Understanding Your Attachment Style

A Practical Guide to Understanding Relationships

FREE Educational Guide

By Maria Shkreli, LMHC

Educational Disclaimer

This educational guide is intended for self-reflection and informational purposes only. It is not a diagnostic tool and should not be used to diagnose any mental health condition. Completing this guide does not establish a therapist-client relationship. If relationship patterns are significantly affecting your emotional well-being or daily functioning, consider seeking support from a qualified mental health professional.

What Is Attachment?

Attachment refers to the emotional bond we develop with other people and the way we connect within relationships.

Our earliest experiences with parents, caregivers, and other important relationships can influence how we learn to trust, communicate, ask for support, handle closeness, respond to conflict, and manage emotional distance.

Attachment is not about blaming parents or caregivers.

It is about understanding how our experiences may have shaped what feels familiar to us in relationships.

Some people feel comfortable with closeness and independence.

Others become anxious when they sense distance.

Some pull away when relationships become emotionally intense.

Others may want closeness but also fear being hurt.

These patterns can begin early in life, but they can continue into adulthood if we are not aware of them.

The encouraging part is that attachment patterns are not permanent.

Through greater self-awareness, healthier relationships, and intentional practice, people can develop more secure ways of connecting with others.

Why Attachment Matters

Attachment can affect much more than romantic relationships.

It may influence friendships, family relationships, parenting, and even the way we respond to support from other people.

Our attachment patterns may affect how we:

- Communicate our needs
- Respond when someone becomes distant
- Handle conflict
- Trust other people
- Express emotions
- Ask for help
- Set boundaries
- Give and receive reassurance

- Respond to vulnerability
- Manage closeness and independence

Sometimes we do not recognize these patterns because they feel normal to us.

We may think:

“This is just how I am.”

“I always overthink relationships.”

“I don't need anyone.”

“If someone pulls away, I know something is wrong.”

But sometimes those reactions are part of a relationship pattern that can be understood and changed.

The Four Attachment Styles

Although every person and relationship is different, attachment patterns are often described using four common styles.

Secure Attachment

People with a more secure attachment style generally feel comfortable with both closeness and independence.

They can rely on others when needed while still maintaining their own identity and boundaries.

Common strengths may include:

- Comfort with emotional closeness
- Healthy communication
- Appropriate trust
- Respect for boundaries
- Ability to ask for support
- Ability to give another person space
- Greater emotional stability during conflict

Secure attachment does not mean someone never feels jealous, insecure, hurt, or afraid.

It means those emotions are generally easier to communicate and manage without the relationship feeling constantly threatened.

Anxious Attachment

People with anxious attachment patterns may become highly sensitive to rejection, abandonment, or changes in another person's behavior.

They may need frequent reassurance or find themselves overthinking interactions.

Common patterns may include:

- Fear of abandonment
- Worrying that someone is pulling away
- Difficulty tolerating uncertainty
- Frequently seeking reassurance
- Overanalyzing texts, conversations, or changes in tone
- Strong emotional reactions to perceived distance
- Fear that conflict means the relationship is ending

Someone with anxious attachment may deeply value closeness but struggle to feel secure when they are unsure where they stand with another person.

Avoidant Attachment

People with avoidant attachment patterns often place a strong value on independence and self-reliance.

They may feel uncomfortable depending on other people or allowing others to depend on them.

Common patterns may include:

- Difficulty trusting others
- Strong preference for independence
- Discomfort with emotional vulnerability
- Pulling away during conflict
- Difficulty asking for help
- Feeling overwhelmed by emotional closeness
- Minimizing emotional needs

Someone with avoidant attachment may care deeply about other people while still finding emotional closeness uncomfortable or difficult to manage.

Fearful-Avoidant Attachment

Fearful-avoidant attachment, sometimes referred to as disorganized attachment, can involve both a strong desire for closeness and a strong fear of being hurt.

Someone may want connection but pull away when the relationship becomes emotionally intense.

Common patterns may include:

- Wanting closeness but fearing it at the same time
- Difficulty trusting others
- Fear of rejection or abandonment
- Fear of vulnerability
- Pushing people away and later wanting them back
- Inconsistent relationship patterns
- Strong emotional reactions during conflict

This can create a confusing push-and-pull pattern in relationships.

A person may think:

“I want you close, but I'm afraid of what will happen if I let you get too close.”

Attachment Is Not a Label

Attachment styles are not fixed personality types.

They are patterns.

A person may also show different attachment behaviors in different relationships.

You may feel secure with one person and much more anxious or avoidant with another.

Life experiences can affect attachment too.

Loss, betrayal, trauma, unhealthy relationships, or repeated rejection can influence the way we connect with people.

Healthy and consistent relationships can also help us build greater security over time.

The purpose of learning about attachment is not to place yourself into a box.

It is to notice your patterns.

What Can Trigger Attachment Reactions?

Attachment patterns often become more noticeable when we feel emotionally vulnerable.

Common triggers may include:

- Someone becoming emotionally distant
- Delayed texts or phone calls
- Conflict with a partner
- Feeling rejected
- Not knowing where you stand in a relationship
- Feeling criticized
- Being asked to become more emotionally vulnerable
- Feeling controlled
- Feeling like someone needs too much from you
- Fear of losing an important relationship

The trigger may be happening in the present, but the reaction can also be connected to earlier experiences.

That is why understanding the pattern can be more helpful than simply judging the reaction.

Attachment Style Self-Assessment

Instructions

Rate each statement based on how accurately it describes your typical experiences in close relationships.

Try to answer based on what you actually experience, particularly when you feel emotionally vulnerable, uncertain, or in conflict.

0 = Never
1 = Rarely
2 = Sometimes
3 = Often
4 = Always

1. I worry that people I care about may leave me or stop caring about me. _____
2. I become anxious when someone I care about seems emotionally distant. _____
3. I frequently need reassurance that my relationships are okay. _____
4. I overthink conversations, texts, or changes in another person's behavior. _____
5. I find it difficult to trust other people completely. _____
6. I prefer handling problems alone rather than depending on others for support. _____
7. I feel uncomfortable being emotionally vulnerable with other people. _____
8. I sometimes pull away when someone becomes too emotionally close to me. _____
9. I sometimes want closeness but then push people away when I feel vulnerable or afraid. _____
10. Conflict can make me fear that a relationship is ending or that I will be rejected. _____
11. I have difficulty clearly communicating my emotional needs in close relationships. _____
12. Relationship stress can strongly affect my mood, thoughts, or sense of security. _____

Understanding Your Score

Total Score: _____ /48

This assessment is designed to help you notice attachment-related insecurity.

A higher score does not diagnose an attachment disorder or determine your exact attachment style.

Your individual answers may be more useful than the total number because anxious, avoidant, and fearful-avoidant patterns can look very different.

0–12

Your responses suggest that attachment-related insecurity is generally low.

You may feel relatively comfortable with trust, closeness, independence, and communication in your relationships.

That does not mean you never experience insecurity or relationship stress.

Continue strengthening healthy communication, boundaries, trust, and emotional awareness.

13–24

Your responses suggest that attachment-related concerns may appear in certain relationships or situations.

You may notice increased anxiety, difficulty trusting, discomfort with vulnerability, or a tendency to pull away when relationships become emotionally challenging.

Look at the questions where you scored higher. Those responses may help you understand which attachment patterns affect you most.

25–36

Your responses suggest that attachment patterns may have a meaningful influence on the way you experience relationships.

You may notice difficulty with trust, reassurance, vulnerability, emotional distance, conflict, or fear of rejection.

Understanding where these patterns come from can help you respond more intentionally instead of automatically repeating the same relationship reactions.

37–48

Your responses suggest that attachment-related insecurity may be significantly affecting your relationships or emotional well-being.

You may frequently experience fear of rejection, difficulty trusting others, discomfort with closeness, strong emotional reactions to distance, or a combination of these patterns.

If these experiences continue creating significant distress or interfering with your relationships, consider speaking with a qualified mental health professional for additional support.

Look Beyond the Number

Your total score tells you how strongly attachment insecurity may be showing up.

But it does not tell you everything about your attachment style.

Look back at your answers.

If your highest scores involve:

Fear of abandonment, reassurance, emotional distance, and overthinking, you may recognize more anxious attachment patterns.

If your highest scores involve:

Independence, difficulty trusting, discomfort with vulnerability, and pulling away, you may recognize more avoidant attachment patterns.

If you notice:

Both a strong desire for closeness and a tendency to pull away when you feel vulnerable, you may recognize fearful-avoidant patterns.

If most of these patterns are uncommon for you and you generally feel comfortable with closeness, trust, communication, and independence, you may have more secure attachment patterns.

You do not need to fit perfectly into one category.

People can show a combination of patterns, and those patterns can change over time.

Reflection

Take a few moments to think about what you noticed.

What usually happens inside me when someone I care about becomes emotionally distant?

Do I tend to seek reassurance, pull away, or do a combination of both when I feel insecure?

How comfortable am I asking for emotional support when I need it?

What relationship patterns do I notice repeating throughout my life?

How have earlier relationships influenced the way I trust, communicate, or handle closeness today?

What is one healthier relationship pattern I would like to strengthen?

Final Thoughts

Understanding your attachment style is not about blaming your past.

It is not about blaming your parents.

And it is not about putting yourself into a category and deciding:

"This is just who I am."

Attachment is about recognizing relationship patterns.

Sometimes those patterns helped us feel safe at an earlier point in our lives.

But what once felt protective may not always help us build the relationships we want today.

Someone with anxious patterns can learn to tolerate uncertainty without immediately assuming rejection.

Someone with avoidant patterns can learn that closeness does not have to mean losing independence.

Someone with fearful-avoidant patterns can begin recognizing the push-and-pull cycle between wanting connection and fearing it.

And someone who already experiences more secure attachment can continue strengthening healthy communication, trust, boundaries, and emotional awareness.

The goal is not perfection.

It is greater awareness and more choice.

Instead of automatically reacting to fear, distance, or vulnerability, you can begin asking:

"What am I feeling right now?"

"What am I afraid is happening?"

"Is this about what is actually happening in this relationship, or is an old pattern being activated?"

Those questions can create space between the feeling and the reaction.

Attachment patterns can change.

Healthier relationships, self-awareness, emotional growth, and intentional practice can help create new relationship experiences over time.

Continue Your Learning

If this guide helped you recognize some of your attachment patterns, you can continue your learning with the complete workbook:

Understanding Your Attachment Style: Educational Workbook & Self-Assessment

The full workbook explores attachment in greater depth through expanded educational chapters, a more comprehensive self-assessment, score interpretations, reflection exercises, and practical tools designed to help you better understand your relationship patterns, strengthen communication and boundaries, and develop healthier, more secure connections.

Thank you for downloading this educational guide. I hope it helped you better understand some of the patterns that influence the way you trust, communicate, connect, and respond to closeness within your relationships.

Maria Shkreli, LMHC