



Conscious Life presents
**HEALING TOXIC
RELATIONSHIPS**

How Attachment Drives What We Think We Deserve

Guest: Heather Monroe

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[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of this Super Conference. Today I'm speaking with Heather Monroe, an integrative psychotherapist who specializes in the healing of relational trauma. Heather's approach to helping people is creative and open and flexible as she understands that just as the context of trauma is individual, so is the process of healing. Today we're going to be talking about attachment, and you're not going to want to miss this. So much of our relationship dynamics and what gets us into toxic patterns can be helped by Heather and her work. So, thank you so much for joining me today, Heather Monroe.

Heather Monroe

Of course. Happy to be here.

Meagen Gibson

So, Heather, I want to start by, one of the ways to understand toxic relationships and how we get into them and how we heal and repair them comes from an attachment theory lens, so I would love it if you could start us off by giving us an overview on what attachment theory is and why it's useful when understanding our relational patterns.

Heather Monroe

Yes. I was so excited to talk about this with you because it's such a great way to look at toxic relationships, in a very tangible, bitesize-able and productive way of looking at the healing of toxic relationships. So, with that being said, what is an attachment system? What is attachment? How do we get there?

Basically, attachment is the way that we connect with other people, but then it kind of spills out into how we connect to others, to ourselves, and to our environment in general. So we all have attachment systems. We are biologically hardwired for connection, which, if you've heard me talk before, you've heard me talk about this, so we're biologically hardwired for connection.

Our attachment system grew out of our survival, basically because we lived in groups and tribes way back in the day, that is how we survived. And so our attachment system grew out of this need to survive together. And that's where you get these different attachment styles, that when things

go wrong, the attachment style can go haywire if it goes wrong enough in humans. And that's kind of what we're talking about today. What happens when our attachment style goes left instead of right?

[00:02:46] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Because the context that I really want to talk about here is there are no heroes or villains in this example. Everybody under stress or extraneous circumstances is capable of acting in ways that are not great for our relationships. And so what's informing that? What can cause it? And then how do we recognize it and get back to center, right?

Heather Monroe

Yeah, exactly. And I just want to say that there is something called earned secure attachment. And what that means is that just like our brains, our attachment system is malleable. It can go from insecure attachment to secure attachment. This also means we can go from securely attached to insecurely attached. So it's a really great insight to know that we can be in a relationship, things are going great, then things go south, we stay in that relationship and it changes our attachment system and vice versa.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I'm so glad that you named it because, and I don't know that I've ever heard it that way before, it's earned secure attachment, and we can be in securely attached relationships, and then somebody adds in some sort of outside stressor. It could be a medical illness. It could be infidelity. It could be all kinds of things. And then all of a sudden, you don't recognize the person you've become.

And you're behaving in ways that aren't in line with what you feel like you are or how you behave in relationship. And then you bring your head up and you're like, I don't understand what happened. I don't recognize how I'm acting, I don't recognize how I feel, what's going on? And so there is some rhyme and reason behind that and we can do a path correction.

Heather Monroe

Yeah, exactly. And I'll also add that there have been many studies done with children and caretakers. And when an outside stressor happens, like, let's say that the parents go through a divorce or one of the parents loses a job and the other parent has to work three jobs to make ends meet, that a securely attached child will go into insecure attachment because the misattunement is more rampant.

And then when that outside stressor gets rectified in some way, that child can go back to secure attachment within six months. So children are faster moving because their brains are growing. It'll take a little bit more time if we have an insecure attachment system as an adult depending on how long we've had it for.

Meagen Gibson

I love that you frame that because it, again, really, normalizes is the wrong word, but validates the fact that this is something that's hardwired into us. It is, in a lot of ways, depending on the stressor

or the thing that's been added to the relationship, the necessary response. It is a totally understandable and natural response to change the way that you're relating to the people that you're connected to when put in extraneous, stressful circumstances. You are insecure because it's an insecure situation.

[00:06:04] Heather Monroe

Totally. And that's also why when clients come to me and they've just gotten out of a toxic relationship, of course their nervous system is shot, of course their attachment system is all out of whack and they might go into the next relationship with an insecure attachment style, which is why doing the work once you get out of a toxic relationship is so important, gives you the best chances to going into a secure one later.

Meagen Gibson

And that's the entire reason we wanted to do this conference. It's because oftentimes we get into these relationships, cyclically we're like, a person who I shall not name now, but famously said wherever you go, there you are. We keep thinking we can change the circumstances of our relationships but we're the one that keeps going into them. And if we're not aware, if we don't have the knowledge to understand our patterns of behavior relating, we're just going to continue to incur the same issues and problems no matter who we're partnered with.

Heather Monroe

Yes, absolutely.

Meagen Gibson

All right, so we've inferred the different attachment styles, but we haven't explicitly kind of named them. So I would love it if you just went through and told everybody kind of the overview on what the different attachments are.

Heather Monroe

Yeah. So, studies, and there's a lot of adult attachment studies out there now, which is really exciting, but different studies have shown about more than half of the adult population has a secure attachment style. So a secure attachment style is going to look like I'm not scared of intimacy. I know what my worth is and I know what my needs are. So if I'm not getting my needs met in a relationship, I'm probably not going to stay because I also know that there is an abundance.

So this isn't going to be the only person that I'm ever going to meet that's going to love me. I also believe that there's going to be someone else that's a better match for me out there. So that's a secure kind of belief system as well. Securely attached people believe they don't just know their needs and wants, they also believe that they will be heard, that the world will react to their needs because their caretakers did that when they were younger most of the time.

Securely attached people, they're not scared of intimacy. They're not scared of going deep with someone, and they have staying power like when things go wrong, they're not going to just get up and run right away. They're really going to look at okay, how do we fix this? Can this be fixed?

Looking at their own resources and their partner's resources. The other big thing I would say about securely attached people is that they know that no one is going to be perfect for them.

[00:09:00]

They're looking for good enough, just like a good enough mother. It's like what Winnicott said, a psychologist, that you don't have to be a perfect parent, you just have to be a good enough parent. And so that is translated into a secure adult, which is, I'm looking for someone who just doesn't fit perfectly, but who fits perfectly, I'm not perfect, but they fit well enough for me.

So you can imagine that in the dating pool, securely attached people, they get taken out real fast, it's like, oh yeah, I connect with this person, they're great, I'm attracted to them. There's not a lot of intensity, but I'm not looking for intensity. Let's see how this goes. And they just leave. And now we're left with the other people in the pot. So we've got a little bit more than half securely attached, and they leave the dating pool pretty fast.

And then you've got 20% of the population that is, I'm just going to call it, anxiously attached. That's like the easiest way to look at these things. There's anxious ambivalent, let's just say anxiously attached. So this is somebody who, this is 20% of the population, this is someone who is terrified of abandonment. The set up is, our parents sometimes got it right, but most of the time didn't get it right. They were most of the time misattuned to our emotional and/or physical needs.

And that can happen in a variety of ways that we can go into, but just for generalization purposes, let's just say that, they were misattuned most of the time. So this person who's anxiously attached, we are terrified of abandonment. We come from a belief of lack. So when we find someone, it's like, okay, this is my only chance, I have to make this work. We tend to have really poor boundaries. We tend to be hypervigilant, meaning hyper aware of loss. So when we feel in disconnection, we are hyper aware of it.

And there are studies that show how anxiously attached people, their brain lights up a lot more than securely attached people around loss and abandonment. We also have trouble regulating our emotions. So there's a real nervous system issue attached to anxiously attached, which means that when we get upset, when our attachment system is triggered, which is very sensitive, our attachment system, because we always are kind of like, are they going to meet my needs? Aren't they going to meet my needs? They don't always meet my needs. So is this going to be the time? So we're hypersensitive.

And when it does get triggered, our attachment system, it's hard for us to regulate our nervous system ourselves. We are always looking to co-regulate and usually to co-regulate with the wrong person, with the wrong nervous system. So it's like this toxic cycle of always going to a lemon tree expecting an orange. And then when you get the wrong fruit, it's like, oh my gosh, but I actually need the other fruit. So you go again to the tree and you just keep getting the wrong fruit. So that's anxiously attached.

Then 25% of our population is avoidantly attached. I'm just going to call it avoidantly attached. And avoidantly attached individuals, we mistake self reliance for independence, if that makes sense. So we are hyper focused on being independent, self reliant, self sufficient, and that is because our parents basically never got it right. We were in an environment where there was almost always misattunement.

[00:13:00]

So this could look like a highly anxious mother who cannot read a baby or a toddler or a child's emotional or physical cues, or father, so it can look like smothering, or it can look like total neglect. Smothering, or being always like, what's wrong? What's going on? What's happening with you? That's not attunement, that's anxiety. And so a lot of avoidantly attached individuals, they'll be like my mom was always there though. She was always right on top of me. That doesn't equal attunement. If she's on top of you or your dad's on top of you for the wrong reasons, that's misattunement as well.

So intimacy can feel smothering for an avoidantly attached person and it does. So I always think avoidants present that their primary fear is intimacy. But really an avoidant's greatest fear is abandonment. Because what if I let you in? Like, what if I tell you my needs? Then, pretty sure you're going to abandon me. So I'm not just going to not let you know what my needs are, I'm not even going to let myself know what my needs are.

Just think about how numb you have to make yourself as a child and an adolescent or whatever age to ignore your own needs and your own body. So avoidants tend to be very disconnected from their feelings, very disconnected from their bodies, and they're always looking for, we can talk about protest behaviors and all that stuff as we go along, but avoidants, basically, intimacy is smothering. I want to get away from it. So, always loving from an arm's length. When things get too good, we pull away. Anxiously attached. When things are good, we can't get close enough. It's the opposite.

And then 2 to 3% of the population are in this much less common disorganized attachment category, which means that we've got both. We're a double winner. It's like we've got anxious and avoidant and you never know what's going to be set off in this. And this is when we come from a very abusive home, when our caretaker is supposed to be... We're supposed to find protection and safety in them, but they're the ones causing us terror. So it is just a completely disorganized chaotic attachment system in it's place.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Yeah. I want to circle back and gut check something for avoidantly attached people, you mentioned smothering as the misattunement and I've also seen smothering look less anxious and more argumentative. So, like, the child, no matter what they are feeling, sensing, needing, the parent is arguing against it.

Heather Monroe

The denial of the emotional reality of the child.

Meagen Gibson

I'm hungry. No, you're not. You just ate. I need a hug. No, you don't. Go outside and play, like this arguing, constant arguing, against what they are sensing, feeling and thinking. No wonder they don't have any sensation or true attunement with their own feelings, thoughts and emotions because they were denied the reality of them.

[00:16:30] Heather Monroe

Yeah, exactly. I always talk about attachment trauma as a consistent misattunement of a child's sense of emotional safety. It's just a constant, I'm missing you, I'm missing you, I'm missing you. Oh, I found you. No. Now I'm missing you, I'm missing you. So, it's a struggle.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. A large majority of parents, we all want our children to succeed and be functioning, independent, wonderful, secure adults. And I think many parents, everything that they're doing is intended to do that with that outcome and a lot of times we just get it wrong.

Heather Monroe

100%. And there's new research around how insecure attachments are passed down through generations, which makes a lot of sense. It's like if my mother was anxious, so they do this with mice, mothers, mouse mothers, it's a strange way, mouse mothers who don't lick their babies, which is a way of showing affection and attachment in that world, those little mice will grow up, become mothers and not lick their children either. And on and on and on. So if you grew up with an anxiously attached mother, you are much more likely to then become anxiously attached or avoidantly attached. So it's a generational repetition that keeps happening.

Meagen Gibson

And obviously if we want to talk about the child brain, it's in development, like you're not, as a child, because we're so wired for connection and because we're so wired to stay in our family system and accept it as normal, this is what love looks like, this is what attunement looks like, we're not cognitively thinking that, we're just feeling into our family system, obviously when you're a child, you can't rationalize like, oh, my parent is misattuned to me.

So we just grow up in these systems and then become adults, expected to have adult relationships in the world with absolutely no awareness of the background programming that's running our lives.

Heather Monroe

100%. And we seek the love we think we deserve and on a subconscious level, it's in our nervous system, we're programmed that way. And so, yeah, if you grew up even with half the attachment system intact, like, mom was there, but dad was a workaholic and he was never there and you're a hetero-cis female, you might continue to end up with men who are emotionally unavailable because there was an insecure attachment with dad, not with mom, but with dad.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely, yeah. And I was thinking earlier, you said something about the anxiously attached people seeking regulation with the wrong nervous system and I was immediately like, avoidantly attached people because the advantage of numbness is that it masks as a regulated nervous system.

[00:19:40] Heather Monroe

Oh, that's so brilliant the way you just said that. So true. And I will also say there is a reason why avoidantly, okay, if you go on dates, in the dating pool, avoidantly attached people are actually the most common in the dating pool and that is for a couple of reasons. One, they tend to break up and go from relationship to relationship, but also they don't date each other.

So, avoidantly attached people tend to not date avoidantly attached people because there's not enough glue keeping them together. They just go their own way. And so avoidantly attached people, they love anxiously attached people. And that is because anxiously attached people and avoidantly attached people, they prove their own belief systems, which means that avoidantly attached people get involved with an anxiously attached person, and they say, AHA, you see, attachment is weakness.

Connection is weakness. Because look at this person, they're so needy, they're so vulnerable, and it repels them. So it's like, you see, like, I'm right. This is why I'm right. Anxiously attached people, they get their belief system validated too, because people are going to leave me. My greatest fear is being alone. And look, you see, that's right? That's true, because look at all these people that I have dated that have left me in really terrible, terrible ways where I felt like even less of myself afterwards.

So, again, we're just like, we are validating this belief system that self reliance is the only way to be, and oh, my God, everyone's going to leave me. I'm going to end up alone.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And even the inner mechanism of even if you're not that conscious of it, but just the subconscious of I'm going to try to make this avoidantly attached person love me right in the ways that I was never loved by the person that caused my insecure attachment in the first place. This avoidant attachment style seems familiar. And if I am just enough for this person, they will love me in the style that would have felt good.

Heather Monroe

If I am just more blank, fill in the blank, then they would have stayed, then they wouldn't have cheated, then they would, you know, and on and on and on and on. Exactly.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. We get into that trap where we're like, I can be more fill in the blank, or I can be less fill in the blank. And then we're just acting out of ourselves entirely.

Heather Monroe

Yeah. Should we talk about what toxicity looks like in insecure attachment? I don't know if any of you guys are familiar with Pia Mellody. She wrote *Love Addiction*. She was the one who coined that phrase. And as someone who specializes in relational trauma and attachment, I find that phrase really stigmatizing, just addiction in general, it leaves a lot of people out. And as I was kind of looking at the mold or the blueprint of love addiction, I noticed that it's actually insecure attachment cycles. That's all love addiction is. It's an insecure attachment cycle that's being played out.

[00:23:15]

And so let's get rid of some of the stigma around if you identify as a love addict or a love avoidant, it's more just like you identify as anxiously attached or avoidantly attached. So in this cycle, which will sound a lot like love addiction, but I don't think that that's what it is, I think it's insecure attachment cycles, is that you guys are magnetically kind of like pulled towards each other because of the belief systems that you both have. So there's a real intensity. There is mistaken identity for intensity, for intimacy.

So we're used to having intensity, magnetic pulls towards one another, the avoidant and the anxiously attached. And the avoidantly attached is really great, highly skilled at knowing what the anxiously attached needs are and kind of like putting on a mask of I'm really strong, I'm really insecure, because there's that independence, right? I know how to teach this person how to be like, they just seem so strong to the anxiously attached person. There's this sense of like this person is Superwoman or Superman. They just have it all together.

So we are really attracted to that. There is also the avoidant doesn't show any vulnerability like a securely attached person might. So we are attracted to the invulnerability of an avoidantly attached person. And so these two attachment styles come together. And it seems like for a little bit the avoidantly attached is fulfilling all of my needs but what happens to the anxiously attached person is our world becomes smaller and smaller and smaller.

It becomes all about, I like to say, capital letters. All of a sudden their name is in capital letters instead of just regular. So now they are in Broadway lights and our life just becomes this small candle that gets smaller and smaller. As our world gets smaller and smaller and we start neglecting our friends, our hobbies, things that make us us, our needs, our boundaries, our emotions, all these things, the avoidantly attached person is getting kind of icked out. It's like getting a little repelled, getting a little like wow, this person is really needy.

And they start fantasizing about the phantom ex, they start thinking about the one but giving you hints that you're not the one. And so you start noticing the avoidant person pulling away and you want to grab onto them. And so you have these protest behaviors, right? Anxiously attached people, we have these protest behaviors like excessive attempts to reconnect with the avoidant. Whether that's calling or texting, we're just always trying to reconnecting it closer.

There's a sense of acting hostile, meaning if they're talking, rolling our eyes when we feel in disconnection, walking away from them, all these, like, being argumentative, threatening to leave is another protest strategy that anxious attachment people tend to have. There's manipulation that's involved. I'm not going to leave a message because they ignored my call or ignoring their calls, acting busy or unapproachable even though you aren't in that moment. Saying you have plans when you really don't.

Just kind of like testing the waters of can I push them the way that they're pushing me? Kind of keeping score. Another thing that we can do as anxiously attached people is we can try and make our partner feel jealous. So just doing things that might elicit jealousy just to see, is this person connected to me? Can I get back to connection with them? But we are immature in the way that we're doing it. Because God forbid we tell them our needs. Because there's a part of us that knows that they probably won't be met.

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So we're going to try and get those met in another way, which is brilliant. It's the way that we had to do it as kids, so of course we're going to do it as adults. Maybe we didn't have to do it as kids, but in this relationship that we've stayed too long in, now our attachment system has gone from secure to insecure. And now I'm going to try all these other ways to get my needs met. So that's kind of the way that we do that as anxiously attached. And that's our toxic part of the relationship.

The avoidantly toxic kind of part in the relationship for us is fantasizing about the ex, the phantom ex, the one that got away, giving lots of mixed signals. So there's a sense of not saying I love you, but then showing that you care about them, but withholding the love word. Flirting with other people is a way of keeping someone at arm's length. Now, these aren't protest behaviors for avoidantly attached. They're called deactivating strategies.

So they're ways that we make ourselves feel like away from our partner. Thinking or saying that you're not ready for a relationship, but then staying in the relationship. So there's this kind of arm's length thing happening. Nitpicking, like avoidants, we are the masters of being like, I don't like the way she dresses or he dresses. I don't like this about them, but they've got this laugh thing that I'm not really crazy about and being really icked out by it.

So, pulling away when things are going well, just had a wonderful date and I'm not going to call you for a few days because it's too much, it's too intense, that kind of thing. So, checking out when a partner is talking to you, ignoring things that are important to your partner on their emotional well-being, just ignoring them, ignoring when they say this hurt, just kind of changing the subject. So these are all, you can feel it as I'm saying it, it's like all ways where you're trying to connect and then the other person, the avoidant person is just kind of keeping you away.

And so you can imagine, this activates anxious attachment. They get more needy, they get more like, what is happening? Their nervous system is even more out of sync and they want to connect, they want to co-regulate. And the avoidant is like, get away from me. You're too much. And this becomes toxic. It becomes codependent, it becomes toxic and it usually ends in tears and a lot of upheaval.

Meagen Gibson

And I would imagine, I was thinking you were giving us the statistics of secure versus insecure versus avoidant or anxiously, and that 50%, I was like, is that the 50% of people that don't get divorced, are the securely attached married people? Right?

Heather Monroe

It's a really good point. That's so true. Yeah, you have to wonder. But also you have to take into account that there's multiple divorces too.

Meagen Gibson

Right.

[00:30:43] Heather Monroe

An anxiously attached person, they might not just have one divorce under their belt, they could have three before they get it right, or two, or five engagements and never married. There's a lot of this kind of getting really close and then kind of exploding apart.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, absolutely. So now that we have the education, I'm imagining people at home and they've identified themselves, they've identified their partner, they've identified their parents and their people they live with. And there's a terrible tendency in the self help world, in the pop psychology world, of weaponizing information. So we don't want to do that. So all we can do is change ourselves if we desire to do so. So how do people take this information and begin to peel apart kind of their attachment and start to heal and then make decisions from a more healed place or a more supported place about how they want to interact in their relationships?

Heather Monroe

And this is the other reason why I love attachment theory, is that it's all changeable. So there's no need to weaponize the problem. It's like, okay, you've gotten a lot of information. You might identify with anxious, you might identify with avoidant, you might identify with both. Let's talk about real science backed ways that we then change our style.

So I already know that people might be thinking, oh my God, I am anxiously attached and my partner is avoidantly attached. And we are in this relationship and what am I, or marriage, and now what? All you can do is focus on yourself, number one. Two, it is possible, I have seen it, where people have gone from both having insecure attachment styles, going to both earned. However, the only way that happens is if both partners acknowledge their attachment systems and want to change them and are doing their separate work and then their work together.

So I know that a lot of you are going to be like, oh my God, I'm in the relationship as it's happening. Just focus on your individual attachment style. Just make it a little less overwhelming. So if you're anxiously attached, let's start with anxiously attached, one thing you should know is that it's easier for an anxiously attached person to change their attachment style. And you're nodding. Yeah, it makes sense, right? Because at least they have some sense of emotional capacity and that they want to connect.

It's not like this longing, like the avoidant, that they keep being like, oh, I want that, but I don't know how. It's like, anxious, we're all in. Let's go...

Meagen Gibson

...I know where all of my hurts are. I've been waiting for somebody to listen to me in this whole time. Yeah.

Heather Monroe

Exactly. So the first way that we heal as anxiously attached people and, by the way, I am a recovering anxiously attached person, so I have done this work and have earned secure attachment through this work, we acknowledge and accept what our needs are. So it's not just like,

when I say, I really say, acknowledging and accepting because when we accept what our needs are, like a securely attached person would, there's not a lot of compromise around that.

[00:34:19]

It's like if I accept the fact that I need responsiveness to text messages when we're apart, then that's not something that if someone continues never to respond to me, it starts to become a deal breaker. Enough of these things start to become deal breakers for me. So we accept what our needs are and we are able to start, number two is that we're able to start effectively communicating what our needs are. So, anxiously attached people, we tend to hide our needs because of our fear of abandonment.

So we hide our needs and we hide our boundaries and then we're resentful, right? And we kind of dive into this pool of resentment because how can they not know I need this? It's like, well, we're just looking at our part here. We're not saying what our needs are and repeating what our needs are and training this person, even a securely attached person, what our needs are. This is important. So we learn how to effectively communicate by being our true selves.

We cannot effectively communicate our needs if we keep going back on them out of fear. So the number one requirement for healing is courage. We have to be courageous enough to be ourselves in a relationship. We have to be courageous enough to say, ouch, I told you that was a need and you didn't meet it. And I'm not going to say it isn't a need anymore because this is who I am. So, being ourselves.

The easiest one and the hardest one would be to recognize and leave avoidantly attached people when we start dating them. I will say, working with anxiously attached clients, we are incredible at recognizing disconnection. So it's not that our intuition is wrong. We have incredibly sensitive intuitions. It's that we don't follow that intuition. It's that we can see it but it feels like love to us. So we don't leave fast enough. So a big piece of the work is recognizing, noticing that intensity, that pull, that hit of dopamine, and when there's enough red flags to walk away.

Which leads me to my other way to heal from anxiously attached, an anxious attachment, is step out of the lack philosophy and into abundance, the belief of abundance. We tend to think that we're not enough, that there isn't anyone who's going to love us and that we're going to end up alone. And so when someone does love us, it's like, this is my last chance. I have to get this right. Think about how exhausting that is. I have to bend myself like a pretzel because this is the only person that's going to love me or the only person I'm going to be attracted to.

So really testing, reframing with some Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, around what our belief systems are and reframing that belief system in our thought patterns, which mindfulness is really helpful in, getting a mindfulness practice in there.

And lastly, which you probably have already surmised, is date securely attached people. Because securely attached people have staying power, they're not going to be scared of your anxiety. And this is why anxiously attached people are the easiest to treat. After a while, when our attachment system gets used to someone staying, it becomes less anxious and it becomes more securely attached.

There's a sense of when this person hears what my need is and then steps up to the plate, I like to call it, and they keep stepping up to the plate, after a while, I'm confident that my voice matters,

my needs matter. And now that person is going to continue to step up to the plate most of the time. And so we want to date securely attached people.

[00:38:43] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Yeah. I was thinking of the phrase people who care about us, care about the way they make us feel. And that's like the secure attachment mantra, I feel like, they demonstrate and act that out.

Heather Monroe

With that being said, what I will say, with every single person I have treated with anxious attachment, there will come a time in a relationship when you get into a good, solid relationship, that we switch into avoidant, because I never want to be a part of a team that I'm picked for, one. And two, intimacy doesn't feel like intensity. So we are going to feel, am I attracted to this person? God, this is kind of boring. Our nervous system is used to going like this and intimacy is more sustainable, it's more like this, which feels a little boring to the anxiously attached person at first.

So, if we can get through that phase and stay the course, on the other side is earned secure attachment, you will be attracted to that, chemistry is chemistry, you can't fake that. So it's like, if you're not attracted, then you're not attracted. But this is different. This is like something keeps bringing me back, I like it when we're intimate. I look at this person and I think that they're really handsome or beautiful, but just there's something, that intensity, missing. That's when you keep giving it a chance and giving it time.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. In intensity, I think what you're referring to is actually instability or questioning loyalty or responsiveness or you're like, the intensity that you were used to was just instability, right?

Heather Monroe

Yes, absolutely. So, stay the course. I promise you, if you stay the course of the securely attached person, what you will gain and learn from that relationship is pretty outstanding.

So, avoidantly attached, just looking at time, okay, so avoidantly attached people. The way that we will heal, first, we have to identify our, just like the anxiously attached person, we have to identify our protest behaviors and kind of like cut them off. Be vulnerable, not manipulative. Be our authentic selves, effective communication. Avoidantly attached people, we have to look for our deactivating strategies. Am I being ambiguous? Am I having trouble saying I love you? Am I having trouble being physical and holding hands in public or letting the world know that I'm taken?

Am I being incredibly nitpicky? Is it hard for me when things are going really right not to pull away? All these kind of deactivating strategies. Do I flirt with other people in a way that's harmful to my relationship? Do I check out when my partner is getting emotional? So we have to look at our deactivating strategies and correct them, identify, and then start working on not doing those things. So there's some Behavioral Therapy there.

Then we have to deemphasize self reliance and start emphasizing interdependence. So self reliance, yes, it's needed and it's good to a certain extent, but humans are supposed to be

interdependent on each other. We're supposed to ask for support, ask for help. So focus on that interdependency. Focus on that mutual support that a relationship can give you. And that also, number one thing for healing, avoidant attachment is courage. Same thing.

[00:42:43]

You have to have enough courage to ask for support, to identify when you need support, so that's going to be another step that an avoidantly attached person has to do that an anxiously attached person doesn't. We have to figure out, when do I even need support? Because I'm not disconnected from my attachment system. Start becoming aware of our tendencies to misinterpret behavior. What I mean by that is that avoidantly attached people can have a real negative bias around vulnerability, around weaknesses, around interdependency.

So, when my partner texts me a couple of times because I haven't texted back, a couple of times, nothing crazy, but like a couple of times I haven't texted back, I need to be aware of my tendency to be like, oh, this person's so needy. That's so gross, right? It's like, no, they just want to connect. I need to text them back. That's where I need to meet them. So, our tendency to misinterpret behavior needs to be looked at. And, again, some Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, some reframing, some being vulnerable enough to say to a person you trust or a therapist, this is what grosses me out.

And for that person to say, oh, let's take a look at that, what do you find so gross about that? Some would say that that's actually a really normal behavior, like wanting to hold your hand on a walk or something like that. This is another important part for just avoidantly attached people. Adopt a distraction strategy. So, there are studies that show that avoidantly attached people, their attachment system is more fully triggered, and an awareness of it, when they are distracted by something else.

So what I mean by this is your partner asking to hold your hand while watching a movie feels a lot less harmful and like, eugh, than your partner grabbing your hand when they're standing there with you, or just like reaching out for you when you're sitting at a table in a restaurant. There's something about going for a walk and holding a hand or watching a movie and holding hands, that closeness, that's less threatening to an avoidantly attached person.

So, finding distraction strategies in order to connect with your partner. This would mean like go for a walk, and that can be connection. Also, there's a lot of ways that we can distract ourselves while connecting. I think about nature always as a wonderful distraction, but doing something with your partner while connecting is a really great thing to do for avoidantly attached people. Drop the phantom ex and looking for the one, because what you're doing is you're looking for perfection. And that's never going to happen.

And then lastly, just like in an anxiously attached person, date a securely attached person, because a securely attached person is going to give you more space than an anxiously attached person is going to. There's going to be less drama. There's going to be less upheaval, and there's going to be less perceived weakness on your part because a securely attached person is going to know what their needs are. They're going to be able to be self-reliant, but also mutually supported.

And they're going to show you the difference between these things. Whereas an anxiously attached person, they can't teach you that. That's going to be really hard for them to teach you. So that's the journey for both types.

[00:46:43] Meagen Gibson

The bottom line here, find a securely attached person. No, I'm joking. And at the same time, that is something we can all achieve within ourselves. And achievement is the wrong word, but we can all grow to that. We can all get to that point. These are not unicorn people walking around with perfect childhoods.

Heather Monroe

It's more than half the population, so it's there. And by the way, securely attached people get divorced all the time, too. It's not as if they're not prone to tragedy or divorce or relationships failing. That is not the case with securely attached people at all. They would be quicker to get a divorce, actually, to a certain extent, if things are really bad because, again, they want to get out, to get back to who they are and what they're doing and who they want to be in this life with.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely.

Heather Monroe

Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. This has been fantastic. And I would keep talking to you if I wasn't aware of the time. Heather, how can people find out more about you and your work?

Heather Monroe

Yeah, you can find me on Instagram. Monroe Wellness. [@monroewellness](#). And please check out my website and sign up for my newsletter. That's going to be the best way to keep in touch with my work. So, subscribe. My website is [monroewellness.com](#). And I will keep you guys up to date on conferences like this, on public speaking, in person, on everything that I'm doing. So, yeah, sign up and be in touch.

Meagen Gibson

Fantastic. Thanks again, Heather.