

RELATIONAL ATTACHMENT SO CLOSE – SO HIDDEN

Living in Annapolis, watching the sailboats on the Chesapeake, have you ever wondered about the wind? We read the wind on the ripples and waves of the water. We see the wind in the rhythmic sway of the leaf-filled limbs adorning our glorious, inspiring trees.

Hearing is similar to wind in that we don't see it directly. For those of us who are hearing impaired, we often have no idea that we are not hearing sounds that others relish. I recently had my hearing aids adjusted and now realize I hadn't heard birds singing for about ten years!

Attachment is like the wind and sound. It is so close and so hidden, virtually imperceptible until we stop and take notice. Attachment encompasses the quality of our relationships with our caregivers when we were infants. Tuning into your attachment style may help you to develop better relationships. Our early childhood attachment styles are generally reenacted in our adult relationships.

Another route to tuning into attachment styles is to realize that we all have both explicit and implicit memory. Explicit memory develops by age two. It is memory that we are able to consciously recall. Implicit memory is unconscious memory that shapes us without realizing how our past experiences are influencing our present reality. (Daniel Siegel, 1999)

Secure and Insecure Attachment

When the British psychiatrist John Bowlby began teaching Attachment Theory he was ostracized by the British Psychiatric Society. Defined as an inborn, lifelong biological drive for affiliation or closeness or connecting with others, it is now universally accepted.

When we as infants experience a Secure Attachment with our caregivers, we enjoy feelings of comfort and support. We are not afraid of conflict and can enjoy closeness without clinging. When we feel loved we can explore and engage a wide range of interests while confident that someone is there for us. Our positive core beliefs are:

- It's safe to love and trust.
- I belong.
- It's safe to have feelings.
- It's safe to be vulnerable.
- I can ask for help.
- I can accept comfort.
- I can count on my loved ones.
- I am loved and lovable.
- I am good and deserve good things.
- The world is safe.

When we have an Insecure Attachment we do not feel valued or loved for who we are. We are trapped within a bubble where we are constantly evaluating ourselves based on self-perpetuating negative beliefs that offer no escape.

Insecure attachments have been subdivided into three main types; they are Anxious, Dismissive and Disorganized. (Source: EMDR for Complex Trauma found in Personality, Addictive and Dissociative Disorders: Diane Clayton, LCSW, Nashville, TN, July 27-28, 2013)

Insecure – Anxious

With Anxious Insecure Attachment the parent or caregiver is poorly attuned to the child who is then constantly worrying and wondering if they are really loved and lovable. The core anxious beliefs are:

- I am not lovable.
- I can't get what I need from you.
- I can't trust you to be there for me.
- I can't survive if you go away.
- If I can't see you, I can't trust you are here for me.
- If you don't see and hear me, I can't trust you are here for me.

The early bonding contract is:

- I will remain hyper-vigilant and hyper-focused on you.
- I will demand/cling/control to make sure you see me and hear me.
- I will demand/cling/control to make sure you give me whatever I need to have to survive.

Insecure - Dismissive

With Dismissive Insecure Attachment the parent or caregiver is avoidant of closeness so the child is filled with distrust and totally avoids being emotionally vulnerable. The core anxious beliefs are:

- I can't trust you.
- Closeness is not safe.
- It's not safe to be vulnerable.
- It's not safe to have feelings or needs.

The early bonding contract is:

- I won't have feelings or needs.
- I won't allow myself to be vulnerable
- I won't allow you to be too important to me.
- I won't depend upon anyone.
- I will take care of myself.
- I will blend into the woodwork.
- I will be tough and strong.

Insecure – Disorganized

This is the most lethal form of insecure attachment. The parent is alternately too close and too distant. The child feels intense anxiety with too much closeness and with too much distance. This creates chaos in relationships. The core anxious beliefs are:

- I must be close to you to feel safe-but being close to you makes me feel vulnerable and unsafe.
- It is not safe to feel safe.
- There is no way to avoid this fear and anxiety.
- Love is supposed to be hurtful and painful.

The early bonding contract is:

- I will constantly be on guard so you don't get too close and you don't go too far away.
- I will never let myself relax or feel safe.
- I will expect hurt and pain in relationships-and even create it-because that is the way it has to be-and then I won't be surprised.

Infant Brain Development

As is commonly known, our brains at birth are incomplete. Our amygdala where we experience emotion is fully operative but there is scant connection with our prefrontal cortex where we reason things out. The vagus nerve eventually has a calming effect for us but it is not yet myelinated. Amazingly, our brain connectivity develops and then corresponds to the quality of our early attachment relationships. The neuronal circuitry we need for self-soothing is dependent upon our attachment experience.

"It is not the caregiver's words, but the quality of her/his voice, the quality of touch, the look in the caregiver's eyes, the caregiver's smile, the warmth of his/her body, the sound of his/her heartbeat, etc. that is regulating. This early communication builds neural networks that shape the belief system and the body." (Lana Epstein, 2014)

Good News: Neuroplasticity

There is room for hope. Our later in life attachment interactions can rewire the brain. "Neuroplasticity is that process in the brain that allows it to change its structure and function in response to mental experience. So depending on the experiences that you are having, your brain will change." (Doidge, 2012 NIBCAM Interview by Lana Epstein)

Psychotherapy, like virtually all scientific fields, is exploding with new knowledge. The practical challenge is to move new brain research findings into therapeutic applications. This requires innovative thinking and training of therapists. Here are four practical tools to change your brain into having more secure attachment.

- **Tool One:** In stillness and quiet in the morning consciously seek secure attachment opportunities during your day. Be open to being new, fresh and transformed. In the evening, take time for being thankful and to review one or more secure attachment events.
- **Tool Two:** Some of us are plagued with negative thinking. Our first impulse is to express how something will not work. To overcome negative bias in the brain, have and notice inevitable (hopefully!) positive experiences. Take time to then enrich, integrate and transformatively absorb the positive experience. Your brain will change!
- **Tool Three:** The route to healing insecure attachment must go through the body, which is holding Insecure Attachment emotional pain. Read [Tapping In: A Step-by-Step Guide to Activating your Healing Resources Through Bilateral Stimulation](#) by Laura Parnell.

- **Tool Four:** Push yourself to experience satisfying, fulfilling, intimate connecting with anyone and everyone. This will be threatening and challenging because closeness makes us vulnerable. Discover being safe and enriched while close.

Healing absolutely requires right brain to right brain connection. It is visual, tactile and experiential. Left brain linear cognitions are insufficient.

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