



¿How do I connect?

Relationships and care during the first years of life are crucial for development. In many ways, the beginning of our life impacts our emotional, social, behavioral development and even how we learn. This time we will focus on the most basic type of connection which leads the way for our development and it's known as *attachment*.

Attachment refers to the connection that forms between a baby and his caregiver, whether it's mom, dad, aunt or uncle, etc. We are wired for connection, that's why from the beginning, we see babies seeking connection to others using sounds, looks, playful interactions, gestures, cries, etc., which causes a response from the caregiver. If the adult responds in a congruent and constant way to him/her during the first two years of life, it sends the message "I'm here for you", "you're safe with me", "I'm not going to hurt you", therefore the baby learns to trust. This is formed through thousands of interactions where the foundation for relationships is being laid, and it will become like a lens from which the child will see and relate to others as he/she grows up.

We would like to invite you to think about your own story while you read. We will be able to observe that in most cases of adopted or fostered children, they have an insecure attachment, but it is necessary to also know how it's our own style of attachment because that impacts how we will raise them, how we connect to them and the attachment they will develop with us.

Through multiple research and studies from renown psychologists like John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, done through many years, they were able to define or categorize 4 types of attachment:

- Secure Attachment:

It forms when, every time the child seeks attention, care or connection from the adult, it is received with an attuned response from the caregiver. The caregiver is usually caring, affectionate and congruent in her behavior which allows for the child to develop a positive and secure self esteem and trust on others. In the future,

these people tend to be warm, emotionally stable and with satisfying relationships. It doesn't mean having a perfect caregiver, it just means to be available and accessible.

- Anxious - Ambivalent Insecure Attachment:

It forms when the caregiver does not respond constantly to the needs of the baby. It may be when the caregiver has an addiction to alcohol or other drugs, a mental disorder, or other difficulties, trauma or diseases that incapacitate him or her. They may be available and attuned at times, and insensitive or neglecting at others. It creates insecurity in the child because he cannot be sure when the caregiver will be available. This is counterproductive for his development because he can't trust others and he's emotional and physical needs are not being met.

- Anxious - Avoidant Insecure Attachment:

The caregiver provides for the physical needs for the child to survive but cannot provide for the emotional needs. He does not know how to hold or calm him or her, or it may be that the caregiver is abusive physically, emotionally or verbally. These may be individuals that tend to isolate because they feel uncomfortable with intimacy, or they may be very independent and dismissive. They see themselves as self-sufficient and with no need to have close relationships, leading them to suppress their emotions. Teaching the child that their emotions are not important and need to be independent.

- Insecure - Disorganized Attachment:

It forms when there are no specific patterns of behavior, interaction or care from the caregiver. Maybe the parent is afraid or has unresolved trauma. When the child grows you can see contradicting feelings in his/her personal interactions. They may have a desire for intimacy or discomfort in the presence of it. They may see themselves as lacking value, distrust others, and are constantly fearful no matter the circumstances.

Learning allows us to acknowledge our history and it opens the door to the road of healing and restoration.

We all have an attachment style that formed in relation with our parents or caregivers and we will repeat those patterns consciously or unconsciously as we relate to others, specially our spouses and children. As we understand where we came from or how we grew up, we become aware of our own style of attachment and how we can change with help, only if we are willing to do so.

During the first three months at home, the adopted or fostered child learns or picks up the attachment style of his/her parents.

If you grew up with any kind of insecure attachment or a mix of them, the *good news* is that it is not a permanent and determining state. It can change. Just as Dr. Karyn Purvis used to say, adults can *earn a secure attachment* with dedication, perseverance and willingness.

How do we earn a secure attachment?

1. Acknowledge we do not have it.
2. Recognize the important skills we need to develop, our own wounds and

weaknesses.

3. Persevering, and being mindful of what we don't want to do or repeat.

In the families that have a secure attachment, spoken communication as well as non-verbal communication are fundamental. We can easily imagine that hugging, listening, playing, reading stories, playing sports together, etc., are activities that strengthen the bond. However, we may have not thought about the fact that talking about their difficulties with them, allowing them to express their uncomfortable feelings, and supporting our child emotionally are also very important to form a secure bond with him/her.

As caregivers, we must make sure to face and seek healing for our own wounds.

In a marriage, if the husband and wife are aware of their own style of attachment as well as each others, they can support each other improve and heal. If one member of the couple did not receive the care that leads to form a secure attachment but decides to face it and seek help, he can earn it. In the process it could also improve the relationship with the spouse.

Certainly a less secure attachment and unresolved issues may mean that old wounds can come up to surface any time and in any relationship. These may be exposed by our children, specially because they have emotional and behavioral difficulties that tend to "push our buttons" constantly.

How can we know if we have reached a secure attachment?

When we are aware of our difficulties, and we're intentional in behaving in a healthier way as we learn how to do it.

It doesn't mean we will never have the desire to isolate or withdraw again or that we will always be able to connect in a whole and perfect way with others all the time. It simply means that we now know, we're willing to face it, work at it and persevere. Accept God's forgiveness, choose to forgive others that hurt us one way or another, and even forgive ourselves. Whether we find reconciliation in relationships or not.

One of the positive aspects of all this is that a child from a difficult background may be the channel that helps you be ware that you need to start the path to your own healing. If you're willing to see your style of attachment and the areas were you've fallen short, be thankful. Also, be compassionate and kind to yourself as you take the steps to heal. This road may take months to years for you to develop a secure and healthy attachment style.

Remember, if there's healing for our children, there's also healing for us.

What does the Word say?

Just as when we have a personal and ongoing relationship with God through Jesus, and we experience healing and transformation in love, so our children are being transformed through our relationship, as we are all being confronted and healed.

It requires a relationships to heal a trauma that was caused in or through a relationship.

God showed us his relational attribute through the relationship with His Son and Holy Spirit. He revealed it to us when He sent Jesus to restore relationship with humanity and God, and live on earth as one of us. His style of attachment is always secure, because He was always with Jesus and He has promised to be with us forever. And because He is faithful to his word, we can be sure He will be faithful again.

It's through him being constant and faithful that our trust in Him is formed and increases. As we walk through different circumstances in our lives by his hand, and we experience Him more and more, in the little and big things of life, we heal, learn and our faith is being strengthened.

We pray you may receive His mighty and healing presence, His peace and compassion as He also uses you as a vessel to show His love to the children that have not known love from the beginning.

I will never fail you.
I will never abandon you.

- Hebrews 13:5

Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. *And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

- Matthew 28:20

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