



Adult Attachment Styles

REFERENCE GUIDE

- Secure
- Avoidant
- Ambivalent
- Disorganized

Use this practical reference guide to better understand how each of the four attachment styles presents (in a clinical setting) within the context of adult relationships.

The attached chart maps each attachment style to distinct defining characteristics and traits.

When using this chart as a guide, it's important to remember that attachment styles fall on a spectrum (from low to severe) and can be changeable depending upon the factors and conditions of relational distress.

The good news, is that all styles can learn secure attachment skills for healthier relationships.



Trauma Solutions

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	SECURE	AVOIDANT (DISMISSIVE)	AMBIVALENT (PRE-OCCUPIED)	DISORGANIZED (FEARFUL-AVOIDANT)
PRESENTING CHARACTERISTICS [how an individual relates within the context of an adult relationship]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attuned, present, safe • Easy flow between connection & aloneness • Playful • Practices repair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disconnected, non-emotional • Lacks co-regulation • Alienated • Existence issues • Lacks sense of belonging • Abrupt • Isolated (loner) • Parallel attention • Distress with closeness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks object constancy • Craves connection, simultaneously pushes others away • Pressure to speak • Ignores caring behaviors • Lacks self-care / ability to self-soothe • Fear of abandonment • Difficulty trusting • Misreads cues (negatively) • Distress with separation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden state shifts • Extreme dysregulation • Situational or chronic • Spectrum between avoidant & ambivalent • Chaotic • Acts out • Views relationships as dangerous • When extreme (or severe), personality disorder
CAREGIVER PATTERNS [primary caregiver's response to child's distress]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attuned, present, safe • Repair mis-attunements • Align with a child's state • Active listening • Comfortable with connection and individuation • Reflect cues accurately • Consistent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacant, not present • Rejecting • Only present when tasking • Doesn't relate emotionally • Not attuned to needs • Non-responsive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role reversal • On-again/off-again parenting • Intrusive, no boundaries • Intermittent reward • Self-absorbed, preoccupied with own attachment wounds • Inconsistent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double bind: set up to fail • Threatening • Triggered by unresolved trauma • Chaotic, confusing • Abusive (emotional, physical and/or sexual) • Punishing, shaming • Combination of non-responsive and inconsistent
NARRATIVE STYLE [how an individual articulates or tells the facts and events of their life]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to follow • Engaged and engaging • Flow, coherent, vivid, alive • Emotionally nuanced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few words • Lacks emotional vividness • Factual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overuse of words • Overly emotional • Negative complaints • Mixes past/present tenses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of voice & word recall • Gaps, long pauses & mix of tenses • Incoherent, hard to follow

OBJECT RELATIONS

[how an individual views
themselves internally in
relation to others]

SECURE



Many Positive
Pairs

AVOIDANT (DISMISSIVE)



Overfocus on
SELF

AMBIVALENT (PRE-OCCUPIED)



Overfocus on
OTHER

DISORGANIZED (FEARFUL-AVOIDANT)



Scared and/ or
Frozen SELF

BRAIN DOMINANCE

[predominant
processing]

- Integrated
- Flow of energy & info between left & right hemispheres

- Oriented to the left hemisphere
- Focused on the future
- Logic, reason

- Oriented to the right hemisphere
- Stuck in the past
- May flood with emotions

- Lack of linkage in the Associative Cortex
- Amygdala often stuck in trauma

CORRECTIVE EXPERIENCES

[how an individual
overcomes
previously held or
distorted beliefs]

- Easy recovery from conflict
- Relaxation in the relational field
- Unflappability

- *Kind Eyes* exercise to heal attachment gaze
- *Welcome to the World* exercise to be met, celebrated & restore belonging

- Develop a sense of Self, so not so lost in the Other
- Practice receiving
- Connect consistency & caring behaviors

- Clarity vs. confusion
- *Competent Protector Safety* exercise
- Untangle survival instinct from the love / attachment system