

## Save Your Marriage By Understanding Your Attachment Style

*Loving responsiveness is the foundation of a truly compassionate, civilized society.*

Sue Johnson, **Emotionally Focused Therapy** co-founder

To save your relationship from the Control Drama Triangle, you must first understand the problem and the solution from both your own viewpoint and that of your partner. Relationship dramas occur predominantly because of ignorance of the dynamics involved.

### Warnings About Attachment Dramas

You may be more attached to attachment dramas than you think. Attachment issues originating in childhood can wreak havoc in your relationships. Attachment in childhood is all about how the bond between parent and baby does or does not develop. The nature of how well childhood bonding succeeded dictates how well we will interact with our partners as adults. Attachment dramas then are an unseen relationship saboteur or glue, ready to undermine or enhance any relationship, no matter how well it starts off. Not only do you need to be alert to attachment saboteurs; you are also likely to find it challenging to deal with their enduring legacy. Even though most people are able to act from a secure attachment position most of the time, there are few people who are so emotionally healthy and balanced that their insecure attachment issues aren't triggered from time to time.

Therefore, it is smart to recognize your inner saboteur, so that when it comes out of its cave as a monster, you are ready and prepared. Five styles are described below, but your behaviour could reflect any combination or variation of these. Each style has strengths and weaknesses, and each style can be improved upon with insights and skills. No-one is Victim to their attachment pattern.

### Secure Attachment Style

*Life is best organized as a series of daring ventures from a secure base*

John Bowlby

1. Many people have secure attachment styles in evidence most of the time. However, when stresses arise, and especially when interpersonal conflict rears its (seemingly) ugly head, that's when people with a secure attachment style excel.
2. Most notably, this attachment style has the ability to stay engaged with their partner when conflict appears. In childhood, they have learned, or been helped, to stay engaged with self and others when a significant other is highly emotional.
3. To do this requires a strong belief in and sense of self, to know they are lovable and are deserving of good in their life.
4. They neither have a strong desire to take off and run, nor do they have a need to go hammer and tongs and get it sorted. They can stay engaged with relatively low levels of discomfort or distress.
5. Basically, a securely attached person has learned to trust that the conflict will be talked through and resolved to a point where their emotional comfort will return. They have little need to 'win' and rarely feel they have 'lost'.
6. Secure attachment is characterised by a belief that one is worthy of love and caring, and that one is also confident and competent. It is also characterised by viewing others as being dependable and trustworthy, unless their actions provide sound evidence to the contrary.
7. Furthermore, a securely attached person has the capacity not only to stay with their feelings and the person with whom they are in conflict, but is able to feel sufficiently to recognise needs, desires, insights and values that these feelings are communicating to them.
8. Thus, a securely attached individual doesn't fear being abandoned during conflict, and doesn't need to run for cover. They have the ability to remain intimate and emotionally connected both with themselves and the other person, even when it appears to others that they are being dominated.

9. The secure person has the confidence to know that conflict is just a process to be worked through, and so their reaction to it emotionally is minimal. This leaves them resourceful enough to stay engaged, intimate, and sharing of self as the need arises.

10. Totally secure people seem to be rather rare. More common are people who can behave securely attached enough in most situations to be able to functionally work through differences between self and others while remaining emotionally quite calm. However, most people have a breaking point, when their secure choices break down, and reactivity takes over. At that point, one of the attachment styles described below will kick in. Most people are well embedded in fact in one of the styles below.

## Anxious Insecure Attachment Styles.

*We're only as needy as our unmet needs.*

John Bowlby

1. You will experience this relating style as an insecure fear that warns you that your dearly beloved is about to desert you or at least not be there for you. You may fear that disconnection with your beloved is happening. You are a **connector**, and can get upset if connection is threatened. In terms of the Control Drama Triangle, you will probably identify a tendency to be a Rescuer of others, but may feel a Victim to your partner. Their preferred Persecutor behaviours are to criticise or blame.

2. A common response to the fear of being unimportant, unseen or of no consequence to your partner is to pursue her/him for engagement. If this is unsuccessful, your emotions may ramp up into frustration or anger. You are now a **pursuer** desperately seeking connection.

3. Whether or not this has been true in the past is immaterial, this inner fear will ring all the warning bells nonetheless. This fear of separation, abandonment or aloneness can arise at any time. It may haunt you as your beloved heads off to work, goes out for an evening, if he's going to be away for a day or two, and most certainly if he goes off in a huff after an argument, or emotionally disconnects.

4. Once this fear and anxiety, more commonly found in women than men, has got a grip on you emotionally, it may then manipulate your mind and convince you that disaster is on the way. This pattern of catastrophizing can convince you of the most absurd porkies, but because the whole process is emotionally based, it will feel true nonetheless.

5. About the time that this drama is going on emotionally and taking its toll on your energy it makes its most potent strike. Knowing that you are wanting this connection to another safe, supportive, reliable, loving person, your inability to get that safe and secure feeling can cause you to feel despairing, anxious or angry. For some, there is also the fear of rejection or abandonment, sometimes to the point where there is no support within you even for yourself

6. Because you probably did not fully and sufficiently internalize a self-support system in childhood, the lack of external support now causes a deep fear within you that no-one will be there for you.

7. The truth is, the child part of you was never assured that an adult would be there for you those many years ago, and so when there's no adult there once again, your inner child fears the abandonment/rejection/oversight/deprioritization she experienced as a child. Not only that, this needy inner child may leave *you* feeling abandoned because she has never learned to be self-supportive and sufficiently self-caring.

8. This is how this pattern of relating begins. When during childhood an adult lends emotional support to a child, the child internalizes this experience and is able to support self in the way she experienced it being done to her, using the internalized version of the support that was modelled by the adult those many years ago.

9. This is what gives rise to a secure attachment, a feeling that all is OK even when the boat is being rocked. So what happens when someone who was insufficiently supported in childhood, where connections, care and communication were often not there when needed, becomes an adult? The adult will now not have this built-in support process kicking into place when left alone to deal with life's dramas.

10. The adult will therefore experience anxiety or loneliness when a partner distances himself, or in some way backs off and withdraws his ability to connect and be intimate or caring.

11. The result is a feeling of emptiness inside, a cavernous lonely experience where there is no part of self able to offer support when the chips are down and others are unavailable. This may not be evident until sufficient emotional exploration has taken place.

12. Often the anxious insecure adult interprets this withdrawing as something wrong with self. This feeling that "I'm wrong" is common, and can be associated with strong self-criticism or judgment. In childhood, and now as an adult this person may experience themselves as in some way wrong for simply being who they are.

13. In some, this may plunge the anxious insecure person into a tail-spin, where they spiral into a deep hole of pain – serious pain – of hurt, fear, despair, aloneness or hopelessness. This can be a truly appalling experience, and one which only other anxious insecure people would fully understand.

14. Of course, the natural reaction when in this state is to reach out and grasp for support – any support. This person reaches out, thinking that their salvation lies in having another to cling to. However, this clinging is unattractive to others, and so there is a risk that their strong desire for connection will eventually be rejected, especially if the person they want to cling to is an avoidant insecure personality.

15. The anxious insecure individual may get so overwhelmingly anxious that they chase after their partner, wanting to resolve any differences at all costs. If the partner backs off, the anxious insecure person may feel even more desperate, possibly lashing out verbally, or in some cases, physically. High levels of frustration or anger are common at this point.

16. It is also common for this person to feel hurt by their partner's avoidant, disinterested or insensitive behaviour. This may leave them feeling hurt, which over time can turn to resentment and finally frustration or even anger and rage.

17. Alternatively, the anxious insecure person gives up on receiving any help, from self or others, and disappears into an emotional black hole, commonly dissolving into floods of tears and pulling away, feeling that their situation is hopeless.

18. Even when their need to cling is not intense, this anxious insecure person will want to talk everything over - sometimes often and endlessly - with their partner (or anyone else), because they are not used to using a totally internal process for dealing with stress or distress. Some partners will hear this as 'nagging' or at best, an unrelenting need to talk – again and again.

19. To an avoidant insecure person (who is more often than not their partner), this seems unnecessary, time consuming, illogical, energy draining, and therefore a frustrating process to have to go through. So their partner may have no idea how to support the anxious insecure person's unmet needs which originate in the need to connect and share their life meaningfully.

20. Furthermore, the innate desire of this anxious-to-connect type is for connection, harmony, approval, cooperation, security, respect, understanding and validation – and whatever needs they most missed out on in childhood. They want to be a team player with collegial decision-making.

21. The anxious insecure person is seeking externally what they struggle to do for themselves - connect inwardly. Self-care and self-soothing from self or other will help, but prioritizing support for their own needs is essential but often something they've learned not to do. Such attention to self may seem anathema to this person who empathizes well with, and consequently usually prioritizes the needs of others, ahead of self.

22. If connection and intimacy can't be found satisfactorily, the anxious insecure person will seek it through friends, internet social connection sites, clubs or other social connections. However, the concern and discomfort with one's beloved will not go away, like a nagging even nauseous discomfort.

23. The anxiously insecure person will tend to find themselves thrown into emotions such as hurt, despair, fear, upset, aloneness, hopelessness, helplessness, or powerlessness quite quickly or possibly quite often. This may escalate into resentment, bitterness, frustration and anger. These emotions may last for days.

24. Crying is a common response for anxious insecure personalities, and this could be in response to hurt, shame, anxiety, happiness, concern for others, empathy for others or for fears of what must be done next. It is essential for this attachment type to know that this is normal and not to be judgmental of self because of it.

25. Avoidants may be perplexed by and possibly judgmental of this common response of anxious insecure types to many situations. However it is a natural way for an emotionally sensitive individual

to respond to life, and is best seen as a strength (which it often is because it responds to and/or creates connection) and not a weakness, even if crying can at times kick in at inconvenient moments.

26. It may not only be difficult to support self when dealing with afflictive emotions, but the relationship event with partner that created this emotional free fall will (probably inaccurately) be perceived through the lens of childhood wounding. This will tend to distort the reality of the situation, so that their partner may struggle to tune in to, understand, or respond appropriately to the anxious insecure person's perspective.

27. Largely because of these background experiences, the anxious insecure person may see themselves as unimportant, a monster, childish, ugly, demanding, needy, inconvenient, overly sensitive, too much, flawed, a burden, unlovable, or over-reactive. One or many of these may seem valid. They may see their partner as withholding, withdrawing, distant, disinterested, cold, uncaring, controlling, dominating, bossy, patronizing, too busy, always right, or unavailable.

28. There is a risk of blaming the relationship (or partner) for these wounds and patterning, yet it's important to see that these would arise in almost *any* close relationship, not just *this* one.

29. If the partner is an avoidant insecure person, they are likely to want to rationalize the situation, while the anxious insecure person will generally want to have their feelings heard, reflected and validated. It is this mismatching of perceptual experience that leads to a high percentage of conflicts between the anxious and avoidant styles.

30. Rationally discussing the situation will therefore probably not work well for the anxious insecure person whilst feelings are running high. There is too much emotional static for this style of person to engage in reason whilst upset.

31. The way ahead for the anxious insecure person, is to firstly recognize these patterns, then own and non-judgmentally accept them, then express their unmet needs that relate to how they are feeling. They may struggle to appreciate that their partner won't otherwise understand them.

32. Secondly, they must recognize the need to provide from within the connection, approval, understanding and validation they seek from another. This can only be done by connecting to their emotions and/or negative beliefs about self, tuning in to self, and owning, accepting, understanding, validating and/or forgiving self. This requires a reflective, contemplative, time-consuming period of just sitting with what is happening within, and patiently recognizing whatever needs are present, and then meeting these by caring for self.

33. While their habitual tendency will be to reach out and want someone else's validation and attention, it is only by giving this to self that healing can finally become complete, and they will slowly then become less needy of others.

34. A partner who can provide this initially through quality listening will help the anxious insecure person down the path of supporting and caring for self. Once the anxious insecure person understands (non-judgmentally – essential to stop 'wronging' self) how they function, they can ask for a partner's support, listening ear, patience as they express their feelings, and acceptance that they are a predominantly feeling person, especially when an emotional situation arises.

35. Sometimes this anxious insecure person talks more than their partner can cope with. Their anxiety tends to encourage excessive story-telling which their partners may struggle with. Concise sharing of how they are feeling will work better, as will inviting their partners to accept those feelings as a true expression of oneself.

36. In summary the challenge for an anxious insecure person, then, is to connect with self, and express their feelings and needs in a way that their partner can hear. Their need is not to rely on external connection (which may seem will work best), but to connect with, honour, respect, value, and accept self, *and then* express requests for support.

37. Their need from others is for understanding and acceptance of their journey; to hear and accept their feelings and what these are saying, and to be there in support of this painful and on-going inner journey, without any attempt to fix it. This must be communicated and explained clearly to any partner, because most non-anxious insecure people will not understand what to do to help unless told.

## **Anxious–Avoidant Insecure Styles**

*Behind the mask of indifference is bottomless misery and behind apparent callousness, despair.*  
John Bowlby

This person tends to have most of the characteristics of the anxious insecure style described above, but has developed an avoidant variation.

1. The anxious-avoidant person is basically fearful of not being able to sustain contact with those who are close, but finds the closeness just too demanding - either scary or a waste of time. Such a person has become a **self-protective connector, a burned out pursuer, or a burned out connector** in general. They are feeling a Victim either to circumstances beyond their control, or fearful of engagement so back away from the risk of inflaming a conflict.
2. It is quite common for many women especially to behave avoidantly, yet be a connector beneath their avoidant veneer. This can be because growing up they were unable to be the connector they might naturally have been if allowed or encouraged. It could even be that they grew up too shy or fearful to meet their needs for connection.
3. This person is an anxious insecure person who has become dis-engaged with their partner when conflict arises. They stay behind their wall, accumulating hurts, resentments, anger and a belief that the other person is the problem.
4. They fear rejection or hurt, and often don't have the confidence or feel safe to connect assertively. So they may have difficulty opening up and being vulnerable. An inner tug of war is taking place. One part wants connection at all costs, and is fearful of not experiencing this. But another part is not confident about doing this, at reaching out for needs to be met.
5. This struggling part is going to avoid getting too close and taking risks of intimacy, instead preferring the space, time out, and distance from unresolvable conflict. Like all avoidant in times of crisis, this person may not feel able to reach out when the going gets tough, even though a part from within cries out for connection.
6. This leaves a chaotic state of inner turmoil. It is a terrible dilemma for the anxious-avoidant person to manage. Conflict will really upset the part that wants connection and togetherness, but a lack of feeling of safety to engage, or the fear that it will be unproductive, may keep this person from doing so.
7. If this person gets caught in the Control Drama Triangle, they may be hurling abuse and blame (persecuting) whilst wanting to connect and feel close to the person they are abusing. If feeling caught in the powerless victim role, they could just close down and avoid contact with their partner.
8. This person is very likely to feel hurt that their partner seems unable to understand them, unable to care for them, or unable to reach out to them. They may shed tears just as the anxious insecure person is likely to do, but may have tuned out to their own wounds about how this relationship is playing out.
9. However, this person is hurting nonetheless, but may be able to hide this from a partner who is likely to be perceived as hard, uncaring, and heartless. Thus, the anxious-fearful person may not even appear to be wounded, even to themselves, so closed down are they to their partner's actions.
10. Alternatively, this wounded individual may bite back in a persecuting way at their partner, but then retreat behind the protective wall they believe is necessary for their emotional survival.
11. The task for the anxious-avoidant individual, like the other two styles, is to become emotionally more able to hear the other and express their own needs, wants and desires. Otherwise, the relationship will close down. This though is a scary option to take, or may be seen as pointless.
12. A major challenge for this person is to keep safe from harm, whilst staying in touch with self. They may feel out on a limb, not knowing whether closeness or distance from the other will bring greatest comfort.
13. It may be painful and distressing for this natural connector to watch the relationship closing down. This is really the last thing they want, but they may feel unable to do anything about a situation they feel powerless to change.
14. Like anybody else, the anxious-avoidant must eventually come to the conclusion that owning how they feel, and responding functionally by connecting and communicating, is the only way forward, despite the risks this presents.
15. The first step then is to recognize feelings when conflict occurs, and that these are likely to be ambivalent, some pulling towards connection, others towards isolation and safety.
16. The anxious-avoidant must come to recognize that the need to talk things through so that intimacy may be possible is a deeper and more compelling need than the desire to lash out, or to withdraw.

17. In summary, similar to the dismissive avoidant person, the challenge for the anxious-avoidant person is to connect with inner feelings, what these say about self, and to use this awareness to connect with others whilst staying safe.

18. It will help if this person allows her desire for connection to lead the way towards something safe, interactive, and productively engaging. There is a strong need for a peaceful approach to conflict resolution to be found which will not be so emotionally intense, and will meet the need for soulful connection.

19. Because the anxious-avoidant insecure person may be feeling unsafe, there may be a need to get support from a third party, probably a professional, so that the more aggressive party can be helped to adopt a more connecting and empathic communication style.

## Avoidant Insecure Attachment Style

*Avoidance is never the answer. If you avoid pain you avoid living.*

M. Leighton

1. The avoidant, withdrawing style can be just as problematic as the anxious insecure attachment, but for different reasons. Usually not as emotionally expressive unless pushed, this style can become very defensive, partly because they are unsure of what to do in the face of another's emotional intensity. This person is most likely to identify with Persecutor behaviour, and won't so often feel like a Victim. However, some avoidants can be very caring and can slide into Rescuing when they overdo people pleasing, 'fixing' the problems of others.

2. The avoidant insecure person, usually a man, avoids conflict, and sometimes closeness, at all costs. They have grown up without the skills of intense emotional engagement with another, and so when communication heats up, they are usually out the door and/or out of their depth. For this reason they can be called a **self-protector** or **withdrawer**.

3. The avoidant can become a **pursuer** also, not because they want connection as much as they want to sort out the argument, or emphasise their perspective, so seek resolution or at least a discussion. They may want to get the matter sorted 'rationally' so that their emotions can settle down again and logic/reason can be restored. Partners often experience this as their need to be right.

4. The avoidant is after all actually anxious about any disconnection with their partner, but displays this by pulling away from the conflict which they usually don't back themselves to successfully negotiate harmoniously.

5. Criticism of their partner, or pointing out their imperfections, may go hand in hand with their withdrawing, especially if they have tried to be tolerant and patient but have finally felt worn down.

6. The avoidant insecure person is usually not very emotionally expressive or understanding. Avoiding strong emotion in themselves and others, and thus most emotionally charged conflict, has for most been a life-long pattern.

7. Emotional avoidance will, over the course of a life, show up as emotional or physical withdrawal or self-protection from intense interactive events, especially conflict with a partner who seeks to be emotionally close.

8. Thus, avoidants will commonly ignore, resist, or just avoid situations where intimacy, sharing, emotional problem-solving, or heart-to-heart discussions with those close to them would be beneficial. A tendency in some to be rather lazy about working to create close bonds with another doesn't help. They commonly take their partners for granted until or unless everything turns to custard. Then they'll bend over backwards, often too late, to 'fix' the relationship problem.

9. The avoidant insecure person will want to explain his position, because he tends to rely on logic and reason. In doing this, his partner may experience him as being defensive and resistant to or ignoring of her comments.

10. He is also therefore very logically driven in what he focuses on, such as tasks, problem-solving and fixing things. He may therefore feel inadequate when he can't fix his partner, or solve her problems for her. He is likely to give up eventually, figuring that she's a lost cause who is beyond help.

11. The feeling of inadequacy, and pressure to solve problems, gains momentum when his partner becomes even more distressed when she's not heard or understood. This is when he's most likely to withdraw, either angrily or with a hopeless resignation feeling overwhelmed by her emotions.
12. Certainly, an avoidant insecure individual will want to avoid the emotions in self or other that these situations can generate, largely because they don't know how to effectively respond to either their own emotions or those of an emotionally driven partner.
13. At their worst, avoidants will use addictive behaviours to dampen down feelings that are difficult to cope with, and/or heighten more pleasant emotions.
14. Avoidant insecure people are likely to become cognitive during an argument (if they've not already withdrawn from the scene of conflict), and this can frustrate or infuriate their anxious insecure partner, making even more certain that the avoidant insecure person won't hang around.
15. Whilst they may start off emotionally relatively even and calm, the emotional temperature of the avoidant insecure may rise if the other person persists, goes on and on verbally, or harangues, as the anxious insecure person can tend to do.
16. The avoidant insecure individual, unable to resist and calm their own emotions of feeling pressured or wronged, may explode if they feel the pressure of being trapped in the conflictual environment. Feeling wrong or inadequate is not comfortable for them, and can cause extreme defensiveness. This is because avoidants usually have a great fear of being shamed, and if their partner harangues them sufficiently, their shame gets triggered and defensive or angry tactics often follow.
17. If their strategy of being calm, reasonable and rational has not worked, the avoidant insecure type may get frustrated, and their anger can reach fever pitch. This may be an ultimate reaction to feelings of pressure, hurt or fear about what to do that they may not be consciously aware of.
18. Avoidant insecure behaviours don't appear to be unhelpful, because this style of emotional management tends to be emotionally controlling and seemingly functional. Unlike the anxious insecure person who can seem emotionally messy and over the top, avoidants are usually emotionally repressed, and so less volatile or emotionally noisy. They like to be emotionally 'in control'.
19. Since childhood, they have learned to go off on their own and process feelings by taking recourse to thinking or doing. Thinking or doing anything else that is – anything that will distract them from the conflict or problem at hand, and any attendant feeling – is their most common coping strategy.
20. This coping strategy can create its own nightmare for the avoidant person. Desperate to avoid feelings (which they've often had minimal practice processing – and so may be unskilled at working with), the avoidant person will remove their body, mind or emotions – or all three – from the scene of conflict.
21. The challenge for the avoidant person is to allow themselves to fully feel, and to stay engaged with the emotions of others, and the downstream consequences of that - being able to hear, connect and work things through with their partner.
22. Avoidant insecure types may avoid what they are feeling by getting caught in addictive options, or taking off to do tasks in the shed – anything that will help them anaesthetize or bury unwanted feelings (especially shame, pressure, inadequacy and anger), or replace these with exciting pleasant ones, such as those associated with gambling, letting their hair down while intoxicated, internet porn, racy affairs, fast cars, speedy movies, exciting sport on TV, or extreme sports participation. These are especially common in young men who are still behaving like bachelors rather than partners.
23. In childhood, the avoidant personality might have used the above activities as a way to self-soothe, or self-medicate and to dissociate from anything that might bring up uncomfortable emotions in a relationship setting.
24. None of these activities heal the inner scars though – which include disconnection from others and from experiences of love, intimacy, closeness, support, sharing and caring.
25. The avoidant insecure style may view themselves in their relationship as one or more of: sensible, balanced, logical, emotionally well managed, problem solver, conflict calmer, grounded, supportive, responsible, inadequate, hopeless at understanding partner, always wrong, or not good enough. They are likely to view their anxious or anxious/avoidant insecure partner as overly emotional, controlling, overly needy, hard work, intense, emotionally volatile, demanding, unpredictable, or on edge.
26. The challenge for the avoidant person is to recognize the need for deep and meaningful connection with another (why else are they in a relationship?), and to realize that the only way to get and to

sustain this, is to stay present and work through emotional pain or discomfort with a partner when this arises – as it inevitably will in any relationship.

27. Secondly, the preference to run away or withdraw has to be recognized, owned and accepted without being judged, but seen as unhelpful in a relationship unless used to defuse an argument after which dialogue occurs.

28. Thirdly, the many feelings of resistance, resentment, despondency, pressure, stress, discomfort or energy loss that may arise when a partner slips into emotional neediness or intensity must also be recognized, owned, and sat with. These are the inevitable consequences of being in a relationship which will inevitably have its ups and downs.

29. With time and practice, as the avoidant learns to hang in there when the going gets hot, these feelings will get easier to cope with, and will lose their initial intensity. Learning to express the more vulnerable feelings will also help.

30. Fourthly, there is a need for this person to recognize that they do indeed have feelings, lots of them, and to own, name, feel and talk about these. Feelings of pressure, defensiveness, resistance, despondency, inadequacy and fear of failure are some of the more common emotions the avoidant feels.

31. Once these emotions have been better owned and understood, the avoidant person will come to recognize that talking about and rationalizing a problem situation is actually a strategy for avoiding feeling it fully. The advantage of feeling conflict is that the avoidant insecure person can now connect via their feelings, which will tell the full story of how they tick, and what they need, value, desire and want to communicate.

32. The avoidant insecure's challenge when confronted by a partner with strong emotions is to avoid helping them with suggestions of alternative ways to think or behave, but just to support this person to discover their own truths, just as he would want his partner to do for him.

33. Whilst the avoidant insecure type may want time out rather than connection in order to rest and relax, they must recognise that they are in relationship because they want connection, even though space and alone time is their habit and preference. Balance between alone time and together time is the way forward.

34. Whereas the anxious insecure person has to reconnect with and support a sense of self, the avoidant insecure person's challenge is to reconnect with their feelings, and with what these feelings tell them about their needs, values, attitudes, perceptions, desires or sense of self, and expressing these feelings and associated needs in the communicative process.

35. After leaving a relationship, avoidants often miss the partner they took for granted but didn't know they had strong feelings for. Sometimes both distance and time are required to get in touch with feelings they've managed to suppress, ignore or deny for years.

36. In summary the challenge for an avoidant insecure person is to connect with feelings and what these say about self. Their need is not to rely so much on the withdrawing inner self, but to recognize that growth for them rests on being able to engage fully and frequently with others, and to learn to enjoy, rather than fear, the feelings of being close, intimate, genuine, real and present with self. Being able to hang in when the other is being emotional, without solving her problems, is the required shift.

37. Their need from others is for understanding and acceptance of their journey; and to be given the space to move from withdrawal to emotional engagement and the struggle to stay present with whatever is going on. They want their thinking self to be valued and heard, and for patience to prevail whilst they come to see that their reasoned approach to conflict has been a way to work out solutions, but can destroy intimate or even basic connection.

38. Avoidant insecure types have reached the holy grail when they can engage without knowing or needing the answers, be open to whatever emotions arise in self or other, communicate directly in regards to their needs or preferences, and reach out and be loving when their partner is struggling.



## Dismissive Insecure Style

*The inner world of (dismissive attachment style) adults seems to function with independence as its banner – living free from the entanglements of interpersonal intimacy. Daniel Siegel*

1. For the dismissive person, conflict and strong emotions are monsters that were put to bed many years ago, often in childhood. This emotional disconnection from self can leave them behaving aggressively or disdainfully of others, so they normally present as Persecutors.
2. This person has a past history of not being able to rely on others to be there for them, and so has learned to make little or no attempt to connect.
3. Usually a male, they are distant isolates who long ago gave up trusting that someone could be there for them, or that they had the skills to reach out to others. They are **extreme self-protectors or dismissive** of others as a result of conflict.
4. For this reason, the dismissive insecure person may often avoid close or intimate relationships and instead become successful in ways that support their notion that I'm OK, but others can't be trusted, and I can't be bothered anyway.
5. If the dismissive insecure person does 4. above whilst in a relationship, his partner will find it very difficult to be heard, to engage, or to bring this person into close connection with intimate sharing.
6. Dismissive insecure types may be very critical of any desire to sort out conflict, choosing just to drop it and get on with something else. They lack any ability to prioritize the relationship, and get things sorted out so that feelings of intimacy are protected and nurtured.
7. Dismissives wouldn't perceive themselves as having needs for intimacy, and will really struggle to develop the emotional literacy and social skills to bridge this gap.
8. Such individuals may not even develop the motivation to connect with their partner, because for their whole life they have been distanced from others and are usually content with that. So, if conflict does arise, they have little awareness of any need to stay connected to either self or other, and will most likely take steps to disengage from both.
9. The only way forward for this attachment type is to recognize the value of intimacy from a rational point of view, and take steps to stir from its slumber the almost totally atrophied part of their personality that has lost the desire for connection.
10. For this extreme form of avoidant insecure personality, the journey for dismissives back to feeling connection and engagement with others is usually just too much. Most don't have either the motivation or resolve to recover, because the memory of having good feelings of positive connection with others is usually well and truly buried and thus no longer beckons to them.
11. The dismissive type would have to be aware that connecting meaningfully with another will require them to give up being right, give up always arguing their reasoned response, give up on being controlling and in control, and hang in when another is distressed or angry. Whilst this is possible, motivation must come from their loving, caring self that desires to be close to another even if this can be challenging.
12. In summary, the challenge for a dismissive insecure person is to connect with inner feelings, what these say about self and needs, and meet these needs by connecting with others in a way which supports both self and other. Their need is to awaken the part of self that wants to connect with others meaningfully. This deeply buried lost self may take some time to awaken, and so the dismissive person may require some help to reconnect to the desire to love and be loved.

## Ambivalent/anxious insecure attachment style.

*The need to fill an inner void is not limited to people who become drug addicts, but afflicts the vast majority of people of the late modern era, to a greater or lesser degree.*

Professor Bruce Alexander

1. The literature also calls this style 'disorganised', because a hallmark of this pattern is an irregular swinging between wanting closeness to wanting distance from a partner, especially in the face of conflict. In effect, this person says to their partner "Come here! No, go away!"

2. This is a most distressing style for those who have it, and originates from a childhood in which caregivers were sought for their love and protection, but one or more of those caregivers was also responsible for neglect or abuse, leaving the child afraid and confused. There are varying views of how many adults have some of this inconsistent insecure attachment style, but some have claimed 40% of the population may be affected to some degree.
3. It is important to note that not all abused children develop these relating patterns as adults. Most children have experienced some measure of trauma, but ambivalents have rarely if ever trusted that relationships could be supportive. They thus perceive that the relationship glass is only ever half full.
4. It may appear that this person has an anxious/avoidant insecure style, because they have a similar desire to be connected and engaged, and also a pattern of backing off and becoming avoidant under stress. However, the difference is in the degree and intensity of the emotional upset-ness that they often experience.
5. Thus the intensity of their anger and blame, the degree of despair and hopelessness when they 'give up' on their partner, and the seeming illogicality and distress embedded in their arguments about the conflict they experience can make them difficult to engage with.
6. In childhood, this person experienced fear, fright or neglect from those who should have been protectors. Being unable to know whether caregivers were loving or threatening set up an inner vigilance and wariness that emotional pain might not be far way. There may have been times when feelings of abandonment, shaming or rejection arose in response to these circumstances, and these may well continue to erupt in the adult relationship. There was no consistent strategy that worked to ensure care, safety and love from caregiver(s) or what to do in the face of conflict.
7. Severe abuse of one sort or another in childhood can give rise to this pattern, but such a background is not always evident in the ambivalent insecure person's past.
8. This childhood trauma has led to freezing in the face of conflict, or wanting to flee, or being determined to fight. This same dilemma of how to behave and support self also plays out in the adult domain, resulting in inconsistent responses to relationship invitations or challenges.
9. In the face of conflict as an adult, this person often fights, but at times it seems strange as to what they choose to fight about, and what upsets them so much. This is because the chaos of childhood caused distress in inconsistent and often unpredictable ways, a theme that repeats in adult relationships, often much to the confusion, shock or frustration of their partners.
10. This can lead to a view that external events, such as the inability of one's partner to behave as desired, is the cause of their distress, leading to a fixated perspective that someone 'out there' is the cause of my distress.
11. Thus, a mental fixation of the 'bad' behaviour of someone external to self as the cause of distress can keep this person stuck in the emotional pain. This pain of course, is caused by a retriggering of earlier trauma.
12. The ambivalent/anxious insecure pattern may also be triggered by one's children, especially if the parent experiences fears arising out of feelings of lack of control, children being demanding or disloyal, or showing insufficient consideration of the parent's needs. Basically, whenever childhood emotional distress is revisited, emotional dys-regulation can arise.
13. Key here is the fear behind relationship problems. Suspicion and distrust is common. The disordered and chaotic childhood experiences give rise to the same for this person in adulthood, resulting in fear, feeling unsafe, wanting to be loved but fearing the person they are relying on will let them down or worse - will undermine their emotional and/or physical safety. Childhood emotions get revisited, usually often.
14. Thus, the ambivalent/anxious insecurely attached person swings from being very anxious or fearful into anger and sometimes violent responses to perceived threats. At other times, this person (more often female) will be loving, attuned to those in her surroundings, and seek love and closeness, but if fears of disconnection, betrayal, rejection or distrust arise, anger can quickly take over. This can be confusing for partners who are rarely so emotionally volatile or inconsistent, and wonder what is going on or what they can do about it.
15. It is this inconsistency that takes its toll on partners, because there seems nothing they can do to settle, please, help or console their ambivalently insecurely attached beloved. While listening to her may help, it may fail to allay the underlying fears which are deeply buried in the psyche of this person.

16. It helps if this person reflects on childhood and the chaotic relating that occurred back then, so that a broken, fragmented, disordered or vague childhood narrative is more fully and completely understood as a series of abusive, traumatic or injurious events. This can happen with their partner, friend or therapist. The goal is to accept and own the past, and see how it is being repeated in adulthood, especially the emotional roller-coaster and similarity of pain and fear.

17. It will help also if this person can own the childhood trauma connection, rather than put so much energy into denying that they have a problem. Because they were so often shamed and fearful in childhood, they attempt to ward off perceived shame or threats as an adult when either arise, or they are told that they are 'a problem'. Thus, there can be a tendency to blame others rather than take responsibility for their own reactivity. Seemingly irrational deceit is another ploy to avoid the perception that self is bad, wrong or inadequate.

18. This journey of insight and ownership is not easy. The plethora of emotional responses to conflict must be experienced, understood and owned over and over again as and when these surface. There is a need to be reminded that the adult emotions they are experiencing are a projection from the past, and are simply being re-triggered by current upsetting events.

19. Crucial also to recovering from these childhood dramas is the ability to self-soothe. Instead of throwing blame at another, this person must learn to remove self from conflict, and to breathe deeply into the feelings of distress and anger, reminding self that this is 'their old stuff'.

20. This attachment style is frightened more than any other styles because of this abusive, neglectful, confusing or traumatic childhood. This person therefore requires reassurance, love, understanding, and compassion, but can instead attract ridicule, criticism and avoidance because of their emotional reactivity. Thus, their reactivity ensures they are unlikely to be understood or get their needs met.

21. On the attachment spectrum, with dismissive and avoidant at one end representing those who are the least adept at engaging and relating intimately, especially in times of conflict, and with the anxious insecure attachment style at the other end being those who are wishing for close connection and sharing, the ambivalent/anxious insecure style is even hungrier for connection and closeness but struggles to succeed at this because their fears which slide into anger push others away creating almost certain disconnection.

22. It is essential for this person to understand and own this pattern, because no-one can help them overcome it until they recognise and own that they are in a recurring pattern that had its origin many years ago. Many with this style struggle in relationships because they are convinced others are the problem, thus keeping themselves stuck.