RELATIONSHIPS & SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Attachment Styles in Adult Relationships

Understand the need beneath a reaction - without putting people in boxes.

Attachment theory explores expectations about closeness, safety and support. Adult attachment is often described along two dimensions: anxiety about rejection and discomfort with depending on others. These are patterns, not fixed identities.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- Recognise common closeness-and-distance patterns
- Understand attachment needs with curiosity
- Practise more secure, respectful communication

Take your time

You can read this guide in one sitting or return to the exercises whenever you need them. No worksheet needs to be completed perfectly.

UNDERSTAND

What this can look like

Secure tendencies

A person can usually tolerate closeness and independence, express needs, and seek repair after conflict. Secure behaviour can be practised and supported in relationships.

Anxious tendencies

Uncertainty, inconsistent contact or perceived distance may trigger fear of rejection and stronger bids for reassurance. Underneath the reaction there may be a wish for connection and predictability.

Avoidant tendencies

Intense emotion or requests for closeness may feel overwhelming, prompting withdrawal or self-reliance. Underneath may be a need for autonomy, safety or time to process.

Fearful or mixed tendencies

A person may want closeness while also fearing it, moving between seeking contact and protecting distance. Trauma, context and relationship experiences matter; labels cannot explain everything.

Notice with curiosity

These are explanations, not labels or tests. You do not need to recognise yourself in every example for the guide to be useful.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

Three things to try

Name the trigger and the need

Before deciding “my partner is avoidant” or “I am anxious”, describe what happened, how you felt and what you needed. Stay with observable experiences.

Make a specific bid for connection

Try: “I feel unsettled when plans change without notice. Would you be willing to let me know earlier?”

Offer a dependable return time

If you need space, say when you intend to reconnect. “I need an hour to settle, and I do want to finish this conversation tonight.”

An important reminder

Attachment categories are shorthand for dimensions and experiences, not diagnostic types. They may change across relationships and time. Distress, conflict or abuse should not be explained away as “just an attachment style”.

IN REAL LIFE

Words and actions to practise

When reassurance feels urgent

“I notice I am worried that we are disconnected. Could we check in for ten minutes?”

When closeness feels overwhelming

“I care about this conversation and need a little time to process. Can we reconnect after dinner?”

When both patterns collide

Name the cycle together: one reaches, one withdraws, both feel unsafe. Focus on a shared solution rather than blaming a style.

Start smaller than you think

Choose one example that feels safe, doable and relevant. Practising a small change consistently can be more useful than attempting everything at once.

REFLECTION & PRACTICE

A few gentle questions

1. What tends to activate my worry or desire for distance?

2. What does emotional safety look like for me?

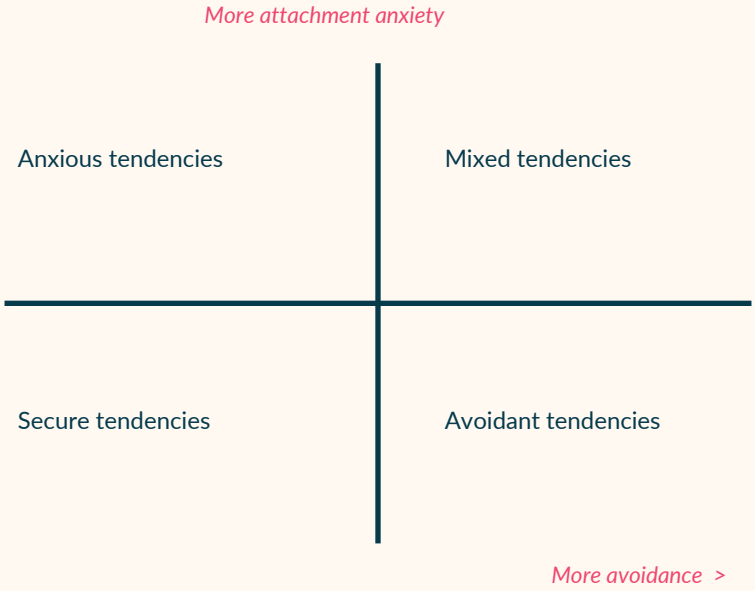
3. What small reliable action could build trust with someone important?

Permission to pause

You can reflect privately, talk through a question with someone safe, or leave it unanswered. There is no “correct” response.

BRING IT TOGETHER

Small steps are still progress



TRY THIS WEEK

1. Notice one trigger without labelling your partner.
2. Identify the need underneath your response.
3. Make one clear, respectful request.
4. Practise a small repair or reconnection after tension.

Keep safety in view

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FURTHER READING & REFERENCES

Nature Reviews Psychology, adult attachment insecurity in relationships
https://www.nature.com/articles/s44159-021-00011-1

The Gottman Institute, Sound Relationship House overview
https://www.gottman.com/about/the-gottman-method/