

Notes: Attachment styles



Understanding the basic principles of Attachment Theory can bring insight into our early development, and the origins of the way we relate to other people.

A **Securely Attached** child has parents who are able to give them unconditional love and acceptance, with healthy protection and guidance.

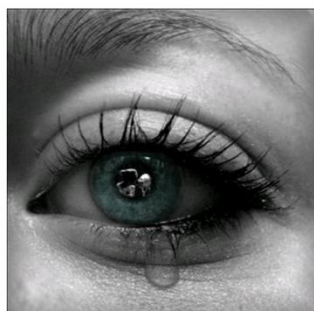
A child develops **Insecure-Avoidant Attachment** when their parents meet their practical needs, such as food, clothing and physical care, but their emotional needs are not met in the same way. Reaching out for comfort and understanding when they feel anxious, angry or afraid does not bring the desired result. They are given the message, *deal with it yourself*. This becomes learned behaviour and defensive walls are built, making relationships difficult as they grow older.

Insecure-Ambivalent Attachment results when parents are unpredictable, sometimes being there for the child with loving care, and sometimes being emotionally absent, angry or upset with them. The child is confused and anxious; they have to learn to 'read' the signals, becoming hypervigilant as to the kind of response they might get when seeking help. They feel angry about this, but also experience a desperate longing for unconditional love and acceptance. This leads to the *go away – don't leave me* dynamic expressed in the poem below.

Go away – don't leave me
I can't live without you
Stay with me – I hate you
I can't stop thinking about you

Hold me close – I need you
But don't you dare come near me
Don't care for me – I'm fine alone
Why does no one hear me?

I'll be good, I really will
If only you will stay
But deep inside, I know for sure
One day you'll go away





As they grow older, childhood patterns can get reinforced.

The securely attached child grows into an **Autonomous Adult**, able to give to and receive from others, building healthy relationships.

Because of their needs not being met in childhood, insecure avoidant people develop a **Dismissive** attitude: their own needs don't get met, so they are clearly not important. They have to 'get on with it', and so should other people. There is no point in seeking healthy attachments as they don't work, so the whole Attachment System gets *deactivated*.

The child with insecure ambivalent behaviour continues to be hypervigilant in adulthood, constantly seeking reassurance: the Attachment System is *hyper-activated*. There is a desire to please, to be approved of, to be affirmed, especially by their parents. They are **Preoccupied** with checking out how relationships in general are going, and they can be seen as demanding and difficult. This may result in relationship breakdown, reaffirming the self-belief that they are too hard to love, and fulfilling their deep-seated fear of rejection.