

Mummy & Daddy Issues

How parental attachment in childhood lays the blueprint for romantic adult relationships.

While we like to make fun of mummy and daddy issues, emotional imprints are no joke. Psychologists Bowlby and Ainsworth developed a theory that stipulated the way we experienced attachment to our parents or primary caregivers in early childhood would inform the extent to which we feel secure in adult relationships. This insight allows us to shine a light on why we feel attracted to and select different partners, even when they seem like a terrible choice!

There are 4 types of attachment styles. To understand yours, think about your needs and how often you felt like they were met. Consider the following: As a baby/child...

- 1. My physical and emotional needs were met most of the time.** I felt loved by my parents. My parents were present, and I experienced a sense of being loved. I felt worthy of my parents' time, energy and love.
- 2. My parents were generally unavailable, busy working, neglectful or absent.** Parenting was possibly critical, absent, un-boundaried, and distant or focused on appearance or achievement. My needs weren't always met. It was safer for me to detach so I subconsciously learned to take care of myself.
- 3. My parents loved me, but parenting was inconsistent or incongruent.** Sometimes my needs were met and other times they weren't. The unpredictability created a sense of anxiety in me. Sometimes I didn't know if I would be comforted, punished, rewarded or scolded. Different variables impacted how I was parented.
- 4. I felt scared, intimidated, threatened or fearful of my parent(s).** I felt unsafe. I did my best to navigate their moods and behaviours. My needs weren't always met. My experience was riddled with fear, anxiety and inconsistency.

The number that best relates to your experience demonstrates your attachment style.

1. Secure attachment
2. Avoidant/Dismissive
3. Anxious/Preoccupied
4. Disorganized/fearful



Your childhood shapes you in good ways and bad

As you reflect on your style, I invite you to analyze your adult romantic relationships. Can you see how these dynamics might have played out, for attachment theory allows us to put up with behaviours in a relationship that would otherwise seem illogical and irrational? Why do you keep going for guys who are inconsistent with their behaviour? Why does she need so much validation? Check the history books. Humans will nine times out of ten stick with familiarity rather than risk the unknown. What if your known is unhealthy and dysfunctional? What if secure and consistent feels boring? Do you want to continue to live in known dysfunction or risk learning and creating unknown functional dynamics?

The hardest part about attachment theory is that despite parent's best intentions, the emotional experience of the child is what counts, it's not just about whether your parents actually loved you or not. Kids need an ocean's worth of love, time, energy and devotion. It is not enough to tell them you love them; they have to feel it in their hearts. For yourself and for your children, if we want to collectively create a culture of healthy and functional relationships, we ought to start paying attention to the emotional quality of our relationships.

So, I leave you with a challenge. Ask those around you, "Do you feel loved by me?" And if they don't come back with a resounding yes, follow up with "What could I do to make you feel more loved?"

Words: **Scout Smith-O'Leary**

Scout is a Relationship Therapist & Educator working with singles and couples based in Manly. For more info visit www.thelovescout.com or call **0410 030 463** to book in a session.



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