



6 WAYS
to heal your
Attachment Style
with your
Nervous System
RIGHT NOW



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Have you taken a bunch of different attachment style quizzes and keep getting different results, leaving you more confused than before?

You're not alone. And it's because there's not ONE answer. BUT, there is a best friend to attachment theory that isn't talked about much... the NERVOUS SYSTEM. Keep reading to learn 5 ways your attachment style is connected to your nervous system and why you act and feel the way you do around others.

Attachment Styles + the Nervous System are Connected

Attachment styles and the nervous system are deeply intertwined and essential for understanding how we relate to others. Polyvagal theory, introduced by Dr. Stephen Porges, explains the workings of our autonomic nervous system and supports the attachment theory. When we connect the two, we can better understand why we react the way we do in relationships, especially during conflicts or moments of disconnection.

The role of our childhood experiences.

Our attachment styles—secure, anxious, avoidant, or disorganized—are shaped by our early childhood experiences. Our attachment styles are responsible for how we connect with others and handle relational dynamics. For example, if we had consistent and attuned caregiving, it created secure attachment, leading to more easeful adult relationships. If we had inconsistent, unavailable, or ambivalent experiences from our caregivers growing up, we developed anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment styles, then causing us to seek constant reassurance in our adult relationships.

The role of the nervous system.

Our autonomic nervous system is a protective mechanism that helps us navigate the world. It's made up of different states: the ventral vagal complex (regulation), sympathetic nervous system (mobilization), and dorsal vagal complex (shutdown). When we understand these states, we can more easily recognize our responses to stress and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

Understanding your Attachment Style(S) – PLURAL!

Here's the truth – we're not just ONE attachment style. We are usually a mixture of many, based on different experiences in our childhood and adult lives. Read through the below descriptions to experience yourself in each style.

Secure Attachment

If you have a secure attachment style, you tend to feel comfortable with being intimate with others as well as being independent. You tend to have healthy and balanced relationships. You communicate your needs well, you attune to the needs of the people you're in relationship with, and you know how to create and nurture safety together.

When you're secure, you tend to operate in the ventral vagal complex. When regulated, you feel safe, connected, and at ease. This state allows for joy, creativity, and intimacy to flourish.

We typically developed secure attachment because we had consistent and attuned caregiving from our guardians growing up. This means that they were responsive to our needs, providing a reliable base for exploration and growth. Our parents were likely skilled at setting boundaries, managing conflict well, and allowing us to develop a "self" where we had our own needs and wants.

Anxious Attachment

If you have an attached attachment style, you tend to seek constant reassurance and fear abandonment. You can be highly sensitive to relationship dynamics, incredibly attuned to shifts in your partner's behaviour, and fear too much space between yourself and another, afraid you'll be rejected, abandoned, and ultimately, alone.

When you're anxious, you can feel like your sympathetic nervous system is frequently activated, with heightened alertness and anxiety, or like you're always ready to find and address a perceived threat within the relationship. Anxious people have a hard time self-regulating and being able to sit with their own feelings, and then deciding if and how they should act based on the feelings they're having.

We typically developed secure attachment because we had inconsistent and attuned caregiving from our guardians growing up. If our needs were met unpredictably, we lived in uncertainty with a heightened need for the closeness we craved but did not consistently receive.

Avoidant Attachment

If you have an avoidant attachment style, you tend to prioritize your independence and feel uncomfortable getting too close to others. You tend to suppress your emotional needs and think that others can be too much or too needy. In the same way that an anxious attached person fears too much space in their relationships, the avoidant attached person fears not enough space. They fear that if they get too close, they'll lose themselves, or be taken over by the other person's needs and emotions.

When you're avoidant, you tend to shut down or emotionally withdraw to prevent yourself from getting overwhelmed, which is an activation of the dorsal vagal complex. While anxious people struggle to self-regulate, avoidants struggle to co-regulate or sit with another and allow both nervous systems to reach a state of calm, together. Think of what a great parent, therapist, or coach provides when you're activated. A hug from a safe and trusted person can be just what we need to come back into regulation. This is co-regulation.

We typically developed avoidant attachment because we had neglectful or emotionally unavailable caregiving from our guardians growing up. We had to rely on self-sufficiency and minimize our own emotional expression.

Disorganized (Anxious/Avoidant) Attachment

If you have a disorganized attachment style or mix of anxious/avoidant behaviors, you will often feel confused and fearful in your relationships. You desire closeness, but don't trust it. You want to lean in, but leaning in is scary and can cause panic.

When you're disorganized, you tend to fluctuate between sympathetic activation and dorsal shutdown, often resulting in the freeze response (indecision and immobilization).

We typically developed disorganized attachment because we had both safe and dangerous caregiving from our guardians growing up. We got mixed signals and an unpredictable environment.

Now that you've read through them all, can you see how we can be a mixture of many, depending on who is near us and what is going on around us? Our nervous system runs the show here. By identifying your attachment style through reflection on your relational patterns and emotional responses, you can see how your nervous system reacts in different situations and identify where and when you experience anxiety, withdrawal, or confusion.

How to Move Toward Secure Attachment + Heal Our Nervous Systems

01. Have Compassion for Your Younger Self

When we begin to connect the dots and recognize that our reactions stem from past childhood experiences, we can start to have compassion for our younger selves. Our nervous systems are always trying to protect us based on past data, and we need to approach healing with empathy and patience.

Everything that you've done in relationships up until now, is exactly what you needed to do to be able to explore, be curious, and decide you want to do it differently.

Understanding what shaped you through exploring your family system and what you were taught is the key to understanding why you do what you do in relationships.

Put your hand on your heart, take a deep breath, and honour that you're here now, and you're ready to help heal and support your younger self. Thank them for getting you here. Say to your younger self, "I got this now."

02. Heal Through Somatic Work

A great way to heal our attachment wound is through somatic work, which focuses on our body's responses. Soma = of the body. You may have heard that we store our "issues in our tissues." By focusing on our body's responses and our nervous system, we can consciously reshape our responses to create new, healthier patterns. Learning self-regulation and attuned co-regulation allows us to experience closeness and independence safely.

03. Create Disconfirming Experiences

If we want to change our relational patterns, we need to provide our nervous system with disconfirming experiences. To do this, we have to engage in new and positive interactions that challenge our old beliefs about relationships.

When you slowly expose yourself to situations that promote connection and trust, you begin to teach your nervous system new patterns. Explore now the new positive interactions and feel different from past experiences. With time, these new experiences will reshape our nervous system and lead to more secure and fulfilling connections. By choosing to only be in relationships with healthy people, you can create more new, healthy relationships. Your system will start to learn and trust that there's a different way!

04. Practice Co-Regulation

Prioritize relationships with individuals who offer consistent, supportive, and non-judgmental interactions. You can practice attuned co-regulation with them by being present and attentive in your interactions, allowing for mutual regulation. For example, take a moment to notice kind eyes looking at you during a conversation, and let their calmness influence your state. Remember that we mirror each other, so choosing the right, regulated, safe people is key here.

05. Build Self-Regulation Skills

Practicing mindfulness and doing breathing exercises will calm the sympathetic nervous system. Techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or physical exercise can help reduce stress and create relaxation. You can practice grounding techniques to stay present and connected to your body. A simple breathing exercise you can do when you're activated (or just throughout the day!) is to breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, and hold for 4 seconds - repeat. You can also use visualization and self-compassion exercises to nurture and support your younger self. For instance, visualize your adult self comforting and supporting your younger self, providing the care and reassurance you needed as a child.

06. Celebrate Your Progress and Growth

Acknowledge and celebrate each step you take toward secure attachment and nervous system regulation! Track your progress and see how it impacts your relationships and overall well-being. This reinforcement helps you solidify new, healthier behavioural patterns. This is so important.

When I first began this work and started to see and feel changes in my attachment behaviours, I was so excited and celebrated with all the people around me. I surrounded myself with people who cheered me on. You deserve to be celebrated for the intention you're putting behind this!

I went from anxious to avoidant to disorganized, to secure. My life experiences kept impacting my behaviours in relationships, and I didn't know why I was doing what I was doing... it felt so automated. I wondered what was wrong with me. Turns out nothing was wrong with me, just like there's nothing wrong with you.

You are not destined to relate in the way you do right now. Creating epic relationships is a skillset. We tend to operate by doing exactly what we were taught to do /feel like we need to do, because we're unconsciously trying to protect ourselves from being hurt again. But now, you want to operate differently, otherwise wouldn't be here reading this. You can learn how to change your behaviors and create the types of relationships you've always desired, even the relationships you thought were only for "lucky" people.