

## UNDERSTANDING *attachment styles*

By **Gabby Hagen**, *EAP Clinical Supervisor*

You may have heard the term “Attachment Style” before, but what does it mean? Attachment styles are non-pathological, meaning they are not indicators of a mental health diagnosis. They are a way to understand how we create attachment within our relationships. As human beings, our attachment needs are enormous. There are four different attachment styles—one secure and three insecure.



**SECURE**



**ANXIOUS**



**AVOIDANT**



**DISORGANIZED**

## SECURE ATTACHMENT STYLE:

A secure attachment style results from caregivers who consistently meet the child's emotional and physical needs. This results in the individual generally viewing others as safe and dependable.

*What secure attachment in adults can look like:*

- Capable of sending and receiving healthy expressions of intimacy
- Feeling secure alone as well as in a relationship
- Tending to have a positive view of relationships



## ANXIOUS/PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT STYLE:

An anxious/preoccupied attachment style results from caregivers inconsistently meeting the child's needs. Sometimes, the caregiver is supportive and attuned to the child's needs; other times, the caregiver is misattuned. This causes the child to be uncertain about their relationship with their caregiver and when or if their needs will be met.

*What anxious attachment in adults can look like:*

- Highly attuned to the needs of others but insecure and anxious about their own needs in relationships
- Strong fear of abandonment in relationships
- High level of emotional dependence on others

## DISMISSIVE/AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT STYLE:

An avoidant attachment style results from caregivers who are not emotionally available and/or attuned to the child's emotional needs. The caregiver may be physically present but seems to pull away when the child reaches out for emotional closeness. This causes the child to avoid expressing their emotions and needs to others because they learn to deal with it themselves. *What avoidant attachment in adults can look like:*

- Tending to be independent and feeling they do not need to rely on others
- Having many relationships, but relationships tend to remain surface-level
- Avoiding close relationships and tending to withdraw from relationships if things get too serious

## DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT STYLE:

A disorganized attachment style results when caregivers become a source of fear for the child. The child may not know what to expect from their caregiver or if their caregiver will meet their needs. Individuals may seek and crave closeness from others but, at the same time, reject closeness due to fear. Often, these individuals have experienced abuse, neglect, or severe loss. *What disorganized attachment in adults can look like:*

- Both wanting and fearing close relationships with others
- Engaging in self-sabotaging behaviors that can cause relationships to end
- Expecting and predicting that others will reject them, even when there are no signs

Understanding attachment styles can provide valuable insights into how we form and maintain relationships. By recognizing our own attachment style and those of others, we can foster healthier and more supportive connections. It's important to remember that attachment styles are not fixed and can be influenced by our experiences and efforts. By gaining a deeper understanding of attachment, we can strive to create more secure and fulfilling relationships in our lives.

For more information on attachment styles, visit [Attachment Project](#).