



Trauma and attachment

What do we mean by attachment?

- The term “attachment” relates to the relationships we have with significant others in our lives. In particular, we are referring to the relationship between an infant and their primary caregiver and the relationship between romantic partners.
- There are different ways of being attached. The majority of people (70%) have mostly positive experiences of closeness with their primary caregivers in infancy and childhood and these people, called securely attached, come to believe that people would be there for them in their distress and that they, themselves, were worthy of care and comfort from others. A smaller percentage of people experience relationships with their primary caregivers that cause them to feel insecure about whether they, themselves, are worthy of consistent care and whether people would be there for them.
- Research with couples has demonstrated that attachment security/insecurity is quite consistent from childhood to adulthood. This research also indicates that the needs for closeness, safety, and a “secure base” are lifelong needs. This tells us that if someone has a secure attachment in childhood, they will likely have a secure attachment also with their romantic partner.

How does childhood trauma impact attachment?

- Childhood trauma may have a significant impact on attachment. The earlier in your life the trauma happens and the closer the relationship with your abuser, the more significant the impact of the trauma is on your attachment security.
- The majority of childhood trauma survivors do experience some insecurity in their attachment relationships.
- For those who have experienced sexual abuse, attachment insecurity can be even more complicated. For instance, while you may really long for connection and closeness with others, that very same closeness and connection may feel dangerous. This can lead to difficulties with maintaining close relationships and a tendency to jump into relationships quickly, becoming overwhelmed and frightened, and then running away.

Where do you see yourself in these descriptions?

- Do you tend to be anxious about whether others will let you down or abandon you?
- Do you tend to avoid closeness with others and fear that they will hurt you if you let yourself get close?
- How has this affected your relationship?
- How do you understand the origins of these feelings?