

Attachment Theory - Understanding How Early Experiences Shape Your Relationships & Sense of Self

What Is Attachment?

Attachment is the emotional bond we form with our main caregivers early in life. These early relationships teach us how safe, valued, and understood we feel. Over time, this forms a kind of emotional “blueprint” for how we relate to others and manage our feelings.

Our attachment patterns often carry into adult relationships, sometimes in ways we’re not fully aware of.

Why Attachment Matters

Your early experiences can shape how you:

- Trust or protect yourself in close relationships
- Express needs, emotions, and boundaries
- Handle conflict, criticism, or silence
- Treat yourself on the inside - your self-talk, confidence, & self-worth
- Understanding your attachment style isn’t about blame. It’s about insight. With awareness, change becomes possible.

The Four Attachment Styles

There is no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ style, it’s simply the way we learned to cope with the emotional world around us. These patterns were shaped in our early years to help us to feel safe & secure.

Secure Attachment: *Often shaped by consistent, reliable, emotionally attuned care in early life*

- Feels comfortable with closeness and independence
- Can give and receive support easily
- Regulates emotions well, handles conflict calmly

Anxious Attachment: *Often shaped by inconsistent caregiving, sometimes loving, sometimes emotionally unavailable*

- Fears being left, rejected, or not being “enough”
- Often seeks reassurance or feels emotionally “too much”
- Can feel easily triggered by silence or distance

Avoidant Attachment: *Often shaped by emotionally distant or dismissive caregiving, where needs weren't welcomed*

- Values independence and often avoids emotional closeness
- May shut down or pull away when things feel intense
- Can find it difficult to rely on others or express emotional needs

Disorganized Attachment: *Often shaped by frightening, neglectful, or chaotic early environments*

- Desires closeness but also fears it
- May struggle with trust or feel confused in relationships
- Often swings between pushing people away and pulling them close

The Window of Tolerance

(Based on Dan Siegel's work)

We all have a natural emotional “window” where we feel calm, connected, and in control. This is called the Window of Tolerance.

When we stay within this window, we can:

- Think clearly
- Stay grounded
- Manage stress or conflict more effectively

But when something triggers us, we might move outside that window:

- Hyper-arousal (overwhelm, anxiety, anger)
- Hypo-arousal (numbness, shutdown, disconnection)
- Your attachment style can influence how easily you're pushed out of your window & how quickly you find your way back.

Can Attachment Change?

Yes. Attachment patterns are shaped by experience, but they're not fixed.

Through awareness, reflection, and emotionally safe relationships (including therapy), it's possible to develop what's called earned secure attachment.

This means:

- Feeling more confident and connected in relationships
- Managing emotions with greater ease
- Building healthier boundaries
- Becoming more self-compassionate and emotionally present

Growth isn't about blaming the past; it's about developing awareness of your story so you can shape what comes next.

When you understand your attachment patterns, you give yourself the power to:

- Respond rather than react
- Connect without fear
- Support yourself with kindness and clarity

WHAT IS YOUR ATTACHMENT STYLE?

