Effects of Insecure Attachment in Childhood on Adult Relationships

by Richard Brown

Your so insecure! What does that mean? How a people bond to each other is taught in early childhood and reinforced for the rest of their lives. In secure relationships partners exchange responsiveness and supportiveness. This builds confidence that the other will be responsive and supportive in times of need. This is how people with Secure Attachment behavior will bond with other people. Every one would like to be in a relationship with a secure individual, but a lot of us aren't and our partners aren't either.

Insecure attachment comes in two types of externalized behavior: Anxious Insecure Attachment and Avoidant Insecure Attachment. A person with Anxious Insecure Attachment will demonstrate hyper vigilance and hyper attentiveness. People with Avoidant Insecure Attachment demonstrate compulsive self-reliance, and negativity evasiveness. Disorganized Insecure Attachment is one or a combination of both, displayed at a very high degree. The behavior associated with Disorganized Insecure Attachment is influenced by variables other than childhood developmental attachment status.

I will be referring to mothers and fathers throughout this article. The mother, her, or maternal entity is referring to the primary care giver. The term father is referring to a co-habitating adult. I'm following these conventions of family structure for simplicity.

Maternal stress is associated with insecure attachment parenting styles, not the mother figure's childhood attachment status. Female insecurity adjustment is shown to correct itself more readily in choice of parenting style then in males. It can be inherited maternally but not by genetic means. This is possible through mate choice and learned stress management. (Fearson, pg. 3)

Insecure Attachment is effectively observed in tests like Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure(A.S.S.P,). Children are placed in an unfamiliar play room. Different behaviors are timed and evaluated, depending on the specifics of the study. Basic information is recorded such as; the time it takes them to leave their parental fugues side and start exploring, how long until they return to their parental figures immediate proximity, their behavior when the parental figure leaves, and the behavior immediately following their reunion.

Secure Attachment During Childhood

During the ASSP, children with secure attachment will show slight duress when they notice the mothers absence, and will soon go back to playing. When their mother returns they will engage her for a short time and then continue playing.

Secure Attachment is associated with Secure Style Parenting. The parent responsive to the child's needs and will slowly coach the child to full fill it's own needs. If the child hungry it will be feed soon, if the child is thirsty it can get a cup of juice from the fridge. The child's needs will be meet with out reproach and the child will be encouraged to do age appropriate tasks.
This balanced approach will be strongly reinforced throughout his or her life. They will ask for help when they need it, and be capable of doing things on their own. This is a formula for success for the rest of their lives.

These children will learn to trust and support others, balance displays of emotions, be independent, and develop many other positive attributes. These child will be set up for success by their parents.

**Avoidant**

**Avoidant Insecure Attachment During Childhood**

During the A.S.S.P., Children that are avoidant will be little affected by the absence of the parent if at all, and not engage the parent upon their return.

Avoidant behavior is strongly associated with what is called Avoidant Style Parenting. Avoidant Style Parenting is the suppression of negative assertion for needs. When the child begins an assertion of need, crying as an example, it is be suppressed by punitive measures such as verbal reproach. These children learn that their needs will not be fulfilled by others. Emotions are suppressed by punishment, so the child learns not to express them.

Insecure attachment behaviors are commonly reinforced by social cues. Images of the stoic male persona projected on to the boys. Girls will often receive comments like miss independent. The behavior of self-sufficiency in stressful childhood environments can be strong influences on the perpetuation of mild cases of avoidant insecure attachment. Sever avoidant insecurity is more strongly characterized by aggressive behavior patterns when the child is left unsupervised.

Boys and Girls do not follow similar development trends with Avoidant Insecure Attachment. Girls will internalize the insecurities developing low self-worth if not actively engaged in helping others, becoming ambivalent. Boys will externalize their insecurities; this behavior is commonly referred to as “acting out”, which is preceded and followed by withdrawal from others. This is highly evident in intimate relationships were the insecure avoidant person will need constant confirmation of relationship status through touch. The common behavior diversifies through maturation and the effects are usually diffused. (Davis pg. 2)

Avoidant Insecure Attachment as a child develops into the minimization of emotional attachments later in life. The child doesn't learn how to develop the trust that their needs will be meet. These children are prone to becoming compulsively self-reliant and emotionally restrained.

Avoidant Insecure Attachment has been linked to anti-social behavior in males, but the link is not consistent with the greater population of men categorized as such.

Avoidant Insecure Attachment can be corrected by higher responsiveness to the child's needs and the allowance of negative assertion of their needs.

**Anxious Insecure Attachment During Childhood**

**Anxious Insecure Attachment during childhood**

During the A.S.S.P., Children that are Anxious Insecure will show extreme duress when the parent is absent, and will cling, almost obsessively, when the parent returns.

Anxious Insecure Attachment is caused by increased assertion of need for an extended period of time before the need is met. An example would be: the child is hungry but needs to cry for an extended period of time before it is feed.

Through Anxious Style Parenting, the child learns to hyper display emotions to have them fulfilled. Anxious insecure children become extremely emotional because only exaggerated displays will get them what they need.

Anxious insecure attachments are also commonly reinforced. The higher tendency for personal disclosure coupled with high emotional engagement, are highly effective means of socializing.

Being responsive to the child's needs, and coaching them so they can effectively complete appropriate tasks; will help correct Anxious Insecure Attachment.
Disorganized Insecure Attachment during childhood

Disorganized attachment follows no regular patterns of behavior. During the A.S.S.P., it is the name that is given to behavior that is inconsistent with Secure Attachment, Anxious Insecure Attachment, and Avoidant Insecure Attachment.

Disorganized attachment is thought to be caused by inconsistencies in parenting style combined with abuse and neglect. The actions of the mother are inconsistent in the context of her response is to the child's needs. At times parents will allow the child to cry for a bit, and other times teaching them to fulfill their own needs. When this normal tendency is elevated to abuse and neglect, Disorganized Insecure Attachment develops. The behavior the child displays to attain its needs is often consistent.

Disorganized attachment is not maternally based. This is often where the father comes into the picture, does he reduce or cause stress. This will directly affect the degree of care the mother can provide, and will reflect how she responds to the child's needs.

Sometimes disorganized attachment develops independent of a father figure actions. A mother's inability to respond to their child's needs is associated with high levels of neglect when she was a child.

Neglect is not a parenting style. Any expression of anything; need or otherwise, or by what means they do this, causes extreme duress. The child's existence activates the parents poorly adapted defense mechanisms. These are typically highly abusive relationships. The child's attachment status is a small element comparatively. The effects do not dissipate quickly in male or female children.

Because there is no abusive neglectful parenting style, many psychologist argue against the existence of Disorganized Insecure Attachment. It is often coded as Avoidant Insecure Attachment in research studies. (Fearson)

Relationships

A study by Bruambaugh has been conducted on the personality adaptations by adult individuals with Insecure Attachment commonly make to attract mates. Insecure people are just as likely to be in a romantic relationship as secure people.

People that have Avoidant Insecure Attachment will use humor to avoid negativity. They will use casual touching and eye contact to develop interaction.

The avoidant insecurely attached people appear more nervous, and are hesitant to divulge personal information. This is not a reflection of their confidence or self-esteem, which is markedly elevated. This nervousness is a reaction to novel social involvement.

Sexual dissatisfaction is very common because of difficulty assessing the emotions of their mate, and their own. The default response to social stress is avoidance in people with Avoidant Insecure Attachment. They will often let problems continue to manifest without resolving them constructively.

Anxious insecure people maximize emotional engagement, readily divulge personal information, and represent themselves with duplicity (lying or exaggerating).

Anxious insecurely attached people will talk for longer periods of time presenting themselves as highly confident. This is not a reflection of their confidence or self-esteem which is markedly low, but a conscious adjustment to mask a weakness they recognize.

Dissatisfaction with the relationship occurs because of the exaggerated negative displays, broken trust because of the lying, and the persistent fear of abandonment.

Conclusion

Both types of insecure attachment will be hesitant to leave the parent's side when placed in the novel environment.
Maternal responsiveness and education in competence are effective in creating an environment that facilitates a more secure attachment for the child.

People learn and grow throughout life. Insecure attachment in childhood is very fluid in changing. All studies that found abusive parenting reported it. The vast majority of those children's insecure attachment issues dissipated over time with lowered stress environments.

Persistent learned insecure attachment behaviors continue to afflict many. Anxious insecurely attached people have a great sex life but the relationship is always rocky. The low identification with those emotionally involved with them, and the high degree of questioning (apparent from the constant need for confirmation) with Avoidant Insecure Attachment causes sexual dissatisfaction but a strong relationship.

Securely attached people will balance their insecurities. They will develop a healthy relationship though mutual support and responsiveness.

References


One area particularly affected is adult close relationships. Attachment theory offers a way to conceptualize how people interact in close relationships. In this study, the influence of CSA on adult male relationships was examined. Severely would be more likely to have an insecure attachment than other males. These CSA characteristics were measured by the Childhood Sexual Experiences Questionnaire and the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ). Although limitations to this study make it difficult to reject the null hypothesis and to make statements that these results reflect the population, findings generally confirm the stated hypotheses. How Secure Attachment Relationships Reduce the Effects of Stress in Children. Posted on Fri Aug 19, 2016. by Megan R. Gunnar, Ph.D. I've spent 40 years studying childhood attachments and how they affect the way children process stress and emotions. Here at CEHD’s Institute of Child Development, our research shows just how important secure attachments are to nurturing the ability to process childhood stress – and how this relationship between parental attachment and stress regulation is different in teens and adopted children. For children who had more insecure attachment relationships with the parent who took them to the doctor, this buffering...