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THE Attachment Theory Workbook

Powerful Tools to Promote Understanding, Increase Stability & Build Lasting Relationships

CHAPTER ONE

What's Your Attachment Style?

What Do You Want from Your Relationships?

As an adult, you have probably had dozens of important relationships over the years. I don't just mean romantic relationships—I also mean with parents, siblings, friends, and mentors. Of those significant emotional attachments, how many have been truly satisfying, secure, and lasting? Perhaps not as many as you'd like. But what if I told you there's a way to approach close relationships that would ensure secure, lasting intimacy? Would you experience the world, and approach intimacy, differently if you felt that security in your relationships was guaranteed? As it turns out, an individual's sense of security in relationships with others—what psychologists call *attachment style*—is a big determining factor in whether those relationships are successful or not. This workbook, based on the core insights from the field of attachment theory, is designed to help you discover your own attachment style and those of your loved ones, with the aim of learning healthier ways of relating to the most important people in your life.

Over the past 10 years, I've worked with hundreds of couples in my private practice, and issues of attachment style nearly always show up in one form or another. The challenges faced by these couples bring to life what I learned in graduate school. The tools and teachings presented in this book are a culmination of all that experience, and the exercises are designed to guide you to your own personal understanding of the experiences you have in your relationships and help you achieve the kind of security found in the most satisfying relationships.

If you're like most of us, you look back at some of your important relationships with fond memories, but there are also regrets: either things you didn't do well or times when others didn't come through for you. You can't change the past, but the good news is, you can change the *patterns* from your past that haven't served you well. Having perfect parents or a flawless relationship track record is not a prerequisite for building lasting, secure bonds. The only requirement for starting down the path to security and

intimacy is your willingness to look honestly at your own behavior and believe that you can change. We have lots of evidence that putting effort into developing your relationships pays off. Studies show that having close, meaningful relationships is linked to better health, greater resilience, and more overall happiness in life. Consider the work you'll do with this book as an investment in a healthier, more secure future.

> A note about relationship violence: This workbook can benefit anyone looking to gain insight about relationships, but if any of your relationships involves violence, I don't recommend this book alone as a solution. Although some violent behavior can result from attachment issues, there is generally much more going on that will require specialized help. Please address these issues with a counselor or advocate. If you are currently in a violent relationship, please seek the support you need. One way to start is by calling the National Domestic Violence Hotline: **1-800-799-7233**.

Who Is Important to You?

Let's begin by identifying the relationships in your life that are important to you. These are the relationships you most want to benefit from the work you do here—the ones you'd most like to strengthen.

In the table below . . .

1. Write the names of the five most important people in your life.
2. Rate how important the relationship is to you, from 1 to 10 (where 10 = most important).
3. Rate how stressful the relationship is in your life, from 1 to 10 (where 10 = most stressful).
4. Finally, rank the list, beginning with 1 for the relationship you most want to work on improving.

Name of person	Who are they to you? What makes them a valued person in your life?	How important? (1–10)	How stressful? (1–10)	Priority to improve (1–5 rank)
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Relationship Values

With those people in mind, consider what you really want from your relationships. At the end of your life, you'll be remembered for how you treated the people who are important to you. Imagine being surrounded by all the people you love and having them reflect on the positive qualities you fostered in your relationships with them. What would you want them to say? Write these positive relationship values below—for example, "honesty," "humor," "supportiveness"—and then rate yourself on how much you express these qualities *today* from 1 to 5, where 1 = needs great improvement and 5 = very satisfied.

The top five positive qualities and values I want to cultivate in my most important relationships:

1. ---------- 1 2 3 4 5
2. ---------- 1 2 3 4 5
3. ---------- 1 2 3 4 5
4. ---------- 1 2 3 4 5
5. ---------- 1 2 3 4 5

Before we dive into your relationships, let's consider what we mean by the different types of connection—or attachment—people can have in their close relationships. Perhaps you've heard about attachment style, and maybe you've even seen a self-help questionnaire that helps you sort yourself into a category. These attachment styles are based on psychological research. Let's do a quick overview now.

What Is Attachment Theory?

Researchers John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth began developing the core of what became attachment theory in the mid-20th century. Their original theory says that infants develop better, socially and emotionally, when they form a close bond with a primary caregiver who's good at reading their cues and responding to their needs in a warm, sensitive, and timely way. At the time Bowlby and Ainsworth were developing their theory, the primary caregiver was usually the mother. Infants with this type of bond grow up trusting that others can help them feel safe, cared for, and supported in the world. This basic premise has been supported by over 60 years of attachment research and backed by experts in neuroscience, psychiatry, traumatology, and pediatrics.

Attachment researchers found that they could categorize the quality of relationships babies had with their main caregivers by observing how these babies responded to everyday stressful situations. Researchers grouped these responses into three distinct categories: *secure, insecure anxious,* and *insecure avoidant*.

The early researchers noted that when stressed, babies with *secure* attachment showed their distress in an observable way, but their response was not excessive. These babies seemed relaxed about seeking help and more often had interactions with their caregivers that ended in their being calmer and ready to move on from the stressful event.

Babies with *insecure anxious* attachment tended to respond to the same stressful events with more extreme crying and distress. They sought their caregiver but also appeared to reject the caregiver's attempts to provide relief. For these anxious babies, researchers observed more labored interactions that did not result in a fully soothed baby.

Babies with *insecure avoidant* attachment were less likely to cry during stressful situations and appeared indifferent about getting help from their caregivers. To the untrained eye, these babies looked fine, but researchers later discovered that elevated stress hormones in their bodies told a different story: They were affected by stress, but they didn't show it.

It may not surprise you to learn that babies grow into adults who develop versions of these *secure, anxious*, and *avoidant* attachments that can be readily identified in their relationships. Of course, adult relationships involve a lot more complexity, but it almost always boils down to this: When we get

close to someone and come to depend on them, in stressful moments we show our true attachment style.

A fully accurate assessment of your attachment style is more complicated than this, but if you think about your closest relationships, you can probably get a basic sense of it. Think about close relationships you've had with romantic partners or in long-term friendships. In the course of those relationships, you've likely encountered a variety of stressors. During stressful times, if you typically expect that you can count on your relationship partners for help and comfort, then you have a secure attachment style. But let's say you encounter stress and don't have this natural expectation of safety and support. Maybe you aren't sure your relationship partners will help you, and you don't feel as if you can count on them to be there for you the way you need. If you've developed an insecure style, either anxious or avoidant, you are more likely to fear either being abandoned or being overwhelmed by the other person. As a result, you are less likely to engage in a way that makes you feel better. People typically have a characteristic attachment style that holds true across their close relationships, so securely attached people usually feel that their relationship partners are there for them; and people with either of the insecure attachment styles can look at their relationship history and see a string of unsatisfying relationships and perhaps regrettable actions.

After reading the descriptions of the secure, anxious, and avoidant styles, you may think, "I want the secure style!" And there's good reason to feel that way. People with a secure style of relating tend to feel more emotional safety with the people they're close to, are readier to collaborate, and are more resilient around conflict. But even these folks, under certain circumstances, can lapse into less adaptive ways of relating.

Regardless of the tendencies and attachment style you've developed to this point, you're not locked into these behaviors—your past doesn't have to dictate your future. Starting now, you can build stronger relationships. This workbook will help you . . .

- Recognize what specific attachment-related patterns and behaviors you and your loved ones have, especially under stressful or otherwise demanding circumstances.
- Learn new tools and practices to stop conflict escalation and reestablish safety and connection.

- Break old, unhelpful behavior patterns and start acting in ways that will build the lasting connections you want.

These skills are worth learning, because you'll get to spend more time enjoying what you love about the people you care about and be able to nurture more intimate, lasting bonds with them. And in times of difficulty and stress, you'll have resources you can call on when you need them.

What Is Attachment Theory Used For?

As a relationship therapist, I pay close attention to my clients' attachment styles, because attachment theory gives me a powerful way not only to identify behaviors that challenge a specific relationship, but also to see the pattern of how and why these behaviors show up across relationships, in both the past and present.

Does this early-learned attachment style drive *all* relationships *all* the time? Of course not! However, the relationships that are most affected by our early experiences are often the most significant ones, that is, the longer-term relationships that we rely on for emotional support. People in our lives whose roles more closely resemble the ones our parents played when we were young —nurturer, supporter, personal fan club—are most affected by our attachment style. Romantic partnerships usually fall under this category and are therefore prime candidates for replaying those habitual patterns we learned early in life. But it's also possible for attachment patterns to show up with other people, like close friends, family members, bosses and other authority figures, and colleagues and collaborators.

Your attachment style is essentially a blueprint of your basic assumptions about safety and trust. Although it may sound simple, your attachment style can have far-reaching consequences. Safety and trust often determine whether you can successfully collaborate, give and receive support, and handle conflict, so attachment theory gives us a simple schematic for understanding the basic building blocks that each person contributes to the foundation of a relationship.

Finding Your Attachment Style

Before you take the quiz to discover your personal attachment style, I want to emphasize that it's a tool to help you explore yourself and your relationships. It will not produce an official diagnosis of any kind or tell you anything definitive about yourself or other people, because real people are more complex than can be captured by a single assessment. With that in mind, this quiz is based on my study of attachment theory, on psychological research, and on my years of clinical experience observing people in their most revealing relationships.

This two-part quiz will help you understand where you fall on the attachment spectrum. Each part assesses a different aspect of attachment, and both are important to get the kind of nuanced picture that will be most useful to you. Please complete both parts of the assessment, which should take 10 to 15 minutes.

Attachment Quiz

Begin by thinking of one particularly important person in your life and the relationship you have with them. This person can be in a relationship with you currently or in recent memory. Unless otherwise stated, the terms *partner* and *relationship* will reference this relationship.

This quiz has been adapted to an interactive online format for your convenience. To take it anonymously and receive automatic scoring and results visit: www.attachmentquiz.com/quiz. If you take the quiz online, after reading your results, skip ahead to "Getting the Most Out of This Book".

PART 1: Attachment Insecurity/Security

This part of the quiz explores how you feel and think about relationships. You will first address items that focus on your feelings (your insecurity score) and then items that focus on the things you think and do to make your relationship secure (your security score).

RATING SCALE *Using the scale below, rate each of the following statements:*

Rarely true	Sometimes true	Often true

1.	I can lose the sense of who I am in the relationship.	-----
2.	I have a tendency to neglect myself in the relationship.	-----
3.	I make compromises that I later feel resentful about.	-----
4.	It counts only when my partner does something for me because they want to, not when I had to ask for it.	-----
5.	When I ask for something from my partner and I get it, I can still feel unsatisfied.	-----
6.	I feel misunderstood by my partner.	-----
7.	When my partner falls through on a promise, I can take it very personally.	-----
8.	I find it upsetting when my partner perceives something I do as unloving even though I mean really well.	-----
9.	I worry about whether my partner and I are fundamentally too different.	-----
10.	I struggle for a long time before I will ask for help.	-----
11.	When I imagine my parents, it's difficult to picture either of them looking back at me in an adoring and proud way.	-----
12.	It really gets under my skin when something feels unfair in the relationship.	-----

TOTAL Add up the numbers for your total **insecurity** score: -----

Understanding Your Insecurity Score

These statements explored the way you respond *emotionally* to difference, complexity, and attachment stress in relationships. The higher your insecurity score, the more likely it is that close relationships can feel overwhelming for you.

14–24: High. You struggle with intimate relationships to the point of instability. When something stressful happens, you are quick to assume

that your partner is against you, and you typically react to that assumption in self-fulfilling ways.

7–13: Moderate. Close relationships can be stressful for you. The more you depend on someone, the more confusing and stressful things can get. A fear of abandonment or feeling trapped can feel real at times, even when your partner gives you reasonable assurances.

0–6: Low. You're comfortable being alone, but you do your best when you have the love and support of a relationship.

Now we turn from issues of *emotional* insecurity to the ways you *actively work* to achieve security in your relationships. These items are more about your beliefs and behaviors than the way you feel.

RATING SCALE *Using the scale below, rate each of the following statements:*

1. It's easy to balance separateness and togetherness in the relationship. -----
2. My partner can change and grow as needed, and it's not a threat. -----
3. It's easy for me to make commitments to my partner and honor those commitments. -----
4. I need my partner as much as they need me. -----
5. If something is not working out with my partner, I can be patient and wait for the right solution to present itself. -----
6. We can have conflict even though neither of us is at fault. -----
7. I tell my partner everything. If there's something I haven't mentioned, it's because I'm absolutely certain it wouldn't bother them. -----
8. When my partner and I disagree, I commit to finding a win-win solution. -----
9. When I put my needs on hold so I can fully hear my partner, I'm confident those needs will eventually be addressed. -----
10. I can just ask my partner for what I want, and it usually works out one way or another. -----

11. When my partner and I fight, I take the lead to help us both feel okay again. -----

12. When past relationships have ended, it was a mutual and well-considered decision. -----

TOTAL Add up the numbers for your total **security** score: -----

Understanding Your Security Score

An important thing to understand about this score is that these things can be learned, if they aren't already natural to you. Even if you scored high on the *insecurity* scale, you *can* have secure-functioning relationships.

18–24: High. Your relationships are a resource for you, and that's partly because you do your best to ensure that you and your partner are taking care of each other. You usually take the high road when people aren't acting their best. No matter how stressful things get, you just try not to go there. A high security score paired with a low insecurity score indicates a secure style of attachment, which will be covered in chapter 4.

9–17: Moderate. Relationships are important to you, and you try your best to show up as your best self. You may even know exactly how to handle a difficult relationship, but when things get stressful, all that goes out the window. You know you can do better and that the relationships in your life are worth the effort.

0–8: Low. You've had difficulty building relationships that are stable and secure. The good news is that with information and practice, you can improve your ability to cultivate healthy, more satisfying relationships.

PART 2: Expressing Insecurity

This part of the quiz will help you explore how often you express insecurity in anxious or avoidant patterns. Even if your scores so far have suggested a secure attachment style, we all respond to stress in a variety of ways, so this part of the quiz is for everyone. Each item presents two options; please check the option that is more often true for you. When relevant, continue to think of the same relationship you chose in part 1.

It's harder for me to be patient when . . .

- □ People aren't understanding me.
- □ I feel stuck doing something I don't enjoy.

When beginning a new relationship that could be significant, it's a deal breaker if the person . . .

- □ Doesn't make an effort.
- □ Comes on too strong.

Conflict is . . .

- □ An opportunity to get something off my chest.
- □ Usually unproductive.

When I get upset at my partner, I . . .

- □ Have to express myself to them.
- □ Prefer to figure it out on my own.

In the relationship, I'm at my worst when I feel . . .

- □ Abandoned or rejected.
- □ Pressured or intruded upon.

In the relationship, I want to feel . . .

- □ As connected to my partner as possible.
- □ At ease.

When I'm overwhelmed, I feel better when I . . .

- □ Vent to someone.
- □ Find distraction in something else (exercise, substances, work, etc.).

There are certain things I don't tell my partner, because . . .

- □ They could get upset and reject me.
- □ It's my business—they don't need to know.

My partner is more likely to complain that I . . .

- □ Criticize and find fault with them.
- □ Am not as engaged as they want me to be.

When we spend time apart, I . . .

□ Feel sad or lonely.	□ Feel relieved to have time to myself.

When I feel hurt by my partner, I recover . . .

□ When I get what I need from them.	□ Pretty quickly on my own.

It would upset me more if my partner told their friends . . .

□ Nothing about me.	□ Something embarrassing about me.

To Score Count the number of check marks directly above, then multiply by 2 for your score.	**To Score** Count the number of check marks directly above, then multiply by 2 for your score.
---- = **anxious** style score -	---- = **avoidant** style score -

If one of your scores is 18 or higher, this is likely to be your dominant style of expressing relationship insecurity. If both your scores were lower than 18 then neither may be dominant; you express some combination of both styles. You'll learn more about what this means in the chapters dedicated to the anxious style (chapter 2) and the avoidant style (chapter 3). Both chapters will be useful, even if your score on one style is higher.

Getting the Most Out of This Book

In addition to helping you understand your own personal attachment patterns and tendencies, this book will also help you recognize the patterns of the people closest to you. If you scored high on either *anxious style* or *avoidant style* in part 2 of the Attachment Quiz, you might prefer to skip to the relevant chapter to explore what that means and what you can do about it.

To get the most from this book and maximize what it can do for you, plan on working through all the chapters eventually. You're likely to have

relationships with people running the entire spectrum of attachment styles, from secure to insecure, anxious to avoidant, so the other chapters will help you understand those styles. In addition, attachment styles exist on a continuum, so while your scores might overall indicate secure attachment, for example, perhaps your score on *insecure anxious* was also somewhat high. Finally, different people—for example, two romantic partners—can bring out different tendencies in you, in part as a response to their own attachment styles. Careful study of all the chapters will give you the most benefit.

The exercises in this workbook are meant to encourage awareness and understanding of yourself and others. As you complete the exercises, if your personal history with relationships brings up memories that are troubling or sensations that are overwhelming, please stop reading or writing and do something that helps you feel grounded, whether that's doing the dishes, taking a walk, calling a friend, or doing a quick mindfulness meditation. You can return later to the exercise, after you feel calmer or enlist the support of a counselor to further explore the themes in this book and your responses to them.

Finally, I recommend building in breaks for yourself. Don't try to complete the entire workbook in one sitting! Make sure you get enough sleep, eat well, drink water, see friends, and go out and take breaks to do something active. Not only will breaks make the process more enjoyable, but you'll also have time for the material to sink in as you work your way through the book.

Chapter Recap

- Attachment theory simply explains the stress that people do or don't experience when they are dependent on others in relationships. It is not a horoscope or explanation of personality.
- The patterns that people have in response to this stress are a natural progression of what they have experienced in relationships since they were very young.
- The patterns of behavior for people with insecure attachment can cause trouble in relationships.
- This book can help you examine your responses and explore the possibilities for real change.