difficulty getting along with co-workers, often preferring to work alone

Work may provide a good excuse to avoid personal relations

Fear of closeness in relationships

Avoidance of intimacy

Unlikely to idealize the love relationship

Tendency toward Introjective depression (self critical)

ANXIOUS/AMBIVILENT

Compulsive Caregiving

Feel overinvolved and underappreciated

Rapid relationship breakups

Idealizing of others

Strong desire for partner to reciprocate in relationship

Desire for extensive contact and declarations of affections

Overinvests his/her emotions in a relationship

Perceives relationships as imbalanced

Relationship is idealized

Preoccupation with relationship

Dependence on relationship

Heavy reliance on partner

Views partner as desirable but unpredictable (sometimes available, sometimes not)

Perceives others as difficult to understand

Relationship is primary method by which one can experience a sense of security

Unlikely to view others as altruistic

Sensitive to rejection

Discomfort with anger

Extreme emotions

Jealous

Possessive

Views self as unlovable

Suicide attempts

Mood swings

Tendency toward anaclitic depression (dependent depression)

GOALS OF THERAPY

Identify early losses

Mourn the loss of that which never was but yearned for deeply

Provide closure to the unresolved relationship longings with parental attachment figures

Reorganize belief system and physiological reaction to attachment relationships

Gratefully, attachment styles are not fixed in stone and with either positive life experience or appropriate therapeutic intervention and a strong desire for change adults can alter their relationships and experience true intimacy and closeness.