



Attachment Styles

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This document provides a **high-level summary** of attachment styles and how these interaction patterns may show up in relationships. It also introduces the concept of **Primal Panic** (also called **Attachment Panic**) a heightened emotional response that can emerge during conflict when the attachment bond feels threatened.

If you're curious to explore more, a few recommended resources are listed at the bottom.

Note: While attachment terms like **secure**, **anxious**, and **avoidant** are widely used, definitions may vary slightly depending on the source. This summary uses commonly accepted interpretations to support clarity and accessibility.

Summary: Styles

Secure Attachment

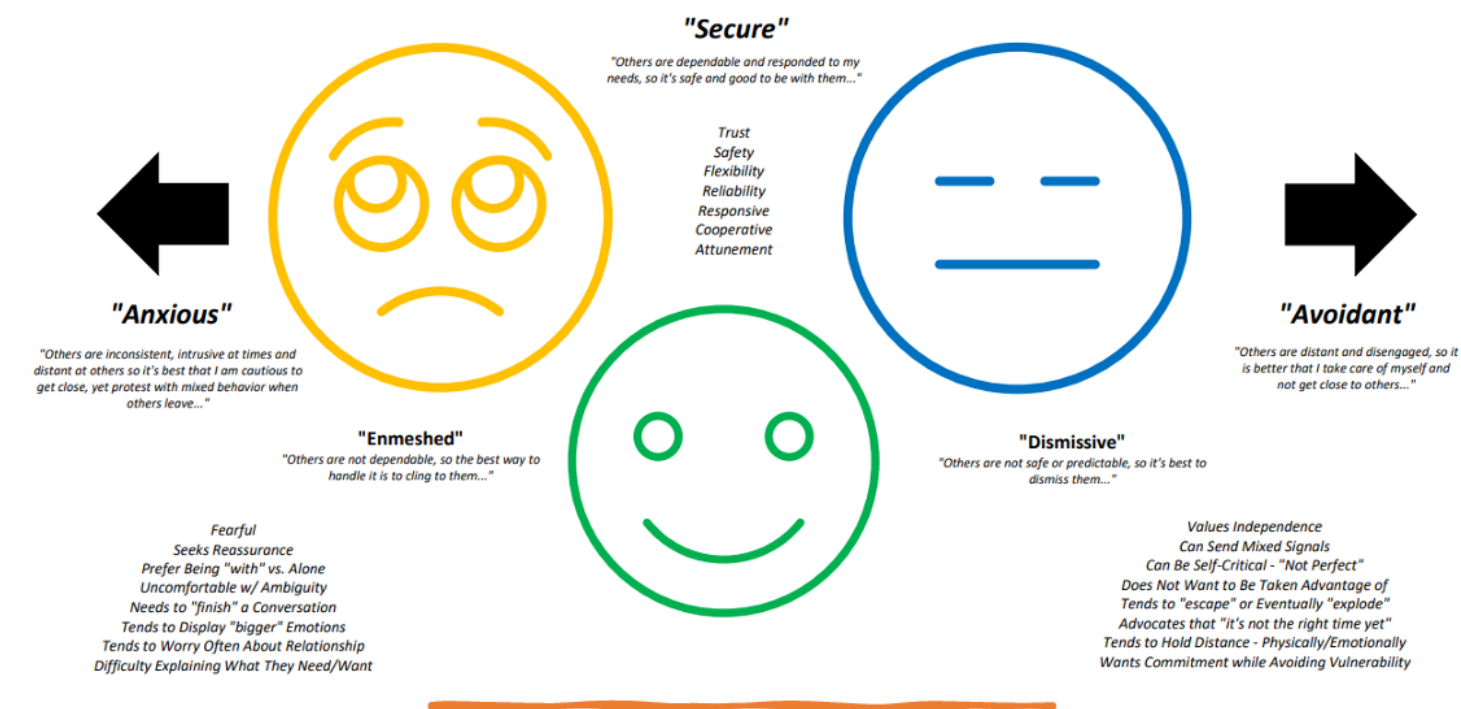
- Feels safe, cooperative, responsive, and open to vulnerability.
- Enables individuals to explore the world with confidence, knowing they have a “safe harbor” to return to.
- Often results in a **healthy self-image** and a **positive outlook** on others.
- Interactions typically feel easy, emotionally available, and supportive.

Anxious Attachment

- Involves a strong desire for closeness and reassurance.
- May include:
 - A need to finish conversations or "complete" conflict cycles.
 - Discomfort with ambiguity—facts and clarity feel safer.
 - Visible and strong emotional expression.
- Behavior may come across as **vigilant or hypervigilant**, driven by fear of unpredictability or rejection.

Avoidant Attachment

- Characterized by emotional or physical distancing in relationships.
- Individuals may:
 - Withdraw during conflict or high tension.
 - Appear independent, guarded, or emotionally unavailable.
 - Send mixed signals—being close sometimes, distant at other times.
- Emotional expression may be muted, but when it surfaces, it can be **intense and confusing**.
- May appear perfectionistic or hard to satisfy.



Behavior: How it Shows Up

Attachment can show up in behavior in many ways, often outside of conscious awareness. It influences how people seek closeness, handle conflict, express emotions, and respond to stress.

Secure attachment tends to show up as openness, flexibility, and comfort with both independence and connection.

In contrast, **anxious attachment** may appear as reassurance-seeking, worry about being left, or heightened sensitivity to changes in tone or attention. **Avoidant attachment** often shows through emotional distance, difficulty depending on others, or a strong focus on self-reliance.

Disorganized attachment can manifest as mixed signals wanting closeness but feeling overwhelmed by it.

Across settings, these patterns shape communication, boundaries, problem-solving, and how individuals interpret others' intentions.

Dismissive	Codependent	Pursuer	Distancer
Anxious	Competitive	Validation Seeking	Parent-Child
Avoidant	Enmeshed	Passive-Aggressive	High-Conflict
Conditional	Transactional	Controlling	Unpredictable

Primal Panic: What is it?

Primal Panic or **Attachment Panic** refers to an instinctive nervous system response that occurs when one or both partners perceive a threat to their emotional bond. This can lead to **dysregulated behavior** that feels disproportionate or atypical during relational conflict.

How It Shows Up

- **Fight Mode:**
 - One partner may become intense, argumentative, persistent, or demanding.
 - It may feel like they *can't stop*, with a sense of urgency and emotional overwhelm.
- **Flight/Freeze Mode:**
 - The other partner may withdraw completely, become silent, disengage, or shut down.
 - The level of detachment goes beyond typical distancing and may feel extreme or unfamiliar.

Why It Happens

- The root of primal panic lies in our **nervous system**, not our logic.
- When attachment feels threatened, our brain signals danger, and we may **react without conscious control**.
- These responses are **primal**, often resembling states of panic, fear, or extreme urgency—even when the trigger may seem "minor" from the outside.

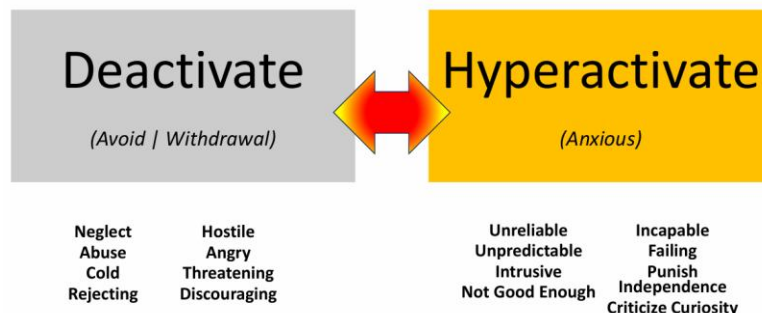
Influence: Modeling

Attachment is shaped by how children learn to manage closeness and distress in response to their caregivers' patterns.

When caregivers are inconsistent sometimes available, sometimes unavailable children often develop **hyperactivating strategies**, amplifying their emotions, seeking reassurance, and staying alert to signs of disconnection to pull the caregiver closer.

When caregivers are emotionally distant, dismissive, or overwhelmed, children tend to form **deactivating strategies**, minimizing their needs, suppressing emotions, and relying on self-sufficiency to avoid rejection.

Over time, these patterns become internalized as attachment styles, guiding how individuals seek closeness, signal needs, and protect themselves in relationships.



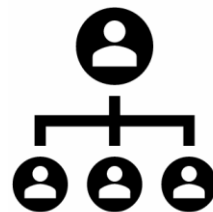
Influence: The Intergenerational Baton

Attachment patterns can transmit intergenerational trauma and legacy burdens from family of origin, culture, and faith or religion when caregivers' unresolved stress, trauma, or attachment wounds shape the ways they relate to their children.

For example, a parent who experienced neglect or abuse may unconsciously respond with emotional distance, overprotection, or hypervigilance, teaching the child that relationships are unsafe or unpredictable.

These early experiences influence the child's attachment strategies hyperactivating or deactivating which can then carry into their own adult relationships and parenting.

Without conscious reflection or intervention, this cycle can perpetuate patterns of mistrust, emotional suppression, or relational anxiety, effectively passing down not only behaviors but also the psychological and emotional weight of past trauma from one generation to the next.



FAMILY OF ORIGIN



CULTURE



FAITH or RELIGION

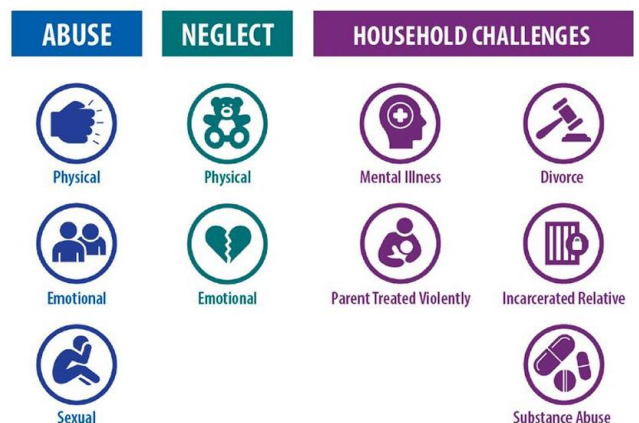
Influence: ACES

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can strongly influence attachment by disrupting a child's sense of safety, stability, and trust in caregivers.

When a child is exposed to high levels of stress such as abuse, neglect, conflict, or household instability their nervous system stays on alert, making it harder to form secure relationships.

Caregivers dealing with their own stress or trauma may be less emotionally available or consistent, leading children to develop protective attachment patterns like hyperactivation (clinging, anxiety) or deactivation (withdrawal, emotional distancing).

Over time, these adaptations shape how individuals understand closeness, regulate emotions, and rely on others in future relationships.



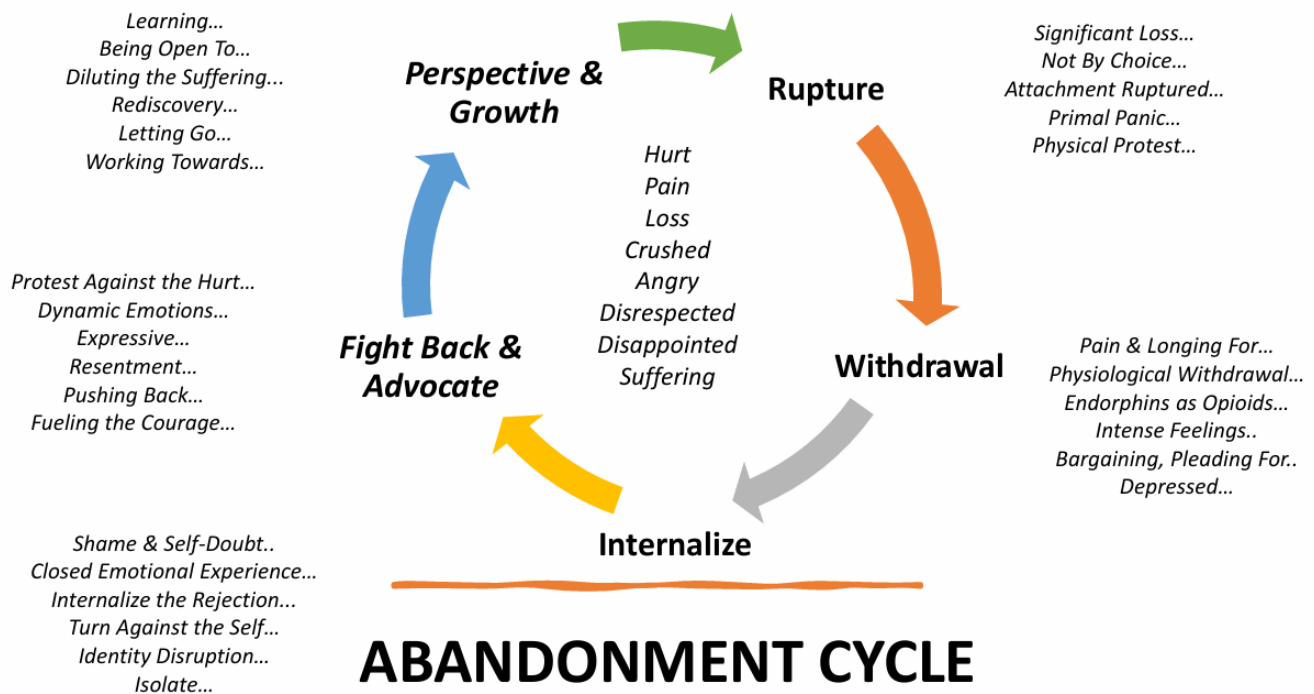
Impact: Abandonment

The **abandonment cycle** is strongly influenced by attachment because early experiences with caregivers shape how individuals perceive and respond to loss, rejection, or emotional unavailability.

Those with **anxious attachment** may become hypervigilant to signs of potential abandonment, reacting with clinginess, heightened emotional expression, or attempts to control closeness, which can inadvertently push others away.

Those with **avoidant attachment** may respond to perceived threats of abandonment by withdrawing, shutting down emotionally, or distancing themselves, which can reinforce feelings of isolation in both partners.

Over time, these patterned responses create a self-perpetuating cycle: fear of abandonment triggers behaviors that increase relational strain, which then reinforces the original attachment fears, making it difficult to break the cycle without intentional awareness, validation, and repair.



Repair

Repairing attachment begins with creating a relational environment where **safety, consistency, and emotional presence** can be rebuilt over time.

This process involves **validation**, where each partner's feelings and experiences are acknowledged as real and understandable, reducing defensiveness and softening protective strategies.

It also requires **accountability**, meaning each person takes responsibility for the ways their behaviors intentionally or not have impacted the relationship.

When partners consistently show up with openness, honesty, empathy, and follow-through, they begin to counter old attachment wounds.

Small, repeated moments of responsiveness, repair after conflict, and reliable action gradually reshape the attachment bond, allowing trust, vulnerability, and connection to grow again.

ATTACHMENT

Repair is CRITICAL...

- Acknowledge reality what occurred.
 - Validate each person's reactions.
- Own your role in the rupture.
 - "Keep your side of the street clean!"
- Offer repair.
 - It will look/feel different for each person and each circumstance.



Want to Learn More? Explore these additional resources to deepen your understanding:

- Link: [Attachment Discussion \(Sue Johnson\)](#)
- Link: [Attachment Theory](#)
- Link: [Attachment Style](#)
- Link: [Avoidant - Anxious Patterns](#)
- Link: [Attached - Science of Attachment](#)
- Book: [Attached: The New Science of Attachment](#)
- Book: [Love Sense \(Sue Johnson\)](#)
- Book: [Hold Me Tight \(Sue Johnson\)](#)
- Book: [The Seven Principles \(Gottman\)](#)
- Book: [The Relationship Cure](#)

The more you understand your attachment patterns and responses, the more equipped you'll be to create safe, connected, and responsive relationships.