

The Importance of Secure Attachments

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When working with clients in my practice in the scope of trauma and eating disorders, I see it over and over again – unstable, absent, or insecure attachments early on in life. I'm talking infancy, here. So what is secure attachment and why is it such a powerful and necessary thing?

When you were born, one of the earliest and nonverbal forms of communication that was sent to you was being nurtured from your caregiver. Feeding, cuddling, eye contact and skin contact. Soothing and nurturing caregivers who provide these forms of secure attachment are consistently communicating with you in infancy that your needs are met; if hungry you are fed, if needing affection it is given. You are safe.

As you grow up to be a child, these secure attachments become more verbal, too. When a caregiver praises you for doing well on your exam, or encourages and believes in you when you question your own abilities, it conveys very critical messages that you are worth something- and on a neurobiological level, positively impacts the way your brain's neurological system develops.

These types of early social-emotional communications directly influence the hard-wiring of your infant and child brain circuits that are responsible for future social and emotional development. Meaning, *the more secure and consistent your caregiver was in infancy and childhood, the more able you are to develop and effectively use your emotions and affect regulation.* Research has shown that this early-on nonverbal emotional attunement between your infant self and your caregiver shapes the development of your ability to cope with stress.



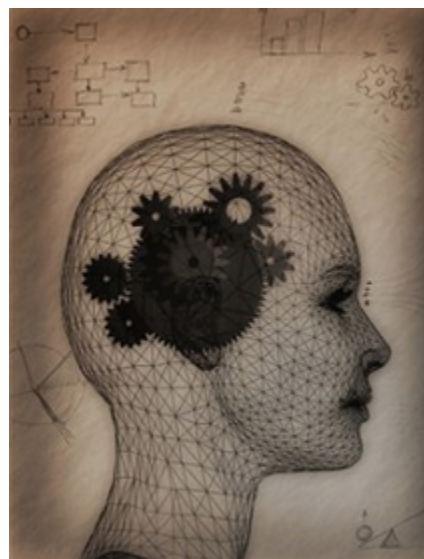
What Happens When Attachment Problems Occur?

When attachment problems occur, your neural development and capacity for affect tolerance (or ability to cope with stress in positive ways by means of self-regulation) become compromised. More often than not, when my clients tell their story of their own childhood, relationship with parents or caregivers, there is a consistent lack of secure attachment.

What does an insecure or unstable attachment look like?

According to research, those who did not receive those messages of safety both verbally and nonverbally consistently throughout infancy and childhood do not have the same neural network as those who were provided secure attachment from their caregivers. An instability of emotion occurs; a vulnerability within that can impact one's level of resiliency, increase feelings of powerlessness and shame.

Imagine growing up as an infant and child receiving insecure messages from a caregiver. When someone conveys early on that you are worthless or insignificant, not good enough, or a disappointment, these ideas become a reality for the growing child. Once instilled by caregivers, the child has no choice but to believe these messages. And keep in mind, their neural network does not allow them to believe otherwise at this point, due to the insecure attachment in-and-of-itself. After the child begins to believe these messages they ultimately see the world through those lenses and begin to behave in such a way that fulfills this unhealthy and mistaken identity.



Now imagine that child growing up to be a teenager and young adult. Could you see how that individual with insecure attachments might suffer in his or her relationships? Teachers, parents, peers, intimate relationships all are affected to some degree or another. Frequently seen in adolescence and adulthood are forms of *low self esteem, body image issues, eating disorders, self harm, thoughts of suicide, anxiety, depression, thoughts of shame, and not performing well*. And it all starts at the significant time in infancy between the feeding and nurturing interactions between caregiver and child.

The good news here?

If you believe you are one of those individuals who did not grow up with secure and healthy attachments, no it does not mean that you are “doomed” in your relationships or that you will have the feelings of depression for the rest of your life. You probably have identified with one or more of the above-stated symptoms and feel *off* or *different* at times.

Seeking professional help can assist you in sorting out your childhood experiences, and with time gain the confidence and self-esteem you need in order to believe you can succeed in anything you set your mind to. And remember—once you believe in something, it makes it that much more attainable. Do not be victim to your circumstance. Seek help and rise above!

