

Developing Healthy Attachments & Healing from Attachment Disruptions

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May 25, 2023

Objectives

- Identify and describe Attachment, Attunement, and Co-regulation.
- Understand the impact of unhealthy attachments in childhood and how unhealthy attachments impact us across the lifespan.
- Define how containment affects co-regulation.
- Identify how we create co-regulation and how co-regulation leads to self-regulation.
- Identify adult attachment styles and how adults can heal from attachment disruption.



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developed by:

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Opening: Attachment Style Quiz

Adult Attachment Style Mini-Questionnaire

https://vivianbaruch.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014-07-17-Know_your_Adult_Attachment_Style_MINI_E-Questionnaire-Diane-Poole-Heller.pdf

- Questionnaire: focus on one significant adult relationship – ideally a current or past partner
- Does not need to be a romantic relationship, but must be the individual with whom you feel the most connected
- **THIS IS NOT MEANT TO BE A DIAGNOSTIC TOOL:** and it's a good starting point to begin your personal exploration into your attachment styles.





Focus for Today

What is Attachment
& Attunement

Impact of Insecure
Attachments

Co-Regulation & Self
Regulation

Adult Attachment
Styles & Healing



What is Attachment & Attunement?



Attachment

Attachment is a deep emotional bond with another person.

Attachment

- **Caregivers:** strong bond to their child from birth
- **Infants:** innate desire to develop attachments
- The child develops attachment through **sensing the caregiver's connection**



Attachment Theory

- Primary caregivers need to nurture & respond to promote healthy attachment
- Child senses caregiver is “dependable”
- Being dependable, nurturing, & responsive will provide children with a “secure base”



Research: Still Face Experiment



Edward Tronick, Ph.D.

- Has been done with mothers & fathers
- Parent engages with Baby
- Disengages with “still face”
- Baby moves into increasingly distressed state
- Baby then shuts down
- Parent re-engages & baby becomes playful again

<https://www.psychhelp.com.au/what-does-the-still-face-experiment-teach-us-about-connection/>

Still Face Experiment: Dads



- <https://youtu.be/7Pcr1Rmr1rM>

Attachment & Attunement

- Attachment is a deep emotional bond with another person.
- Attunement: “In tune with”
- “Attunement describes how reactive a person is to another's emotional needs and moods.”
- Attunement is a building block for attachment

<https://www.alleydog.com/glossary/definition.php?term=Attunement#:~:text=Attunement%20describes%20how%20reactive%20a,on%20another%20person's%20emotional%20state.>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-attachment-theory-2795337>

<https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/pregnancy-and-babies/attachment>





Why is it Important?

- Allows child to explore: has safe base to return to
- 1st way infants learn about feelings & actions
- Handle situations later: separating for school
- Cooperation: give & take
- Self-control: Regulates emotions
- Learn to trust others

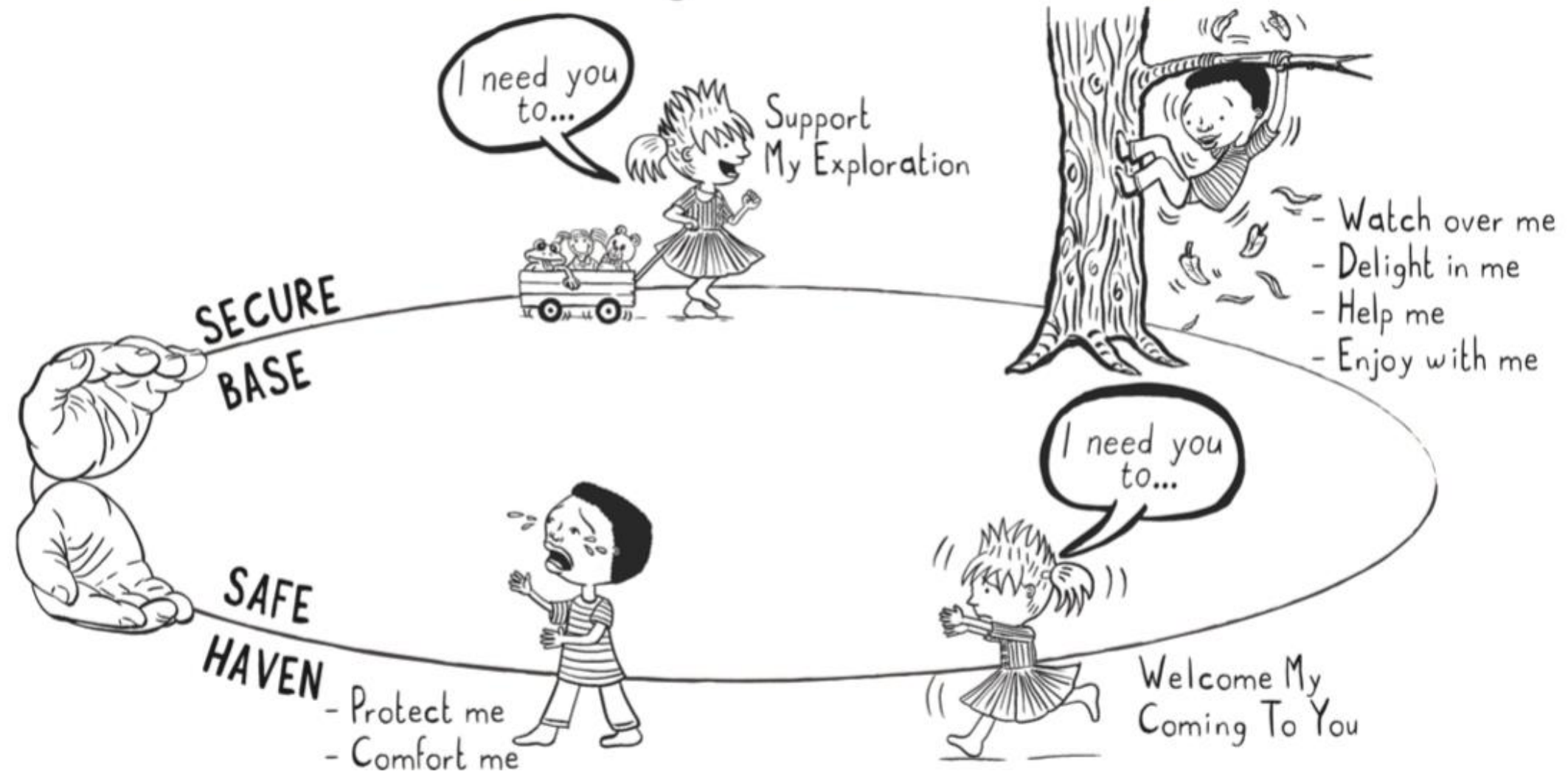
Circle of Security Video

<https://vimeo.com/circleofsecurity>



Circle of Security®

Parent Attending To The Child's Needs





Secure Childhood Attachment Benefits

Good self-esteem

Self-reliance

More independent

Perform better in school

Positive social relationships

Less depressed & anxious



Impact of Insecure Attachment



Attachment Styles

- Biological mechanism that allows us to survive
- No right or wrong style
- Styles are stable but plastic
- Biological, social, & experience impact our style
- Attachment Theory: empowers us to learn attachment styles & find strategies to improve relationships

Attachment Styles

- Mary Ainsworth 1970s
 - Observe: 12-18 month olds
 - Organized vs. Disorganized
 - Secure: Secure-Organized
 - Avoidant: Insecure-Organized
 - Anxious: Insecure-Organized
-
- Main & Solomon 1986
 - Fearful/Disorganized:
Insecure-Disorganized



<u>Attachment Styles</u>	Anxiety showed at separation	Stranger Anxiety	Reunion behaviour	Other	Caregiver's responsiveness to the child's signals and needs
Secure Attachment	Distress when primary caregiver leaves	Avoidant of stranger when alone, but friendly when Primary caregiver present	Positive and happy when primary caregiver returns	Will use primary caregiver as safe base to explore environment. Infant believes and trusts that their needs will be met	Sensitive Consistent
Avoidant Attachment	Infant shows no signs of distress when primary caregiver leaves	Infant is ok with stranger and plays normally when stranger is present	Infant shows little interest when primary caregiver returns	Primary caregiver and stranger are able to provide comfort to the infant equally well. Infant believes that their needs probably won't be met	Distant Disengaged
Ambivalent Attachment	Show signs of intense distress when primary caregiver	Avoids stranger, shows fear	Approaches primary caregiver but resists contact, may push them away	Cries more and explores less. Cannot rely on their needs being met	Inconsistent, sometimes sensitive, sometimes neglectful
Disorganised Attachment	Frightened, dazed, frozen	May or may not seek comfort from stranger	Contradictory- approaches/moves away – may back into primary caregiver for comfort	Freezes, goes into stillness, rocks, fears the primary caregiver. Infant confused conflicting impulses of not knowing how to get their needs met	Frightened or Frightening, passive or intrusive, Disassociated Extremely erratic



**Attachment
Styles
TBRI® Animate:
Attachment**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlhATiiM-Pw>

Secure Attachment Style

- Organized & Secure attachment
- Secure: regularly gets needs met
- **Feels safe & Nurtured**





Anxious (Ambivalent) Attachment Style

- Organized but Insecure
- Inconsistent love & care; child is emotional, anger or disinterest toward caregiver



Avoidant Attachment Style

- Organized but Insecure
- Only get some needs met; child suppressed emotion, withdrawn

<https://medium.com/invisible-illness/the-four-different-attachment-styles-b711d01c19ec/>



Fearful/Disorganized Attachment Style

- Disorganized & insecure
- Parent is often source of fear, often abusive or neglectful parents; high level of stress & anxiety response



Insecure Attachment Impact

- See adults as unreliable
- May not trust adults easily

Risk Factors

- Abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual)
- Caregivers with poor parenting skills
- Parental anger issues
- Parental neglect
- Parents with psychiatric conditions
- Prenatal exposure to alcohol or drugs



Risk Factors

- Has had many different foster care providers
- Spent time in an orphanage
- Experienced multiple traumatic events
- Taken away from a primary caretaker after forming a healthy bond





Impact

- Avoid people - refuse to engage with others
- Exaggerated distress
- Show anger, fear, and anxiety



Attachment Disorder

- Hurting others
- Extreme clinginess
- Failure to smile
- Intense bursts of anger
- Lack of eye contact
- Lack of fear of strangers



Attachment Disorder

- Lack of affection
- Oppositional behaviors
- Poor impulse control
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Not joining in play
- Withdrawn or listless moods

Support & Treatment

A photograph of a man with a beard and a young boy playing on a light-colored rug. The man is lying on his back, wearing a red and white checkered shirt, and is smiling at the boy. The boy is leaning over the man, wearing a grey shirt and blue jeans, and is holding the man's hands. The background is a blurred living room with a couch and other people.

- Need stable, healthy environment
- Initially still may push caregiver away & caregivers may struggle to connect
- Therapy to heal from trauma & reduce symptoms
- Social skills training
- Family therapy to help families find new ways to respond



Co-Regulation

Containment

“To help understand how containment works in attachment, think of a container: a defined space that can safely hold and accommodate its contents.”



Containment

Psychology:

“Hold” what the other person is needing

- Emotionally
- Mentally
- Security & Safety
- Throughout lifespan





Co-Regulation

- Initially referred to response between caregiver & infant
- Now: process of regulatory support that can occur within the context of caring relationships across the lifespan



Co-Regulation

- Safe adult helps regulate until child regains self-regulation
- Sustains connection while guiding the child to appropriate behaviors & responses

Co-Regulation



Toddler:

- Just figuring out strong emotions:
overwhelmed
- Parent steps in: calm, regulated way, identifies emotion & provides care
- Toddler starts to calm
- Creates co-regulation



Caregiver Self- Regulation

- Research: attachment style of caregiver predicts child's attachment style & child's well-being
- Caregivers with significant unresolved childhood histories can inadvertently trigger unhealthy behaviors in the children
- Caregivers need to be aware of their own emotional state, attachment style, & emotional availability

Co-Regulation

3 key components of co-regulation across lifespan:

1. A warm, responsive relationship where children feel secure & cared for
2. Environmental structures that help self-regulation be manageable & reduces stress
3. Skill instruction & coaching to build on self-regulation





Caregiver Self-Regulation

- Notice own feelings & reactions during stressful interactions
- Notice thoughts & beliefs about the behaviors of others
- Use strategies to self-calm & respond effectively & compassionately
- take a moment for some deep breaths or self-talk



How Much is Needed?

- As a child's ability to manage their own emotions increases, less caregiver emotional support is required
- And, support will always be needed



Supporting Caregivers

- Provide accessible & relevant information to caregivers
- Specific information: developmental stages birth - childhood.



Healing Attachment

Window of Tolerance

- Dr. Dan Siegel, MD: Zones
- Within Window: Stability
- Hyperarousal: “Fight”
- Hypoarousal: “Flight/Freeze”
- Moving “out of the window”:
Notice body signals that we
are moving out of our
window

HYPERAROUSAL:
Fight/outburst: “I am unsafe”

ESCALATION:
Vigilant: “I feel threatened”

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE:
“I am calm enough to learn”

HYPOAROUSAL:
Flight: “I am flustered and avoidant”

DISSOCIATION:
Freeze: “I am too overwhelmed”

<https://www.nicabm.com/trauma-how-to-help-your-clients-understand-their-window-of-tolerance/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifespan-psychology/202004/expanding-the-window-tolerance>

<https://biologydictionary.net/parasympathetic-nervous-system/>

Window of Tolerance

- “Anxiety”: Alerts us to a “threat”
- **Reduces window:** Stress, sleep, poor self-regulation skills, past experiences
- **Patterns:** repeated pattern of “shooting out the window” triggers “false alarms”
- **Expanding the Window:** Encouraging Stability



<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifespan-psychology/202004/expanding-the-window-tolerance>

<https://biologydictionary.net/parasympathetic-nervous-system/>

Attachment Styles: Adult

- Don't really “grow out” of attachment style
- Symptoms shift with age
- Untreated problems can impact relationships across lifespan
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Therapy helpful in addressing



Secure: Adult

- Accept their emotions
- Create boundaries
- Express emotions in a healthy way
- Feel secure & connected to loved ones
- Not afraid to leave an unhealthy relationship
- Can handle rejection
- Trusting & long-lasting relationships



Anxious:Adult

- Nervous & insecure in their relationships
- Need constant reassurance
- Lack of trust
- Difficult time believing others actually love them
- Can become clingy & possessive
- Idealize relationships but are fearful of rejection



Avoidant: Adult

- Avoid emotional intimacy
- Discomfort with affection
- Fear being vulnerable
- Prefer to live rather independent life
- Rationalize their emotions
- Deny feelings to avoid confrontation
- May constantly keep their partner at arm's length



Disorganized:Adult

- Both the characteristics of anxious & avoidant
- “Push-pull” dynamic: want to feel close & loved but also want to avoid any feelings of intimacy : “Get away closer”
- Dysfunctional and unstable relationships
- Negative storm of emotions





ESA: Earned Secure Attachments

- Adults who lacked secure attachments as a child & found a way to heal
- Able to make sense of what happened to them in a meaningful way
- Doesn't downplay harm done: my mother rejected me, & I know now she suffered from depression
- Therapy & subsequent healthy relationships

A photograph of two women sitting at a dark table in what appears to be a cafe or coffee shop. The woman on the left has long, wavy brown hair and is wearing a black jacket. She is smiling and looking towards the woman on the right. The woman on the right has short, dark hair and is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. She is also smiling and looking towards the woman on the left. Both women have their hands clasped on the table. There are two white coffee cups with black lids on the table. The background is blurred, showing some lights and what might be a window or door.

Healing Attachment

- A positive view of self & others
- Comfortable with being emotionally close
- Comfortable depending on others & having others depend on them
- Don't worry about being alone or having others not accept them

Healing Attachment

- Believe they are valuable & worthy
- Believe others are trustworthy & dependable
- Balance of intimacy & independence
- Can talk about difficult attachment experiences from early life





ESA: Earned Secure Attachments

- Unsafe, unseen, & unsoothed in the past
- To safe, seen, and soothed in the present

<https://lindsaybraman.com/attunement-containment-attachment/>

<https://www.fueledschools.org/blog/earned-secure-attachment/>

A photograph of four hands of different skin tones cupped together, holding a bright red, glossy heart. The hands are positioned in a way that they form a protective and caring shape around the heart. The background is a soft, light blue gradient.

Thank You for Coming