

Trauma Chat Episode 8

Disclaimer: This is a verbatim transcript which may contain spelling errors.

[00:00:00] **Laura Reagan:** [00:00:00] Trauma Chat episode 8.

[00:00:03] Hello, again, good to be back with you. I'm Laura Reagan, and today in episode eight, we're going to talk about attachment styles. This is a very complex topic that I'm going to talk about very, very briefly, and then give you a bunch of resources to learn more. Attachment refers to the relationship between a child and their primary caregivers from birth.

[00:00:33] So they used to call it bonding, family bonding, or parental bonding, with the child. And attachment affects us throughout our lives, so I usually tell my clients that attachment begins in our earliest years and from birth with our primary caregiver and most attachment [00:01:00] development occurs in the first six years of life, but it does continue to evolve throughout our lifespan. So regardless of what our attachment style is, it can eventually become a secure attachment style. So one thing about attachment that's important to understand is we are influenced by how our attachment was with our parents. And when we have our first romantic relationship, that's the next time that our attachment development, really kicks into gear again. So, our first romantic relationship influences what our attachment style is in adulthood as well, and attachment shows up in our romantic partner relationships, our relationships with our parents, and our relationships with our children, and our friends, and our coworkers.

[00:01:57] It's basically in everything we do as [00:02:00] human beings, because we are social, relational beings and how we attach, or don't, with others is a major part of who we are as humans. So secure attachment is when the caregiver does a good enough job of being able to attend and be attuned to and respond to the child's emotional and physical needs. If the parent does a good enough job with that, then the child will have secure attachment. However, since child development is a newer field of understanding over the past hundred years, it's been developing. Our parents and their parents did not know anything about attachment.

[00:02:54] So with the historical context of everything that was happening over the past 100 years, all [00:03:00] the wars, um, the great depression, and the great depression or the great recession that happened in 2007, 2008, the impact of oppression, discrimination, unequal opportunity for people based on not being members of the white -heteronormative group, all of those things influence attachment, over the last 100 years.

[00:03:30] So some of us, our parents did do a good enough job and many of us, they didn't because they couldn't, they didn't know how to. So, if you don't have secure attachment, from your relationship with your, your parents, you may have insecure attachment and insecure attachment falls into two categories: [00:04:00] insecure -anxious, and insecure -avoidant. In childhood, children who have anxious attachment styles, may show behaviors like crying that isn't easily consoled, becoming extremely upset when a caregiver leaves, being clingy with their attachment figures, being more timid and less comfortable exploring

than other children their age, appearing generally anxious, fearful, not wanting to interact with people they don't know, having trouble with emotional regulation, and potentially displaying aggressive behavior or having a lot of issues in their peer interactions. Those are some signs of anxious attachment in children. And I got that list from an article on healthline.com, which I will link to in the show notes. And [00:05:00] anxious attachment can show up in adulthood too. And this is how it could look: trouble trusting other people, having a sense of low self-worth, like I'm no one, I'm not as good as other people, I'm unlovable, worries about being abandoned by partners, and sometimes that's subconscious, craving closeness and intimacy.

[00:05:30] Now wanting closeness and intimacy is normal, but craving it, feeling like you can't get enough of it, could be an indication of anxious attachment. Being overly dependent in relationships or needing frequent reassurance that people care about you, you people love you. And it says being overly sensitive to a partner's actions, and moods, so overly sensitive to [00:06:00] them, I'm taking that to mean being so hypervigilant to how your partner's feeling and feeling responsible to fix it if something's bothering them. Being highly emotional, impulsive, unpredictable, and moody. So, those are some of the examples of anxious attachment or insecure-anxious attachment.

[00:06:38] Now the other one that I mentioned is insecure-avoidant attachment. So avoidant attachment can look like the child who doesn't really connect with anyone. So children with avoidant attachment might seem calm when they are separated from their primary caregivers, but [00:07:00] when the caregivers return, they don't want to really interact with them.

[00:07:04] So avoidant attachment looks like calm on the outside, but on the inside, the child still feels the same way as the insecure attachment that I mentioned before. So children with avoidant attachment style can appear to be very independent, mature for their age, tend to rely heavily on self-soothing techniques, so they, they handle their own emotions and they don't look for help from others because they've already gotten the message that they can't rely on others. They may want to accept help, but they struggle to connect, and they're not really sure why. Some people with avoidant attachment may actually consciously try to avoid closeness with others and have trouble asking for help when they have emotional [00:08:00] needs.

[00:08:00] They can be highly critical of other people. Adults with an avoidant attachment style look very self-reliant, and may have few close relationships. Sometimes people with avoidant attachment styles are actually very lonely, but they don't know how to connect. There's a great book about avoidant attachment called, *Trauma and The Struggle to Open Up* by Dr. Robert Muller. I interviewed him on my podcast *Therapy Chat*, and I'll put a link to his book and that episode in the show notes. And there's another episode of *Therapy Chat* that is about attachment styles, that, um, in fact, I'll put all the episodes of *Therapy Chat* that are about attachment as links in the resources for this episode, because, um, attachment styles themselves can be kind of hard to [00:09:00] explain in my opinion, but I think it's useful to try to understand them.

[00:09:07] The other type of attachment style that shows up a lot with people who have trauma histories is disorganized attachment. Disorganized attachment happens when the caregiver is, and I'm going to try to find who said this because I can't remember whose quote this was. If it was Janina Fisher or Dan Siegel, um, both of them are wonderful teachers about trauma and attachment.

[00:09:44] Um, but one of them said that disorganized attachment happens when the caregiver is scared, or scary. So the [00:10:00] child needs a secure base, a reliable, safe parent, at least one that they can turn to so that they know that they can go off and safely explore and they'll have someone to go back to who will be safe for them.

[00:10:16] When the caregiver is terrified themselves, then the child senses that the parent doesn't feel safe, so that gives the child the signal that they're not safe. And if the caregiver is scary, in other words, they scream at the child, or they do things that are really unpredictable, that, that scare the child, their behaviors incongruent, like they say, everything's fine when the child senses that the parent is really upset about something.

[00:11:00] That's scared or scary caregivers, and disorganized attachment develops from the quandary that the child has, they need their parent to be safe and secure base. But if their parent is not safe and secure either because they are scared or they are scary.

[00:11:24] Then what is the child to do? And that is when a lot of fragmentation happens because the child has to detach from the truth that the parent can be unsafe. In order to be able to biologically depend on the parent for survival, the child has to be able to attach with the parent. So part of them holds the knowledge of the, the terror of, of the [00:12:00] parents scared or scary presentation.

[00:12:03] And another part of them goes on with their normal life and stays connected with the parent. But the reason why I say that leads to fragmentation is because when the child needs to be able to connect with the parents, so they have to not know, not remember, or not be in touch with the traumatized parts of themselves.

[00:12:31] Then those parts are just kind of tucked away outside of the child's conscious awareness and they lead to the problems that you've been hearing me talk about on previous episodes like flashbacks, body memories, um, nightmares, emotional dysregulation. So that is [00:13:00] the attachment styles in a nutshell. I know this was far from comprehensive.

[00:13:06] I'm going to link to a couple of articles, I used as references to just help describe this as simply as possible and, uh, links to some books. I mentioned, um, Trauma and The Struggle to Open Up by Dr. Robert Muller is one. Also Sharon Martin LCSW has several books on codependency that relate to attachment, Nedra Tawwab's book Set Boundaries, Find Peace.

[00:13:44] Dr. Jonice Webb's books on childhood emotional neglect would fall into this topic. And I mentioned Janina Fisher's book in a previous episode, Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors, [00:14:00] as well as Lisa Ferentz's workbook, Letting Go of

Self-Destructive Behaviors. I could probably put these all down as resources for every episode, but I thought that they all have specific content that relates to attachment.

[00:14:14] So, I'm also going to link to all the episodes of Therapy Chat about attachment. So the resources for today's episode will be plentiful.

[00:14:27] Thank you so much for listening. Hope you enjoyed this episode. Please go to iTunes and leave a rating and review, if you do like the show, I'd love for you to let apple know that so that they can show it to more people.

[00:14:39] And thanks as always for listening, talk to you soon!