

Attachment Styles

The four attachment styles are:

1. **Secure**
2. **Avoidant** (aka dismissive, or anxious-avoidant in children)
3. **Anxious** (aka preoccupied, or anxious-ambivalent in children)
4. **Disorganized** (aka fearful avoidant in children)

Avoidant, anxious, and disorganized are considered insecure attachment styles.

1. What's a SECURE attachment style?

Secure attachment is defined by an ability to build healthy, long-lasting relationships, says Peoples.

How it develops

Secure attachment is the result of feeling secure with your caregivers from childhood and being able to ask for reassurance or validation without punishment. Ultimately, you felt safe, understood, comforted, and valued during your early interactions. Your caregivers were probably [emotionally available](#) and aware of their own emotions and behaviors. "Hence, children model (imitate) secure attachment as well as receive it from their caregivers," Peoples adds.

Signs

Signs of a secure attachment style include:

- ability to regulate your emotions
- easily trusting others
- effective communication skills
- ability to seek emotional support
- comfortable being alone
- comfortable in close relationships
- ability to self-reflect in partnerships
- being easy to connect with

- ability to manage conflict well
- high self-esteem
- ability to be emotionally available

How it manifests in relationships

“Securely attached people grow up feeling secure emotionally and physically and can engage in the world with others in a healthy way,” says Peoples. As a result, people with secure attachment styles tend to navigate relationships well. They’re generally positive, trusting, and loving to their partners. “They trust their partners’ intentions and jealousy is often not an issue for them,” adds Peoples. “Securely attached people feel that they’re worthy of love and don’t need external reassurance.”

2. What’s an avoidant attachment style?

Avoidant, dismissive-avoidant, or anxious-avoidant are all words for the same insecure attachment style. “[It’s] defined by failures to build long-term relationships with others due to an inability to engage in physical and emotional intimacy,” says Peoples.

How it develops

In childhood, you may have had strict or emotionally distant and absent caregivers.

Your caregivers may have:

- left you to fend for yourself
- expected you to be independent
- reprimanded you for depending on them
- rejected you when expressing your needs or emotions
- been slow to respond to your basic needs

“Some avoidant-producing parents are outright neglectful but others are simply busy, slightly disinterested, and more concerned with things like grades, chores, or manners than feelings, hopes, dreams, or fears,” adds Jordan. As a result, Peoples says these children may learn to adopt a strong sense of independence so they don’t have to rely on anyone else for care or support.

Signs

You might have an anxious-avoidant attachment style if you:

- persistently avoid emotional or physical intimacy
- feel a strong sense of independence
- are uncomfortable expressing your feelings
- are dismissive of others
- have a hard time trusting people
- feel threatened by anyone who tries to get close to you
- spend more time alone than interacting with others
- believe you don't need others in your life
- “Commitment issues “

How it manifests in relationships

Anxious-avoidant attached adults may tend to navigate relationships at an arm's length, says Peoples. “The need for emotional intimacy is simply lacking in this type of individual, so romantic relationships are not able to reach any level of depth,” she adds.

“While they allow romantic partners to engage with them, they avoid getting emotionally close,” Peoples explains. “A partner may feel as if they can never get inside and will inevitably be stone-walled or dismissed when the relationship feels too serious for the anxious-avoidant partner.”

3. What's an anxious attachment style?

Anxious — also known as anxious-ambivalent or anxious-preoccupied — attachment style is another type of insecure attachment characterized by:

- fear of rejection
- fear of abandonment
- depending on a partner for validation and emotional regulation

- codependent tendencies

How it develops

This attachment style stems from inconsistent parenting that isn't attuned to a child's needs. "These children have difficulty understanding their caregivers and have no security for what to expect from them moving forward. [They're] often confused within their parental relationships and feel unstable," says Peoples. "Children with this attachment style experience very high distress when their caregivers leave. Sometimes, the parents will be supportive and responsive to the child's needs while at other times, they will not be attuned to their children," she adds.

If you have an anxious attachment style, Jordan notes that your parents may have also:

- alternated between being overly coddling and detached or indifferent
- been easily overwhelmed
- been sometimes attentive and then push you away
- made you responsible for how they felt

"Therefore, these children often grow up thinking they are supposed to take care of other people's feelings and often become codependent," Peoples says.

Signs

Signs you might have an anxious attachment style include:

- clingy tendencies
- highly sensitive to criticism (real or perceived)
- needing approval from others
- jealous tendencies
- difficulty being alone
- low self-esteem
- feeling unworthy of love
- intense fear of rejection
- significant fear of abandonment
- difficulty trusting others
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How it manifests in relationships

According to Peoples, people with anxious attachment styles usually feel unworthy of love and need constant reassurance from their partners. “They often blame themselves for challenges in the relationship and can exhibit frequent and intense jealousy or distrust due to poor self-esteem,” she says. Ultimately, there’s a deep-rooted fear of being abandoned, rejected, or alone. And those fears typically express themselves in these ways.

4. What’s a disorganized attachment style?

“Anxious-disorganized attachment is defined as having extremely inconsistent behavior and difficulty trusting others,” says Peoples.

How it develops

The most common causes of a disorganized attachment style are [childhood trauma](#), neglect, or abuse. Fear of their parents (their sense of safety) is also present. Children with this attachment style may seem confused. “Caregivers are inconsistent and are often seen as sources of comfort and fear by their children, which leads to their disorganized behaviors,” explains Peoples.

Signs

Signs of a disorganized attachment style include:

- fear of rejection
- inability to regulate emotions
- contradictory behaviors
- high levels of anxiety
- difficulty trusting others
- signs of both avoidant and anxious attachment styles

Jordan notes that this type is also associated with mental health conditions in adulthood, including:

- mood disorders

- personality disorders
- self-harm
- substance use disorder

How it manifests in relationships

In relationships, people with disorganized attachment styles tend to have unpredictable and confusing behavior. Jordan says they alternate between being aloof and independent and being clingy and emotional. “While they desperately seek love, they also push partners away because of the fear of love,” says Peoples. “They believe that they’ll always be rejected, but they don’t avoid emotional intimacy. They fear it, and they also consistently seek it out, only to reject it again.” “They perceive their partners as unpredictable, and they themselves behave in unpredictable ways within their relationships as they continue to wrestle between the need for security and fear,” she adds.

Looking forward

“Making sense of the way one interacts with their partner and knowing why they react in certain ways can make the journey of healing much easier,” says Peoples. “New patterns of thinking can emerge, and behaviors can be corrected.”

Beware, though: “The only reliable mechanisms for identifying adult attachment are the Adult Attachment Interview or the Adult Attachment Projective,” says Jordan, who notes that these tests are administered by highly trained research psychologists.

Peoples notes that people with insecure attachment styles might need further help if they want to develop a more secure attachment type.

“In many cases, the individual may need to talk to a counselor to make sense of their childhood experiences and how they affect future relationships,” she adds. “It may not be an easy journey, but it will be well worth it.”