



Attachment Theory & Relational Dynamics

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Introduction to Attachment Theory

"Our early relationships with our parents (or caregivers) shape the way we perceive and act in relationships throughout our lives."

John Bowlby

John Bowlby is the father of attachment theory dating back to 1950's. He discovered that if our parents/caregivers were attuned to our needs as a baby we formed a secure attachment. If our needs went unmet, we formed either an anxious, avoidant or disorganised attachment.

A babies survival depends on their primary caregiver, therefore they have no choice but to attach to the caregiver, and trust they will be taken care of and provided for. A warm and loving environment, with responsive caregivers is what a baby needs to thrive and build a secure attachment.

What is the meaning of attachment?

It means that a primary caregiver is available and responsive to an infant's needs, this allows a sense of security to develop. The infant learns that their caregiver is dependable, as the child grows it can explore the world because it has a secure base.



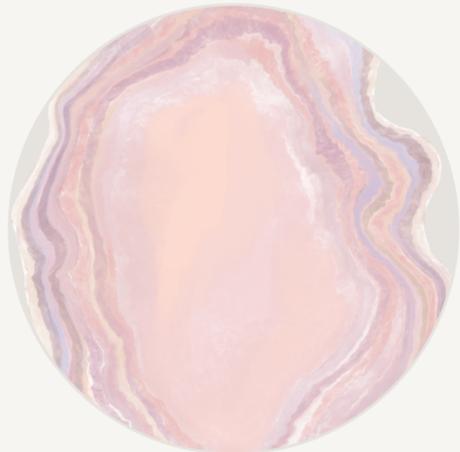
The desire for connection



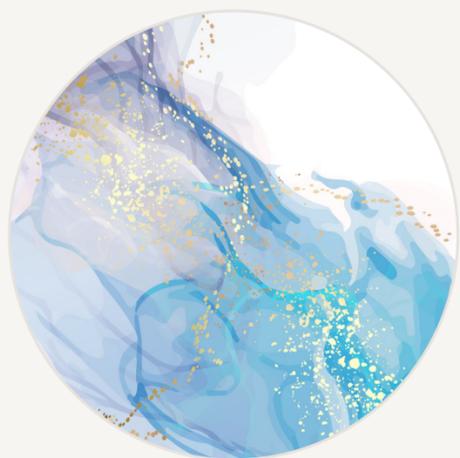
What is attunement?

Attunement means to be connected and responsive to the other.

Human's are social beings, the quality of our life is determined by the quality of relationships we can experience.



Research has shown if we aren't fulfilled in relationships we don't function as well as we are supposed to. When we don't experience love and belonging in our relationship it can lead to things like mental health issues, emotional issues and physical illness.



Susan Johnson who is a leading researcher in attachment theory, established a fundamental question that is on everyone's mind "Are you there for me?". The level of attunement the other has to you and you have to them, this creates a securely attached relationship between two people who can listen to each other and recognise the others needs.

Relational struggles



If you struggle to experience a secure attachment in relationships you will:

- Struggle to get close to your partner, perhaps you may do this through fighting.
- Struggle to accept a relationship in your life, as it causes a risk of being seen or abandoned.
- Be in a long term relationship, but have walls to ensure the other can't get too close in case you need to abandon them first before they abandon you.
- Feel like you don't need a partnership or feel like you can't live without a partnership.
- Have a deep desire of connection to let walls down, but struggle to let the walls down.



It's important to note here that you are not broken, this all stems from your childhood wounding or trauma that requires air and space to breathe in order to heal, and do the work to establish a secure attachment. Experiencing secure attachment will elevate your life in a way that you could never imagine.



Anxious Attachment

- The thought of being alone causes anxiety
- Negative self image
- Seeks approval and support from others
- Highly value their relationship, but feel anxious there partner doesn't feel the same way.
- Neglects themselves when in a relationship
- Disconnection in a relationship feels overwhelming
- Chronic fear of abandonment
- Safety is a priority
- Attention, care and responsiveness from their partner is a remedy for their anxiety.
- Lack of support, causes clinginess, desperation and preoccupied with relationship.
- Hypervigilant to people's emotional state.
- Causes disagreements to feel close.
- Struggles with boundaries and accepting other's boundaries
- Emotionally reactive



Avoidant Attachment

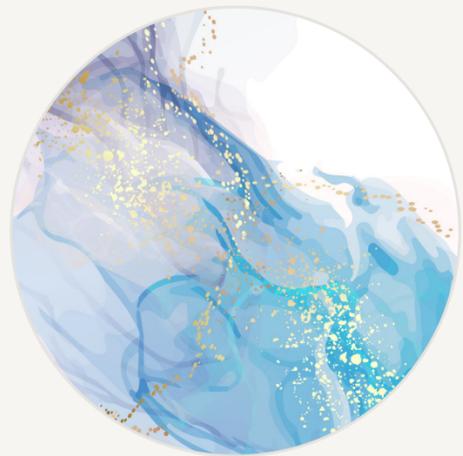
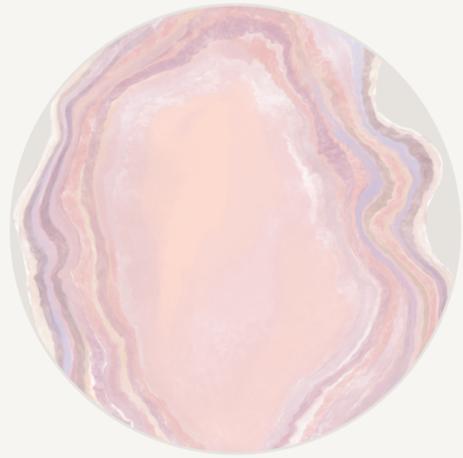
- Independent and self sufficient
- High self esteem
- Believe they don't need to be in a relationship to feel complete
- Highly critical of themselves and others
- Desires connection, but they don't know how to have it.
- They don't depend on others
- They don't like others depending on them
- Withdraw when another is getting too close in a relationship
- If needs aren't being met they will end the relationship
- Unrealistic expectations of others.
- Lacks empathy
- Doesn't understand the needs of others
- Suppress their feelings, especially when faced with a situation that requires emotion.





Disorganised Attachment

- The relationship is a source of both desire and fear
- They want closeness but trouble trusting and depending on others
- A relationship can be overwhelming or triggering
- Poor emotional regulation
- Have a fear of being hurt
- Re-enact childhood experiences
- Push/Pull dynamic in relationship
- Distrust of the others and self
- Feel resentment towards relationships
- Unconsciously creates chaos
- Addicted to emotional highs or drama



Secure Attachment



- Comfortable sharing emotions openly
- Depend on their partners, and comfortable with others depending on them
- Thrive in relationship, but don't have a fear of being alone.
- Have a positive view of themselves and others
- They don't depend on the responsiveness or approval of others
- Can have difficult conversations and address conflict
- Trustworthy and trusts others
- A flexible nervous system
- Congruency between words and action
- Ability to grow
- Open minded
- Playful and curious
- Experience emotional closeness with others
- Relationships are based on honesty, tolerance, closeness/meaningful and growth
- They are warm and easy to get along with

The left side of the slide features a decorative background with a marbled pattern in shades of brown and beige. Gold-colored circular accents and wavy lines are scattered across the background, adding a textured and elegant feel.

Secure attachment healing principles

- Nobody can give you what your not willing to give yourself.
- You must have a secure attachment with yourself first.
- How much you feel loved is dependent on the love you have for yourself.
- Others can only love you to what you allow. When you feel love for yourself it is much easier to notice and accept love from the other.
- You need to accept yourself fully, flawed and all.
- Honest communication with yourself is a must.
- How you show up in life and relationships is how life and others will show up for you.
- If you have negative belief systems about yourself, you will teach others to treat you this way.

Disclaimer: these principles do not apply to abuse nor are they the reason for attracting an abusive situation or partner into your life. These principles are about creating a secure attachment with yourself first and foremost.



Attachment theory categories

- Your significant other
- Friendships
- Family
- Spirituality/God/Spirit
- Career
- Money



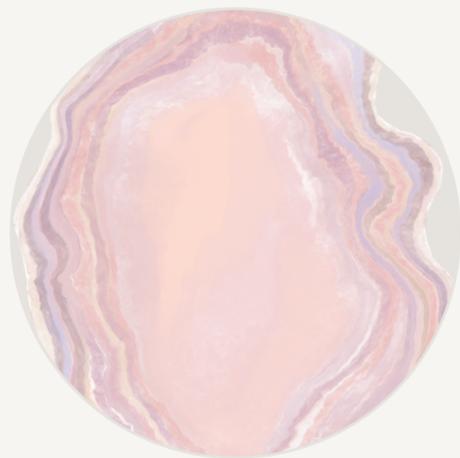
You could be securely attached with your friends, but not in your relationship. Your attachment will be different in each area. If you don't have a secure attachment, it's an invitation to grow in deeper union with that aspect to experience the fullness of life.



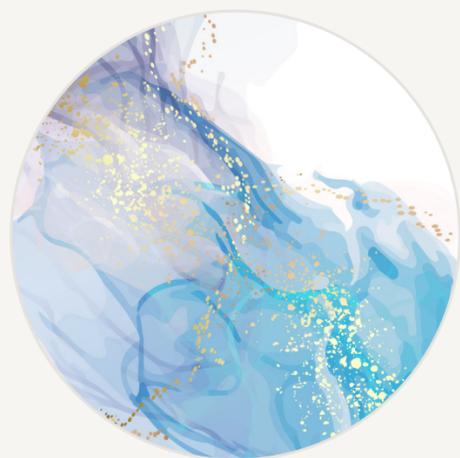


Detangling yourself

The term detangling, means to detangle yourself from what belongs to you and what belongs to others. In relational wounding or trauma, a lot of what our primary care giver thinks, believes and the way they behave towards us form the perception we have of ourselves and the world around us. As a child we see ourselves as a part of the caregivers, rather than being a separate human until the age of 1, this is when we realise we have a separate body. Then part of our sense of self remains intertwined with the family unit, until we embark on the journey (some do and others don't) in adulthood to release the entanglement and step into our authentic nature. This often means breaking family rules and traditions to do what is best for you.



If we live in a never ending search of somebody else completing us, we will continue to abandon ourselves. If we have a constant need of winning love and approval from others, we will struggle to step into being our authentic self.



To be in a healthy relationship with yourself is primary to being in relationship with another. Some core principles of being in a healthy relationship with yourself include:



- Able to fully express yourself
- Appreciating and loving who you are
- Understanding and being patient with yourself
- Ok being alone
- Prefer to align with people where you can be your true self



To detangle yourself from the thoughts and beliefs that have been handed down to you, building AWARENESS is crucial. When you finally realise that what you were made to believe about yourself had nothing to do with you, a sense of freedom and space will form. Do not underestimate the gift of awareness, it's such a simple principle yet one of the most powerful. If you aren't building your self awareness you will struggle to see where you need to grow, and accept less than what you deserve.



To be aware includes:

- Hearing your self talk and mind chatter
- Noticing feelings in your body
- Noticing how you react or respond to situations



Detangling exercise

1. Write down what comes up? *eg: the thought of not being good enough.*
2. Look at it with eyes of compassion and enquire where this has come from. What was the defining moment/s that created this belief? *eg. At school you were humiliated for not knowing the answer.*
3. What emotions need to be felt from this experience, and what didn't the inner child get to say at that time. *eg: She felt helpless, and she wanted to say how scared she was.*
4. What did you need the adult to say or do at that time instead? *eg: You needed the adult to reassure you and provide help.*
5. When this surfaces for you actively parent yourself and say what your inner child needs to hear by self soothing. *eg: You have always been good enough and your differences make you unique*
6. What actions can you take to heal? It is important that you take actions to rewrite the story and reprogram your brain. *eg. actively challenge that belief system by doing something small that you have been avoiding or taking on something that you have been scared to do.*

Exploration Exercise

What were your parents like as a child:

Your childhood felt like:

Your deepest fears are:

The most frequent emotion you have:

What is your deepest need:

What are your deepest fears in a intimate relationship:

In past relationships you needed more of this:

Your strengths are:

Your challenges are:

When others are upset with you, what surfaces:

The reason you want an intimate relationship is:

Being vulnerable feels like:

When your partner/someone else disagrees with you, this is what you feel:

What is the purpose of relationships:

What are your relationship goals:

What is your ideal relationship:

When I fall in love with someone this is what happens:

Abandonment Wound



An abandonment wound will have you feeling at times like you want to run away from everyone and sit at the top of a mountain where nobody can come near you. However, deep down inside a person who has an abandonment wound has a deep desire for connection but doesn't know how to achieve it.



The visual representation of this wound is like you (your true self) is sitting at the top of a secluded mountain internally, however your body is present in person and nobody or only a selected one or two can reach you. Your true self refuses to come down and engage with others for fear of being abandoned, rejected or hurt. Allowing others into you can be incredibly scary, especially if you feel like they don't understand you.



This is because during your childhood, what you needed from your parents was neglected causing you to feel invisible. Or perhaps your parent/s were absent, or passed away. Other ways of experiencing abandonment is being dismissed, received the silent treatment, a significant person discarding you, devaluing you or not acknowledging you. It is a painful wound to say the least. If you feel this is happening in your current relationship, please know that abandonment in a intimate relationship is not as straight forward as you think. There is a dance going on in relationships, and this needs to be delved into with a counsellor present as there are many parts that must be tended to.

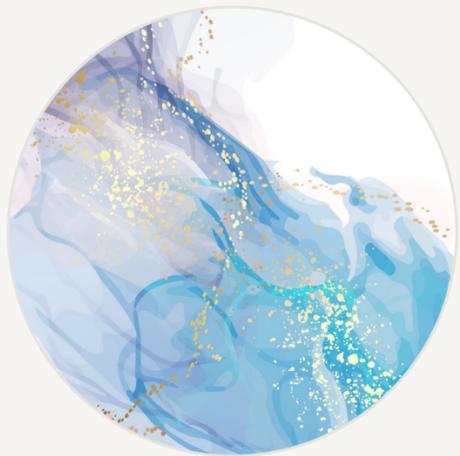
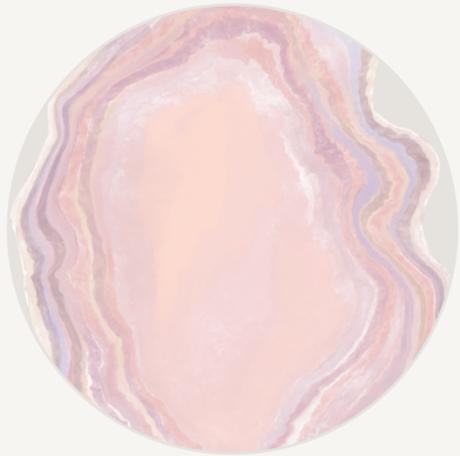


Abandonment Wound



People with an abandonment wound often experience:

- They have a rich internal world, with an incredible imagination. This became their safe space to cope with the disappointments of the outside world.
- They can have childlike fantasies that translate to expectations in real life, which blocks their pathway to creating a healthy relationship with themselves or others.
- Struggle to create relationships where there are challenges or normal amounts of misunderstandings and recover from it.
- Have a constant feeling of loneliness.
- They have a sea of emotions which can be very overwhelming.
- They feel like they need to do everything on their own.
- They are overly responsible for everyone else, and end up burnt out.
- They feel like nobody understands them, or perhaps only have just one person who does understand them.
- They struggle with conflict and there is a lot of fear.
- They blame themselves.



All of these traits are coping mechanisms to protect and avoid pain, however what it is truly doing is keeping the pain locked inside and blocking the connection to your true self to experience a meaningful life and relationships with others.



Abandonment Wound

The Good News:

An abandonment wound is only ONE part of you.

You are many parts of a whole, and what often happens is that the abandonment part can be the one running your the show. This means you probably have little awareness around when the wound is running the show and when you actually have a break from it. You may not even get many breaks from that part of you.



This is important work to figure out when your abandonment wound is running the show vs when you are in your higher self.

Your abandonment wound is the scared little girl or boy, it would feel like:



- unsafe
- fear
- scared
- irrational thinking
- self isolates
- lonely



The Higher Self

**You are more than you think you are.
You are more than your physical body bound in time and space.
You have knowingness beyond your beliefs.**

Jeffrey Allen

Your higher self is your soul energy, it's constant and never changes. Parts of you come and go like the wind, but the higher self always remain sitting behind the veils. Your higher self feels like:

- a feeling of coming home
- safe with yourself and others
- trustworthy
- expansive
- connection
- love
- understanding
- inspiration

Healing the Abandonment Wound



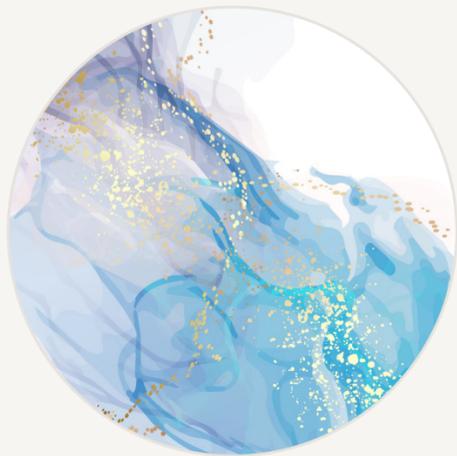
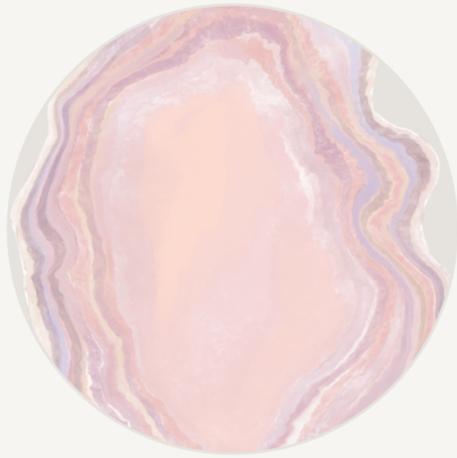
Healing the abandonment wound takes time, reflection and patience. But the most important ingredient to healing is the willingness to keep showing up for yourself to do the work.

Exercise:

- Write a letter to the person who caused the abandonment wound. Write all the feelings you experienced from the abandonment (do not give the letter it's just for your purpose only to process the feelings).
- Write a letter to your feelings of longing for love. Focus on the feeling not the person who hurt you. Focus on where you feel the hurt stored in your body. Draw a picture of the longing you feel to identify how you experience longing. Sit with your feelings, and give them space to be.
- Allow the feelings of grief to be felt, if you truly allow yourself you will process what happened and open the door of healing.



Healing the Abandonment Wound



- Meditation to feel your higher self.
- Daily communion with your higher self.
- Recognising patterns and when the wound is running the show.
- Transforming belief systems about yourself.
- Noticing how you feel in your body.
- Self regulation.
- Balancing your thoughts using the Thought Record.
- Listen to what your inner child needs to say.
- Talk to your inner child and parent it.
- Be playful
- Practice self love.
- Lean into love.
- Show up everyday for yourself and commit to your healing journey.
- Saying "no" to others more often, and not over committing yourself.
- Rest.
- Appreciate how you feel, no matter if others don't see it that way.
- Do nice things for yourself each day.
- Write yourself love notes and letters.



Today I listen to myself.
I am gentle with how I am feeling.
It's okay to not feel okay.
I give myself space to feel what needs to surface.
I give it room so I can let it go.
I am loved always.
All is safe in my world.



Thank you