

## The Need for Attachment

Is it okay to be dependent, to need someone emotionally? We like to believe that as adults we should be fully independent, that we shouldn't *need* to be in a relationship. The idea that dependency in a relationship is neurotic or unhealthy has been advanced by some misconceptions about codependency. Numerous studies have proven that this is not true. Even Pia Mellody, an internationally recognized authority on codependence, says,

“There are some needs that can be met only through interaction with another person, such as physical nurturing or emotional nurturing. But we must be taught that it is our responsibility to recognize those needs and ask someone appropriate to meet them. We in turn must learn to meet other's needs at appropriate times in proper circumstances, which is called interdependence.”

*Attachment* was first studied over fifty years ago by John Bowlby, a British psychologist and psychiatrist. In essence, Bowlby defined attachment as the need to be closely connected emotionally in secure relationships. These secure relationships provide a safe base of support from which children—and later, adults—can grow, develop, and become independently functioning adults. Bowlby explains:

“All of us, from cradle to grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figure(s).”

Attachment has been studied extensively, and this is a summary of some of the most important findings:

- Attachment is an emotionally based bond between child and parent—and between adults. Our brains are *hardwired* for attachments to others, and we need these survival-based connections for good physical and mental health.
- Children require safe, consistent physical and emotional closeness. These basic needs continue into adult life. Healthy attachments during childhood result in independent adults who need relationships with others.
- Our attachment patterns in childhood can predict our attachment patterns as adults. There are two major types, or strategies, of attachment:
  1. *Secure*: A safe haven based on reliable, accessible, responsive, and attentive caregivers (for children) or partners (for adults). When something bad or upsetting happens in the relationship, the securely attached individual can cope effectively with the negative emotions, knowing there is a safe connection to return to.
  2. *Insecure*: Often the result of childhood neglect, abandonment and/or abuse, the insecurely attached individual tends to be anxious or avoidant. People who are insecurely attached may be clingy, demanding, and complaining. Their anxiety results in excessive pursuing or smothering behavior. Other people who were insecurely attached as children may avoid close relationships due to the fears of abandonment.
- Loving, secure attachments protect us from stress, improve our immune system, and help us cope with life. Secure attachments promote independent functioning and personal empowerment.



Brené Brown is a leading voice in the study of connection, love, vulnerability, authenticity and shame. She says that:

**“A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all women, men, and children. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don’t function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.”**