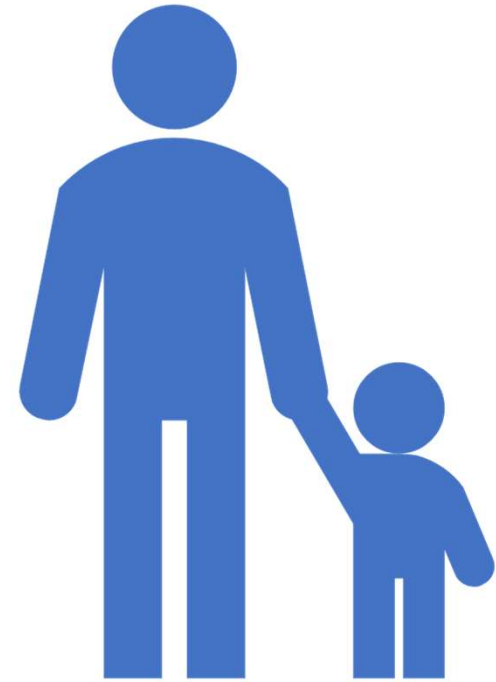


Understanding  
attachment styles  
and internal  
working models



# Learning outcomes

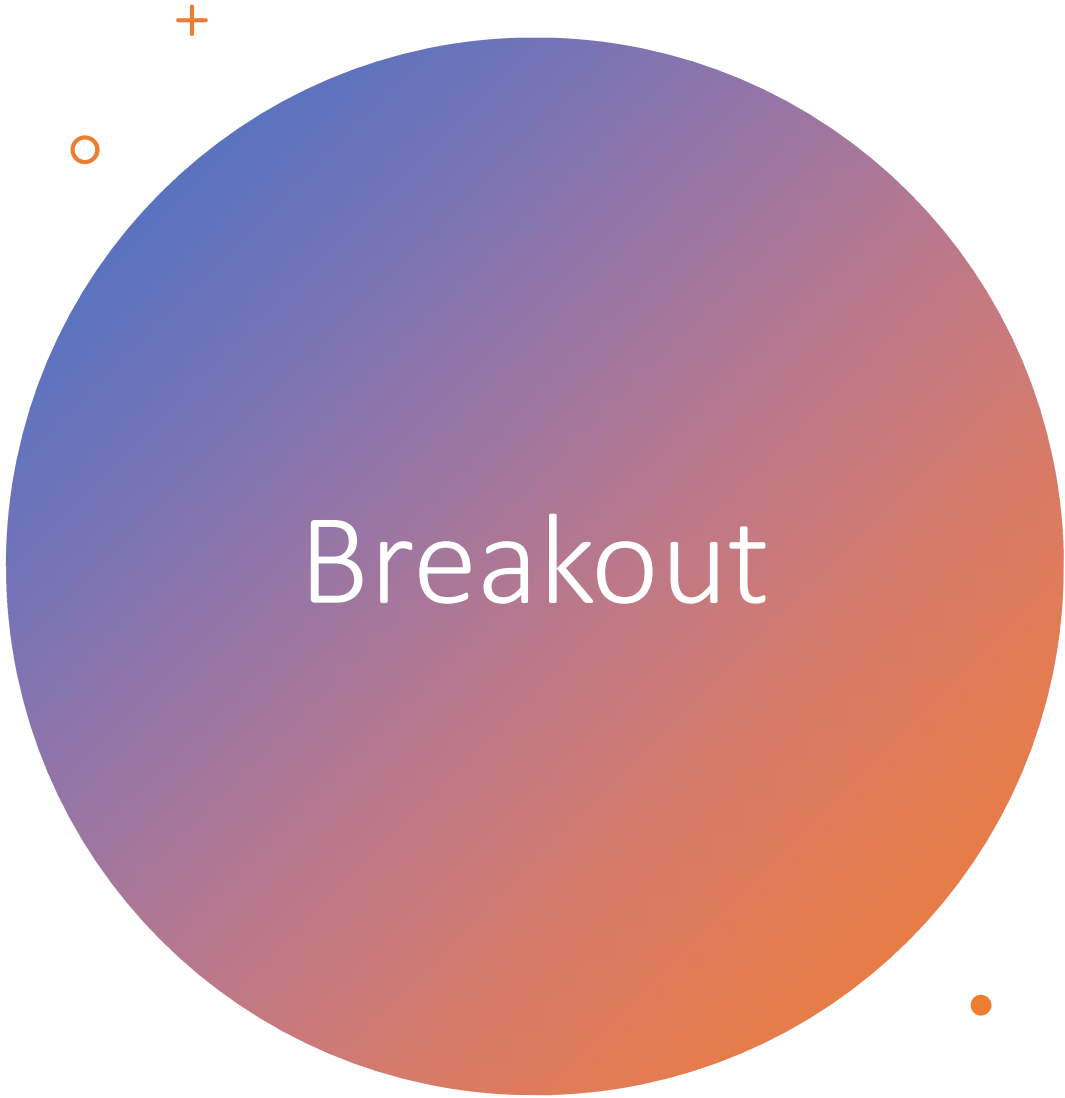
To refresh your understanding of attachment theory

To examine how attachment influences behaviour and relationships

To explore your own attachment style

The background features a series of concentric, overlapping circles that create a tunnel-like effect. The colors transition from a deep blue on the left to a light green on the right, with a teal center. The circles are semi-transparent, allowing the colors to blend and create a sense of depth and movement.

Health Warning!



What does Attachment mean to you?



# Attachment theory

## The history

- 1930's – John Bowlby trains as a paediatrician and then as a child psychiatrist
- 1940's – Bowlby and James Robertson video children's separation from their parents in hospital
- 1950's – Bowlby develops Attachment Theory
- 1960's – Mary Ainsworth researches "Strange Situation"
- 1980's – Research into secondary attachment figures, cross cultural differences, adult attachment styles, attachment relationships throughout childhood
- 1990's – Research into neuro-science explores how attachment impacts upon brain development

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# Attachment theory

- According to Bowlby, attachment also serves to keep the infant close to the mother, thus improving the child's chances of survival. He suggested that both mothers and infants had evolved to develop an innate need for proximity. By maintaining this closeness, infants are more likely to receive the care and protection that they need to ensure their survival.
- The central theme of Bowlby's attachment theory is that mothers who are available and responsive to their infant's needs establish a sense of security. The baby knows that the caregiver is dependable, which creates a secure base for the child to feel safe to explore the world.

# Key concepts

Attachment behaviour is what a baby does to draw **primary attachment** figures attention to their needs

Attachment is and can only be **relationship specific**

Children can develop strategies when they face perceived stressful or dangerous situations (their **attachment system** is activated)

Out of this process being repeated, the child develops a secure **Internal Working Model**

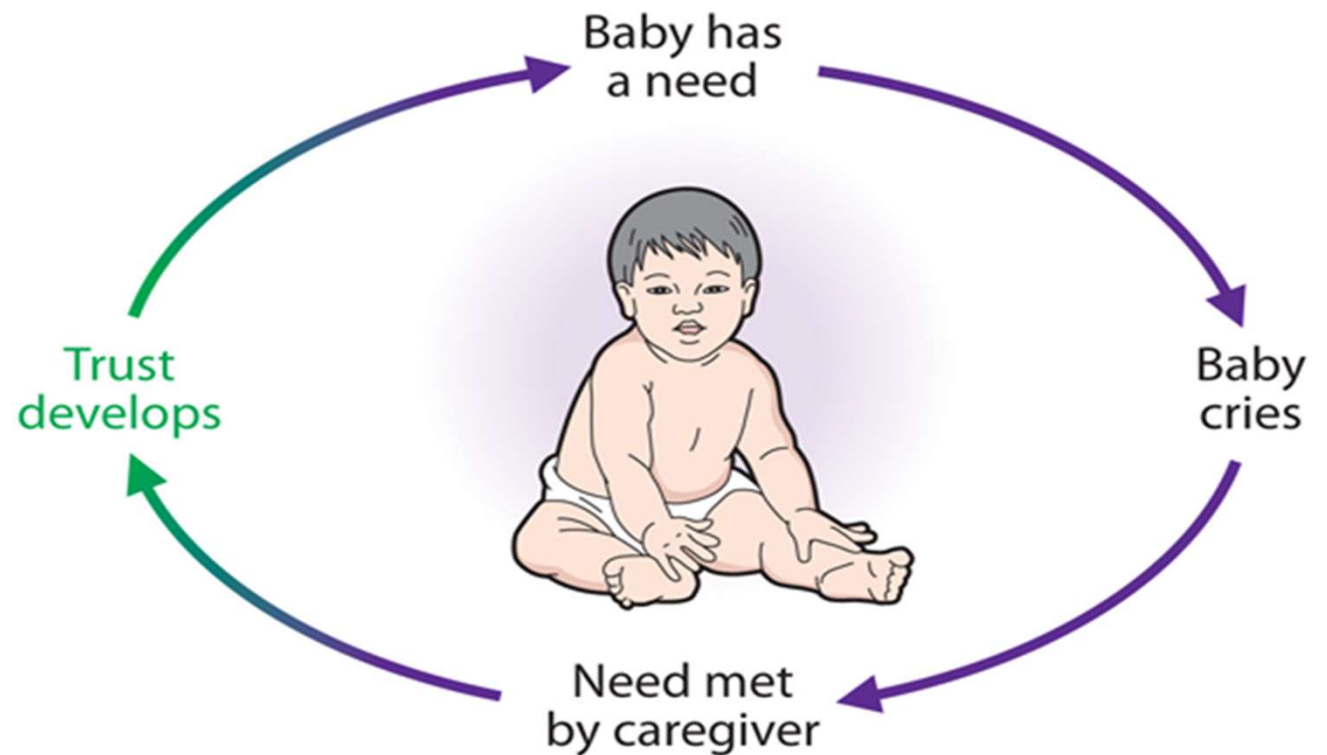
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# attachment-seeking instinct

1. Faced with danger, the infant will seek safety.
2. Faced with distress, they will seek comfort.
3. Faced with isolation, they will seek proximity to their attachment figure.
4. Faced with chaos, they will seek predictability

How do children form attachments?

## Infant Attachment Cycle



# Ainsworth “Strange Situation”

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The procedure, known as the ‘Strange Situation,’ was conducted by observing the behaviour of the infant in a series of eight episodes lasting approximately 3 minutes each:

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(1) Mother, baby, and experimenter (lasts less than one minute).

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(2) Mother and baby alone.

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(3) A stranger joins the mother and infant.

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(4) Mother leaves baby and stranger alone.

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(5) Mother returns and stranger leaves.

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(6) Mother leaves; infant left completely alone.

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(7) Stranger returns.

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(8) Mother returns and stranger leaves.

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Strange  
Situation  
classifications  
based on  
four  
interaction  
behaviours

---

Proximity and contacting seeking

---

Contact maintaining

---

Avoidance of proximity and  
contact

---

Resistance to contact and  
comforting

The Strange Situation Procedure led Ainsworth to identify the three major attachment patterns to as balanced ('B'), distancing ('A') and preoccupied ('C'),

	Distancing strategies – 'A'	Balanced strategies – 'B'	Preoccupied strategies – 'C'
<b>Internal strategies</b>	Cognitively organised: 'My thinking will keep me safe and help me survive.' More concerned with what happened than how they felt about it.	Integrates affect and cognition.	Affectively organised: 'My feelings will keep me safe and help me survive.' Less concerned with what happened than how they felt about it.
	Organised to avoid danger in a consistently dangerous environment.	Organised to act adaptively.	Organised to maximise safety in an environment that is unpredictable.
	Omits or dismisses negative affect (fear, sadness, desire for comfort, anger), or gives false positive affect.	Integrates and balances negative and positive affect. Owns true feelings.	Dominated by and exaggerates anger, fear, sadness or desire for comfort.
	Exaggerates predictability; believes that by controlling their behaviour they can regulate future outcomes.	Predicts whilst accepting uncertainty.	Omits/falsifies predictability; does not believe that they can regulate the future by their behaviour.
	Distances the past.	Retains past but not stuck in it; retains what is relevant from past.	Retains/gets stuck in past; keeps past alive and close – may confuse past and present to know how to respond based on feelings.
	Trauma: retains too little information. For example: blocks, displaces or dismisses the information/memory about the incident. Prioritises other people's perspectives, so may speak of someone else's trauma but not their own.	Trauma: takes forward information relevant to future; leaves behind redundant information, ie. information that was specific to that event but which is not relevant to protecting oneself in the future.	Trauma: retains too much information; does not move forward; preoccupied with past trauma or anticipates/imagines future trauma.
	Minimises/obscures problems; observes problems at distance.	Acknowledges and evaluates problems.	Maximises/highlights problems; overly engrossed in problems.

The Strange Situation Procedure led Ainsworth to identify the three major attachment patterns to as balanced ('B'), distancing ('A') and preoccupied ('C'),

	Distancing strategies – 'A'	Balanced strategies – 'B'	Preoccupied strategies – 'C'
<b>Interpersonal strategies</b>	Dismisses self; takes other's perspective and organises behaviour accordingly.	Can take both own and others' perspectives.	Takes own perspective and organises behaviour according to own feelings.
	Blames self, takes responsibility for own and AF's behaviour; blames situations rather than people or relationships.	Takes/allocates appropriate responsibility among self and others.	Takes no responsibility and blames other people for his/her problems.
	Minimises interpersonal problems.	Maintains an appropriate focus and balance on relevant interpersonal problems.	Emphasises interpersonal problems.
	Boundaries firm but attachment figure(s) are pushed out and strangers are included.	Diverse and appropriately differentiated boundaries.	Boundaries loose or collapsed; no differentiation.
	Sees victims as responsible and abusers as not to blame (because they may still blame themselves for what was done to them as a child).	Appreciates that victim and abuser behaviour can co-exist within one person.	Sees victims as totally innocent and abusers as totally responsible; tends to see self as victim even when perpetrating violence or abuse.
	Idealise others/negate self; takes others' perspectives and forsakes own.	Balanced view of self/others.	Dismisses others/preoccupied with self; poor at taking others' perspectives.
	Fear of closeness; intimacy is sacrificed.	Seeks appropriate intimacy; able to trust intimate partners; integrates both impulses – intimacy and autonomy.	Fear of abandonment; autonomy is sacrificed.
<b>Note:</b> 'AF' refers to 'attachment figure'.			

# Attachment and Brain Development

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- Brain development relies upon experiences either increasing or decreasing the neural activity of a cell.
- Unused neurons will die, while used neurons will survive.
- This is a normal process that occurs in the developing brain—too many cells are born and are then pruned.
- While new neurons are born in the brain throughout life, the enormity of early life growth is never replicated in later life.
- Early life deprivation fails to activate neurons, which means that a greater number of neurons will die.
- Equally important, neurons that would typically die under “normal” conditions could be retained under deprivation or conditions of abuse.

# Why Attachment matters

- Researchers have found that attachment patterns established early in life can lead to a number of outcomes.
- For example, children who are securely attached as infants tend to develop stronger self-esteem and better self-reliance as they grow older. These children also tend to be more independent, perform better in school, have successful social relationships, and experience less depression and anxiety.
- While attachment styles displayed in adulthood are not necessarily the same as those seen in infancy, research indicates that early attachments can have a serious impact on later relationships. For example, those who are securely attached in childhood tend to have good self-esteem, strong romantic relationships, and the ability to self-disclose to others. As adults, they tend to have healthy, happy, and lasting relationships.
- Quality of early attachment relationships are predictors for later behaviour, not necessarily determinants.



Breakout  
looking at  
our own  
attachment  
styles


When you were a child who cared for you?


To whom were you especially attached?

To whom did you turn when you were distressed? Who comforted you?

What words would describe one person to whom you were particularly close?

Can you remember a time as a child when you were separated from that person? What feelings are evoked from that memory?





# Attachment behaviour Children

# Attachments

Secure (70%)

Children given a positive working model. *I am safe, loveable. I know where to go for help if I need it. The world is mostly a pretty safe place.*

Caregiver who is emotionally available, sensitive and supportive, responds quickly to child's needs.

Insecure Avoidant (15%)

Children have a working model of themselves as unacceptable and unworthy. *Go away, leave me alone. I don't need you and I don't care about anything or anyone.*

Caregiver who is unresponsive, rejecting, dismissive

Insecure ambivalent (15%)

*I am not sure what is going to happen next and I'm worried. I might tell you to go away but also be very clingy.*

Caregiver who is responds to child inconsistently

Insecure disorganised (1/2%)

No attaching behaviours. Often appears confused or apprehensive in presence of caregiver

Caregiver who is abusive or neglectful  
Responds in a frightening or frightened way

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# Secure attachment

- have better self-regulation
- learn more easily and quickly
- show more persistence and 'grit'
- succeed at creative tasks
- become part of strong social networks.

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## insecure avoidant

- Most likely, this is because their parents were **emotionally unresponsive** when they were very young.
- For instance, their parents may have:
  - ignored their child's emotional needs
  - rejected the child when it was hurt or scared or cried for help
  - encouraged the child to be independent before it was ready.

---

# insecure avoidant

- are self-reliant to a fault - to the extent that needing an adult's help actually makes them feel insecure
- tend to suffer from high levels of anxiety (and harbour a strong fear of failure)
- don't communicate with adults when they're upset or stressed
- can appear withdrawn or isolated
- don't outwardly show any desire for affection or closeness
- have a strong need for choice and control

---

## insecure ambivalent

- This may be because their **parents were inconsistent** in how they responded to the child as a baby.
- Sometimes, when the baby cried, the parent was attentive and nurturing
- At other times, the parent presented as unavailable, intrusive, dismissive or insensitive
- this unpredictability led to confusion and a lack of trust in adults

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# insecure ambivalent

- often physically cling on to their parents
- find it hard to concentrate on academic tasks
- engage in persistent attention-seeking behaviour
- pay close attention to what the adults are doing
- have a poor understanding of cause and effect (so they find it difficult to learn from systems of rewards and consequences)

# disorganised-controlling

- These children often display **controlling and manipulative behaviour**.
- This form of attachment can develop because of childhood:
  - abuse
  - trauma
  - neglect

Here, the **parent's behaviour was so unpredictable** in the child's early years, they **never learned to feel safe**. In fact, they may even view their **parent as a source of fear**, rather than comfort.

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# disorganised-controlling

- seek control of relationships with peers and adults
- present a limited range of emotions
- have a poor attention span
- experience high levels of anxiety (that they often seek to mask with 'power' behaviours) or quickly become overwhelmed by their emotions
- resist attempts at support or encouragement from adults
- are hyper-vigilant of adults and other children
- may be very compliant and helpful when meeting a new adult for a short time, before completing changing their behaviour profile
- experience continually high levels of stress that hold them back



# Breakout

Discuss how you feel your attachment history may have affected your life as an adult.





# Attachment behaviour Adults

# Secure Attachment Style

Those with a strong Secure Attachment Style manifest at least a number of the following traits on a regular basis:

Higher emotional intelligence. Capable of conveying emotions appropriately and constructively.

Capable of sending, and receiving healthy expressions of intimacy.

Capable of drawing healthy, appropriate and reasonable boundaries when required.

Feel secure being alone as well as with a companion.

Tend to have a positive view of relationships and personal interactions.

More likely to handle interpersonal difficulties in stride. Discuss issues to solve problems, rather than to attack a person.

Resiliency in the face relational dissolution. Capable of grieving, learning, and moving on.

# Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment Style

Those with a strong Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment Style tend to manifest at least several of the following traits on a regular basis:

Inclined to feel more nervous and less secure about relationships in general, and romantic relationships in particular.

Inclined to have many stressors in relationships based on both real and imagined happenings. These stressors can manifest themselves through a variety of possible issues such as neediness, possessiveness, jealousy, control, mood swings, oversensitivity, obsessiveness, etc.

Reluctant to give people the benefit of the doubt, tendency for automatic negative thinking when interpreting others' intentions, words, and actions.

Requires constant stroking of love and validation to feel secure and accepted. Responds negatively when not provided with regular positive reinforcement.

Drama oriented. Constantly working on (sometimes inventing) relationship issues in order to seek validation, reassurance, and acceptance. Some feel more comfortable with stormy relationships than calm and peaceful ones.

Dislike being without company. Struggle being by oneself.

History of emotionally turbulent relationships.

# Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment Style

Those with a strong Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment Style tend to manifest at least several of the following traits on a regular basis:

Highly self-directed and self-sufficient. Independent behaviourally and emotionally.

Avoid true intimacy which makes one vulnerable and may subject the Dismissive-Avoidant to emotional obligations.

Desire freedom physically and emotionally (“No one puts a collar on me.” Pushes away those who get too close (“I need room to breathe.”)

Other priorities in life often supersede a romantic relationship, such as work, social life, personal projects and passions, travel, fun, etc. In these situations, the partner is frequently excluded or holds only a marginal presence.

Many have commitment issues. Some prefer to be single than to settle down. Even in committed relationships, they prize autonomy above much else.

May have many acquaintances, but few truly close relationships.

Some may be passive-aggressive and/or narcissistic.

# Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Style

Those with a strong Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Style tend to manifest at least several of the following traits on a regular basis:

Often associated with highly challenging life experiences such as grief, abandonment and abuse.

Desire but simultaneously resist intimacy. Much inner conflict.

Struggle with having confidence in and relying on others.

Fear annihilation, physically and/or emotionally in loving, intimate situations.


Similar to the Anxious-Preoccupied Style, suspicious of others' intentions, words, and actions.

Similar to the Dismissive-Avoidant Style, pushes people away and have few genuinely close relationships.



# Breakout

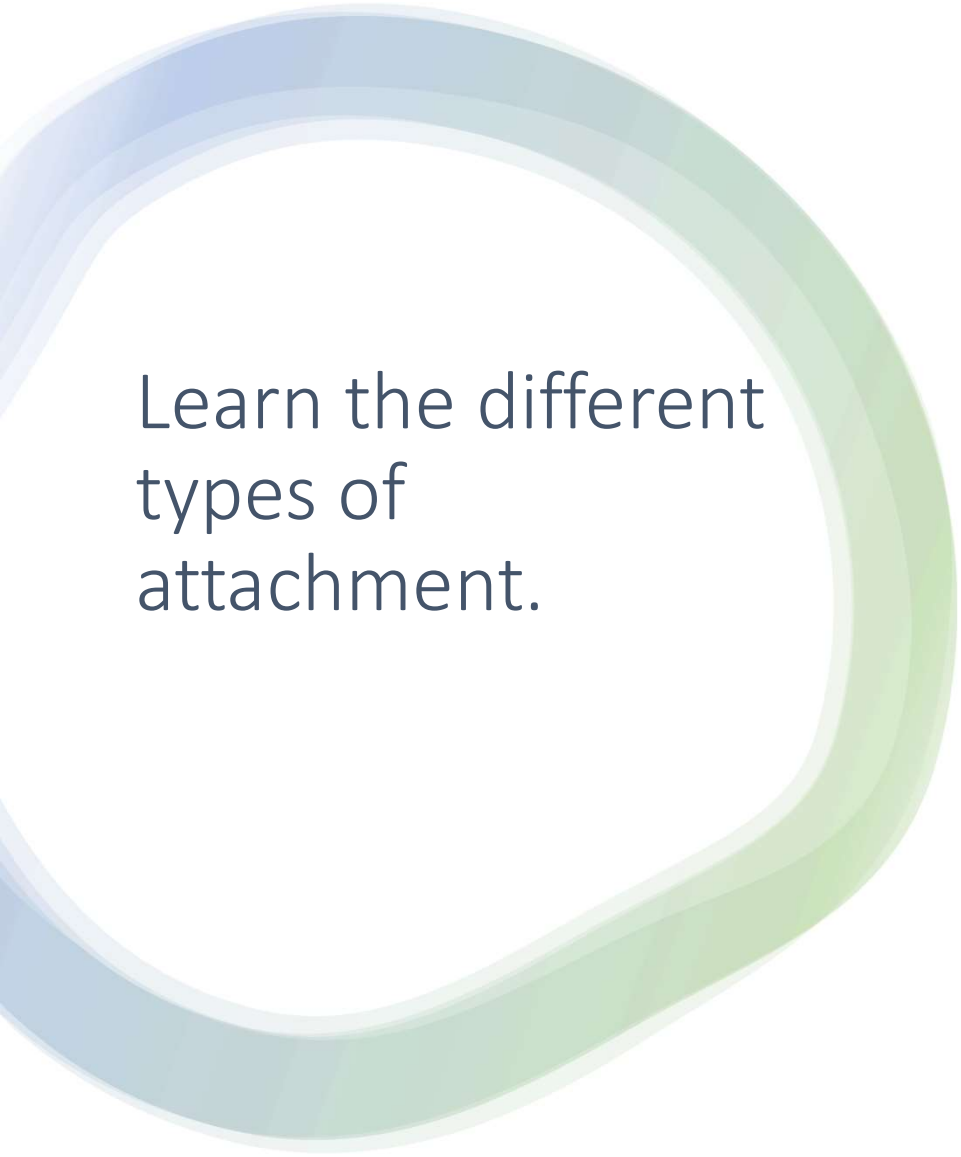
What can you do to better understand your attachment style?





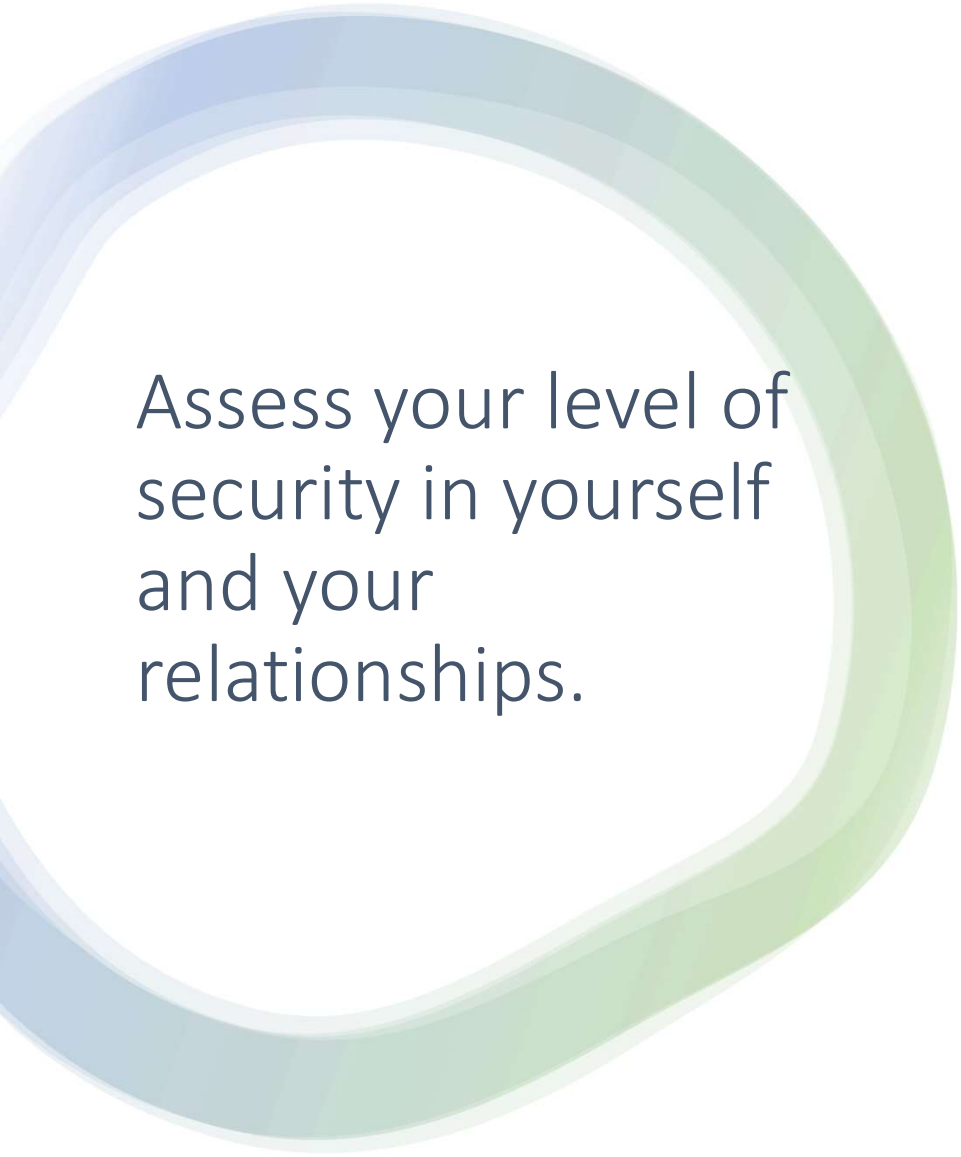
## Define attachment.

Attachment is the ability of one being to form emotional bonds with another. When attachment is in its healthiest state, you can build stable and enjoyable relationships with friends and family. However, if for some reason you have developed an insecure attachment as a result of traumatic experiences, then attachment issues may develop and make it difficult to form and keep stable relationships.



Learn the different  
types of  
attachment.

There are different types of attachment an individual may have. Understanding the different types will help you understand yourself better, and if there are issues that may need to be addressed with the assistance of a professional.



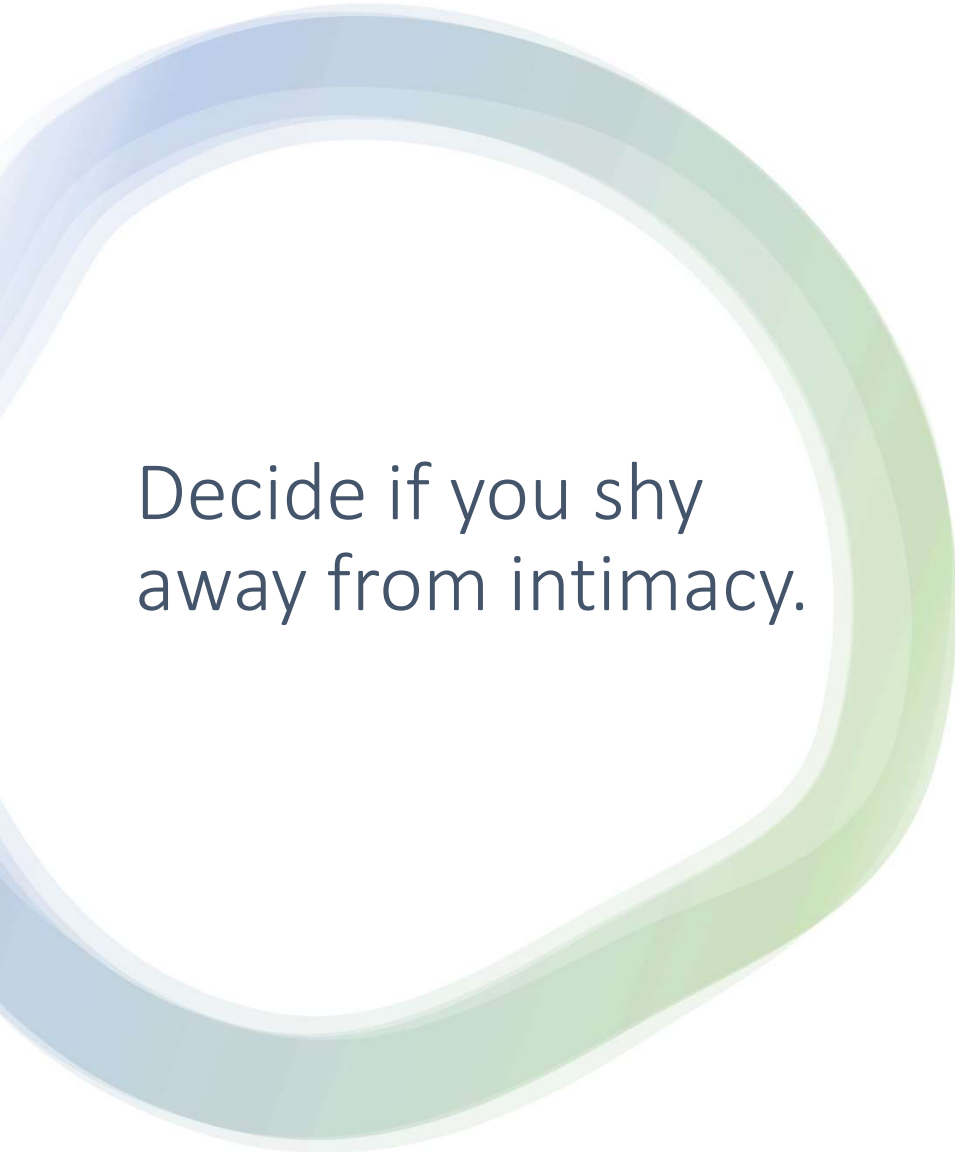
Assess your level of security in yourself and your relationships.

People with secure attachment styles have high self-esteem and are comfortable receiving and giving love. They don't look towards others to find value with themselves and feel comfortable with intimacy but aren't co-dependent. They also stay calm in arguments and are mentally flexible.



Check for clingy behaviours.

Ask yourself if you are clingy in relationships and constantly worry about what others think of you. If you look to others to complete you, want your partner to rescue you, and are in fear of rejection and abandonment, you likely have an anxious attachment type. People with this attachment style crave intimacy and become obsessed with the details of their relationship. They worry that the slightest changes in a relationship mean that it is going to end.



Decide if you shy away from intimacy.

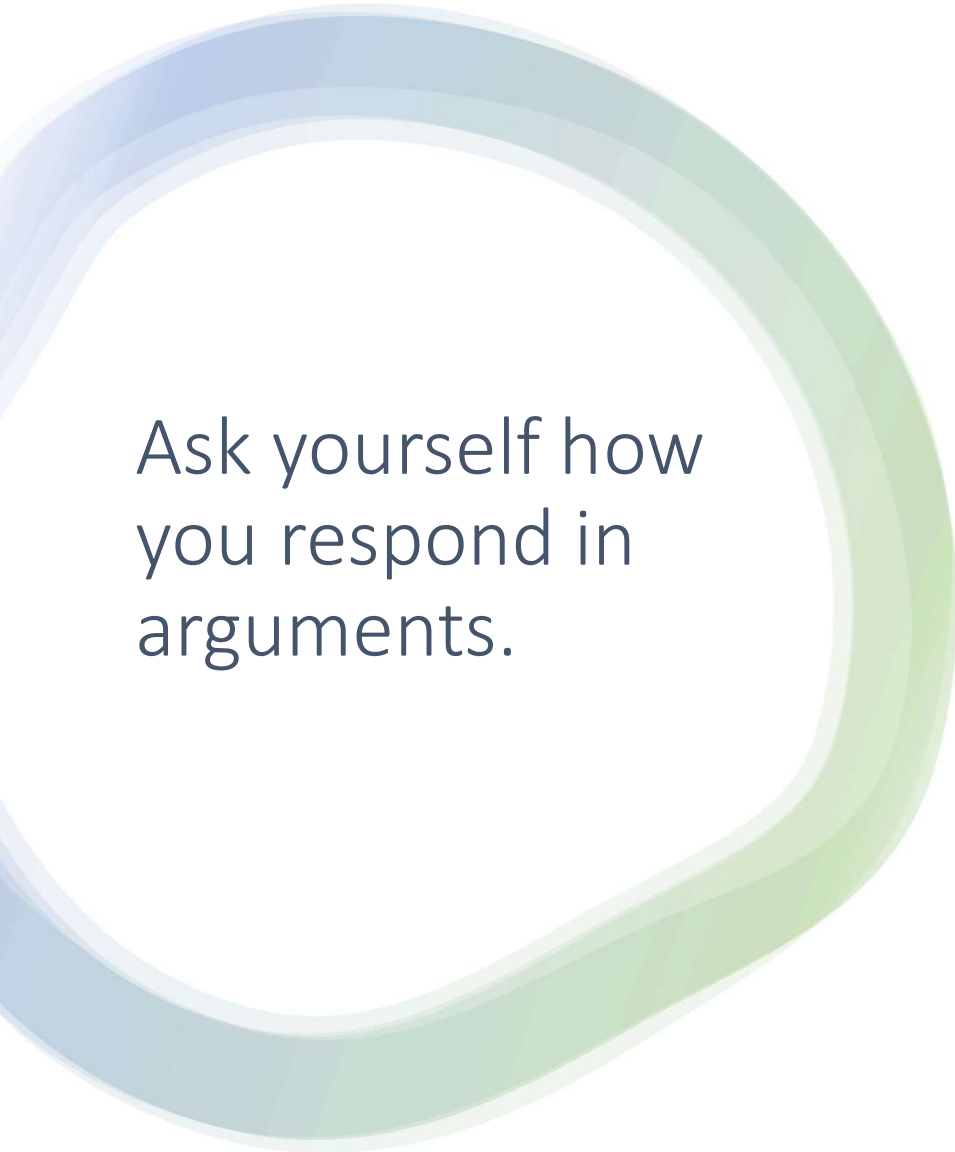
Decide if you shy away from intimacy. Those with avoidant attachment styles try to detach themselves from relationships. They are often emotionally distant and tend to withdraw from others. They are able to turn off their feelings and become non-reactive, even during an argument.



Take a look at your  
self-esteem.

It's no secret that the way parents treat their children affects their self-esteem for the rest of their lives. How you feel about yourself is a good indicator of what attachment style you have. Be honest when evaluating yourself and you'll get the most reliable answer.

Are you happy with yourself or do you have feelings of self-hatred? Do you value yourself or do you think you are worthless? You likely have a healthy attachment style if you have high self-esteem. Those with low self-esteem typically have unhealthy attachment styles.



Ask yourself how you respond in arguments.

How you engage in an argument says a lot about your attachment style. It reveals how you handle conflict and probably reflects the way you saw your parents behave in arguments, as well.

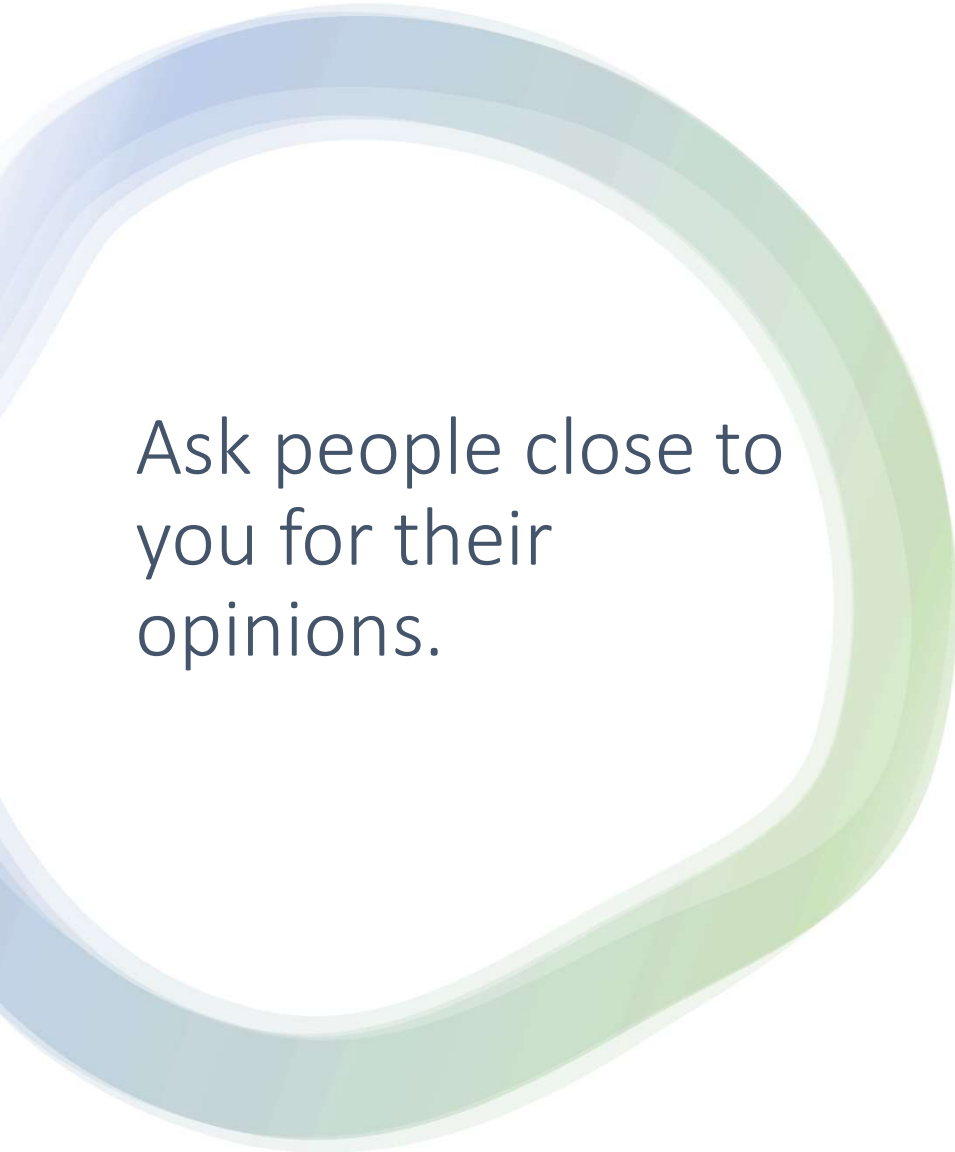
Do you stay calm in arguments or do you walk away and try to avoid the situation all together? Do you scream, lash out, name call, and vow to “get even” during a fight? The answer to these questions can reveal your attachment style



Think about your  
romantic  
relationships.

Your behaviour in a romantic relationship is perhaps the biggest clue when determining your attachment style. The way in which you respond to your partner and how attached you become to them says a lot. Being honest with yourself in this department may be difficult, but it is imperative when trying to determine your style.

Ask yourself if you are open to love and intimacy or if you shy away when someone wants to get close. Are you constantly worried your partner will leave you and do you become clingy early on in the relationship? Perhaps you enjoy being in a relationship and are completely secure in them. Whatever your answer is says a lot about your attachment style.




Ask people close to you for their opinions.

It can be difficult to access your own personality because you are so close to the situation. However, if you ask your partner or your family or friends to give their opinion on how you behave in certain situations, you may get a better idea than trying to determine it on your own



# Breakout

How can we challenge our attachment style?



# Challenging negative working models

