



SUPPORTING A CLIENT'S JOURNEY FROM INSECURE RELATIONAL ATTACHMENT TO ACHIEVING THERAPEUTIC CHANGE.



EARLY EXPERIENCES – AND THEIR ROLE IN ATTACHMENT

- What is attachment?

Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) is one of the more popular psychological concepts from the 20th century. Experiences early in life, particularly in our early childhoods, greatly impact how we grow and develop, our physical and mental health, our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Two important factors to think about when considering our mental well-being are the quality of our attachment relationships and our experience with ACEs.

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- What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

(ACEs) are *“highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. They can be a single event or prolonged threats to, and breaches of, the young person's safety, security, trust or bodily integrity.”* (Young Minds, 2018).

EXAMPLES OF ACES-

- Physical abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Living with someone who abused drugs
- Living with someone who abused alcohol
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Living with someone who has gone to prison
- Living with someone with a serious mental illness
- Losing a parent through divorce, death or abandonment



Impact of ACEs

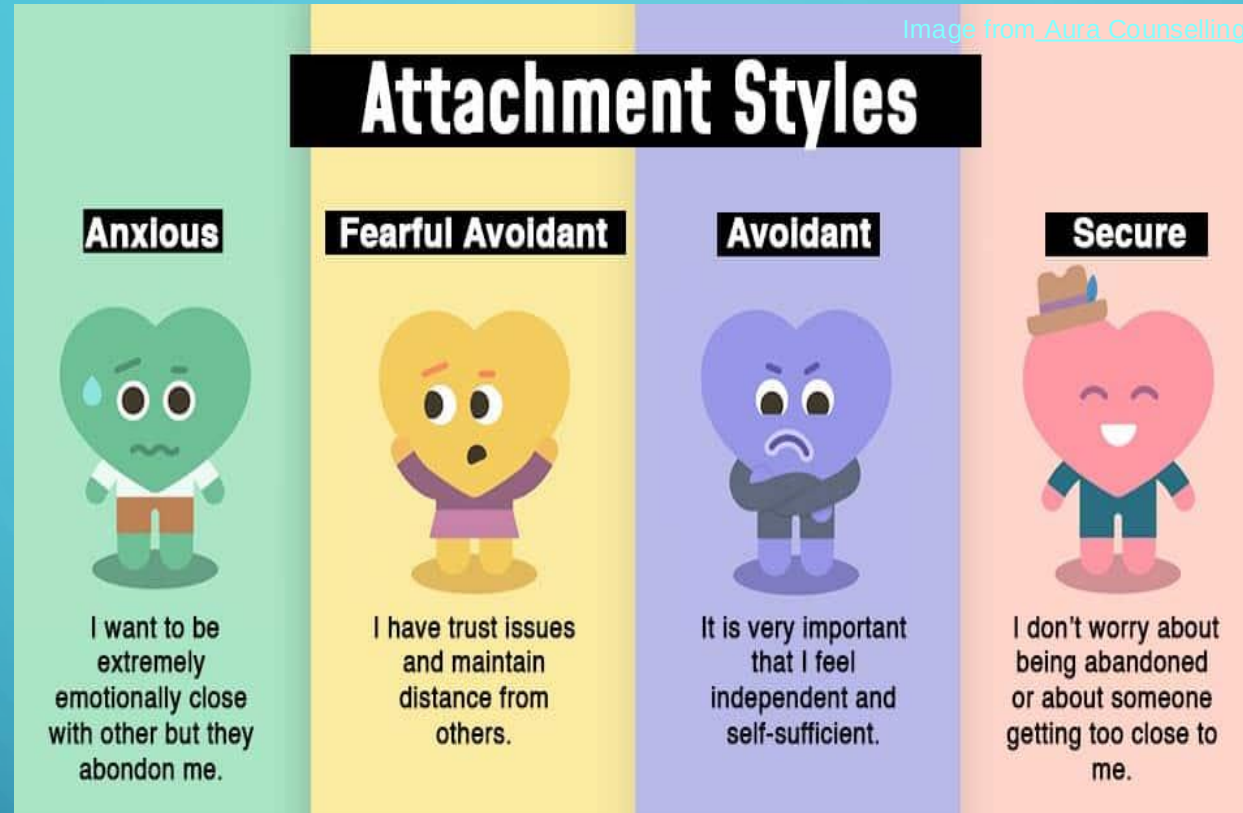
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can profoundly impact physical and mental health, often serving as barriers to the development of healthy attachment relationships in children. The effects of ACEs on individual well-being may include a range of physical and psychological challenges.

- An increase in the risk of mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. 1 in 3 diagnosed mental health conditions in adulthood directly relate to ACEs.
- The ability to recognise and manage different emotions.
- The capacity to make and keep healthy friendships and other relationships.
- The ability to manage behaviour in school settings.
- Difficulties coping with emotions safely without causing harm to self or others

Insecure:

Anxious/Preoccupied

- Value their relationship but worry that their partner is not as invested as them
- Feeling unworthy of love
- Needing constant external approval
- Difficulty being alone
- Fear of being abandoned which leads to clingy behaviour
- Exhibit intense jealousy which stems from lack of trust or low self-esteem



Insecure: Avoidant/Dismissive

Generally, avoid emotional closeness or suppress feelings

Difficulty trusting people

Strong sense of independence and not needing others in life

Dismisses relationship once it becomes too serious

Lack of emotional intimacy so the relationship lacks depth

Insecure:

Disorganized/Fearful-Avoidant

- Avoid emotional attachment out of fear of being hurt
- Contradictory behaviour
- Difficulty trusting others
- Those with disorganized/fearful-avoidant attachment styles want a close relationship but have trouble trusting and depending on others
- Unpredictable behaviour due to switching between need for security and fear

J. R. Harris (1998) is one of the main critics of Bowlby's attachment theory. People often believe that kind or rude parents will raise children with similar traits. However, Harris argues that parents do not solely shape their child's personality. Instead, peers have a greater influence. For example, immigrant children may speak their parents' native language at home but learn the new language without an accent to fit in with their peers.



NATURE VERSUS NURTURE



Agreeing with Harris (1998), Field (1996) believes parents are not solely responsible for how their child develops. Advising they have some responsibility because they provide genes and have some influence. However, children are influenced more by their social groups when it comes to shaping their personalities, with this is an important point to remember. Additionally, it also discusses the limits of attachment theory. The mother is not always the main person a child becomes attached, so we cannot assume that she will always be the primary figure.

HOW MAY THIS PRESENT

ANXIOUSLY ATTACHED INDIVIDUALS HAVE **HYPERACTIVATING** ATTACHMENT SYSTEMS. (LOOKING FOR MORE ENMESHMENT, REASSURANCE, CARE AND ATTENTION)

- A fear of abandonment might lead to excessively seeking closeness or assurance.
- Repeatedly asking for validation due to fears of not being loved or wanted.
- Reading too deeply into the partner's actions or words, often with a negative spin.
- Looking to the partner to constantly validate self-worth due to deep-seated feelings of inadequacy.

AVOIDANT ATTACHED INDIVIDUALS HAVE **DEACTIVATING** ATTACHMENT SYSTEMS. (CREATING DISTANCE FROM INTENSE CONNECTION, INTIMACY OR EMOTIONS).

- Denying attachment needs and being compulsively self-reliant
- Suppressing attachment-related thoughts and feelings
- Keeping anger and resentment inside.
- Avoiding emotional involvement, intimacy, interdependence and self-disclosure.

Changing your attachment style



It is possible to change your attachment style through personal development by working on strategies to break negative patterns that repeat in your life. Some strategies that may help you move towards a more secure attachment style are,

- Practice acceptance of yourself through self-compassion and building self-esteem.
- Learn to identify and express your emotional needs.
- Avoid reacting and rather take time to process information before deciding how to act.
- Work on learning to resolve conflict.
- Reflect on your relationship and take accountability for how you make the other person feel.
- Work with a therapist to uncover the root of your attachment style and techniques for secure relationships.

Humanistic Therapies



THE PARADOXICAL THEORY OF CHANGE

This Gestalt theory highlights that true change occurs when individuals embrace their authentic selves rather than striving to fit an ideal. By allowing ourselves and others the freedom to be who we genuinely are, we can foster a supportive environment that nurtures natural, meaningful, and orderly growth. This approach encourages positive transformation and self-acceptance, leading to more fulfilling personal development.

AWARENESS, ACCEPTANCE, CHANGE.

Gestalt therapy looks at how clients experience life and relate to others. It focuses on what is happening in the present moment rather than the topic of discussion. The main goal is for clients to become aware of their actions and thoughts. This awareness helps them learn to accept themselves and make the changes they want to make.

SEVEN STAGES

Clients are never entirely in one stage of the process; they may advance and then regress.

People at this stage tend to have a rigid personality and can seem emotionally distant, detached from both their feelings and other people. Rogers believed that these individuals would be unlikely to recognise the benefits of therapy, making it improbable that they would choose to participate in it.

In this stage, there is a gradual loosening of constructs, yet individuals often struggle to take responsibility for their own actions and the circumstances in their lives. While there is a growing acknowledgement that things may not be right, personal blame tends to be directed towards others or the world in general.

At this stage, clients often see things in black-and-white terms, believing that if something isn't one way, it must be the opposite. Those seeking therapy typically find themselves here and require full acceptance before progressing to the next stage.

Clients now start to express deeper feelings, often stemming from past experiences. At this stage, they begin to engage in more direct relationships with their therapist, though there is often a sense of fear around it.

By stage five, clients feel more confident expressing their current feelings and recognise and accept their ambivalent feelings towards another person, understanding that it is acceptable for these conflicting emotions to coexist.

Rogers described this stage as distinctive and often dramatic, characterised by the full use of previously suppressed feelings. Awareness becomes sharp and meaningful, allowing the self to be viewed as an integrated whole, encompassing mind, body, emotions, and intellect. Ambiguities are transformed into clarity, resulting in irreversible changes in attitude and perception. The worldview shifts significantly as feelings flow freely and are regarded as enriching rather than something to be avoided, alleviating fears surrounding negative emotions.

There is a fluid, changing quality to life, as people are able to experience each new event without being bound by interpretations that belong in the past. There is a strong feeling of living fully in the present, an ability to relate freely to others, and an awareness that further change and growth is not only possible, but desirable.

NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL

Limitations of Person-Centred Approach

- Ignored social, historical & political factors
- Some clients may prefer a more directive, structured treatment
- Does not focus on the use of specific techniques, making treatment difficult to standardise
- Beginning therapists may find it difficult to provide both support and challenges to clients
- Limits of the therapist as a person may interfere with developing a genuine therapeutic relationship



CARL ROGERS 3 CORE CONDITIONS

The most important part of the process is the relationship between the client and the therapist. Without a solid and trustworthy foundation to build off, no matter what fantastic technique is used, the client will never fully feel safe enough to disclose what is truly troubling them that they cannot, or aren't even aware of, to share with anyone else.



Carl Rogers Core Conditions for therapeutic change 1957



Empathy, Congruence and Unconditional Positive Regard reflect the counsellor's ideal attitude towards clients.

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