WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR ATTACHMENT STYLE

What we learn about how to be close to others, happens early in life. It happens with our primary attachment figure – usually our mothers. We have to attach to survive. There are various categories of attachment styles and they tell us a lot about how we behave later in life with our significant others. Knowing our attachment style, informs us of what is needed to earn a healthier, more secure attachment.

Secure Attachment in Childhood
If we are Securely attached as children we develop the following capacities:

▪ We can manage our emotional reactions and self-regulate our own distress
▪ We believe in the positive nature of relationships
▪ We expect that others will give back to us, just as we give to them
▪ We have awareness of other peoples’ feelings and have empathy for them

Secure Attachment in Adulthood
Here is how we show up in our relationships as adults if we are securely attached:

▪ We have trusting, lasting relationships
▪ We take responsibility for own moods
▪ We tend to have high self-esteem
▪ We seek out social engagement and we are open to sharing our thoughts and feelings with others, especially those closest to us.

The beautiful gift of a secure attachment is that we feel safe and secure enough to explore the world. It starts in childhood and it continues into adulthood. We look out at the world and know that there is no substitute for our own encounter with life and so much life is out there waiting to be discovered.
Insecure Attachment Styles

Many people I see in my clinical practice have not acquired a secure attachment. Instead, they have one of 3 insecure attachments.

1. Insecure/Anxious Attachment in Childhood

If we are Anxiously attached as children we suffer in the following ways:

- We are uncertain that others are interested in meeting our needs or wants
- We are ambivalent about connection (we both want to be close and pull away)
- We are prone to separation anxiety
- We cling to our parent and are anxious or fearful about exploring the world

Anxious Attachment in Adulthood

Here is how we show up in our relationships as adults if we are anxiously attached:

- We are ambivalent about intimacy
- We are preoccupied with our partner’s thoughts and feelings
- We often worry that our significant other doesn’t really love us
- We lose focus, we ramble and go on tangents
- We become panic-stricken when our partners go away or if a relationship ends

2. Insecure/Avoidant Attachment in Childhood

If we are avoidantly attached as children we suffer in the following ways:

- We lack confidence that anyone cares
- We give up believing anyone will respond to us helpfully
- We rely on ourselves to get through life
- We shut down emotionally to survive

Avoidant Attachment in Adulthood
Here is how we show up in our relationships as adults if we are avoidantly attached:

- We tend not to seek intimacy
- We invest little emotionally in our partners
- We devalue our partners and their requests for connection
- We tend to minimize events that cause pain to our partners
- We share very little about ourselves – we are a closed book

3. Disorganized Attachment in Childhood

If we are disorganized in our attachment as children we suffer in the following ways:

- We are chaotic - both anxious and avoidant
- We are confused & dazed by the extreme reactions to normal requests for help
- We are frightened by the emotional responses of caregivers
- We see the world as unsafe/dangerous

Disorganized Attachment in Adulthood

Here is how we show up in our relationships as adults if we are disorganized in our attachment:

- We have a distorted (negative) view of our partner that is hard to shake
- We have trouble in normal social situations
- We have low self-esteem and have no idea what healthy behavior looks like
- We fail to use our partners to co-regulate our distress to help soothe us

The Good News

We can change our attachment style; if we are willing to work for it. At the Good Life Therapy Centre, our work with couples is informed by the Developmental Model of Couples Therapy (Dr. Ellyn Bader & Dr. Peter Pearson). The work we do with couples addresses their developmental growth, both as individuals and as a couple, which earns them a secure attachment and the road to a brighter future together.

What are you waiting for? Security and connection are waiting for you.