

What is attachment and why is it important?

Attachment refers to the particular way in which you relate to other people. Your style of attachment was formed at the very beginning of your life, during your first two years. Once established, it is a style that stays with you and plays out today in how you relate in intimate relationships and in how you parent children. Understanding your style of attachment is helpful because it offers you insight into how you felt and developed in your childhood. It also clarifies ways that you are emotionally limited as an adult and what you need to change to improve your close relationships and your relationship with your own children.

The Tree of Life Relationships Inventory will help you identify your attachment style, whilst the SAVE Relationships Inventory will help you identify your general temperament. Attachment style and Temperament are both interwoven, and when explored together, you will receive the full view of your inner workings.

Early Attachment Patterns

Young children need to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver in order for their social and emotional development to occur normally. Without this attachment, they will suffer serious imbalance within the spheres of influence on the tree of life which include physical, mental, emotional, social & spiritual impairment. During the first two years, how the parents or caregivers respond to their infants establishes the types of patterns of attachment their children form. These patterns will go on to guide the child's feelings, thoughts and expectations as an adult in future relationships.

Secure Attachment (Anchor): scores between 4-6 – Balanced circle

Ideally, from the time infants are six months to two years of age, they form an emotional attachment to an adult who is attuned to them, that is, who is sensitive and responsive in their interactions with them. It is vital that this attachment figure remain a consistent caregiver throughout this period in a child's life. During the second year, children begin to use the adult as a secure base from which to explore the world and become more independent. A child in this type of relationship is *securely* attached.

Avoidant Attachment (Island): scores between 1-3 – Contracted circle

There are adults who are emotionally unavailable and, as a result, they are insensitive to and unaware of the needs of their children. They have little or no response when a child is hurting or distressed. These parents discourage crying and encourage independence. Often their children quickly develop into "little adults" who take care of themselves. These children pull away from needing anything from anyone else and are self-contained. They have formed an *avoidant* attachment with a misattuned parent.

Ambivalent/Anxious Attachment (Wave): scores between 7-9 – Expanded circle

Some adults are inconsistently attuned to their children. At times their responses are appropriate and nurturing but at other times they are intrusive and insensitive. Children with this kind of parenting are confused and insecure, not knowing what type of treatment to expect. They often feel suspicious and distrustful of their parent but at the same time they act clingy and desperate. These children have an *ambivalent/anxious attachment* with their unpredictable parent.

Disorganised Attachment: this style is not measured on the Inventory

When a parent or caregiver is abusive to a child, the child experiences the physical and emotional cruelty and frightening behaviour as being life-threatening. This child is caught in a terrible dilemma: her survival instincts are telling her to flee to safety but safety is the very person who is terrifying her. The attachment figure is the source of the child's distress. In these situations, children typically disassociate from their selves. They detach from what is happening to them and what they are experiencing is blocked from their consciousness. Children in this conflicted state have disorganised attachment with their fearsome parental figures.