

Developing a Healthy Attachment Style

Marti Wibbels, MS, LMHC

British psychologist Dr. John Bowlby first defined attachment, referring to it as a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.” In a world characterized by loneliness and disconnection, we can learn to develop deep, authentic relationships, steadily moving from debilitating to healthy attachment:

1. **Avoidant attachment:** with a distant or disengaged mother, a child internalizes the parent’s distance with an ongoing belief that his or her emotional, physical, or mental needs won’t be met. An avoidant adult can seem distant, disengaged, or preoccupied.
2. **Ambivalent attachment:** characterized by insecurity and high anxiety, this attachment style can result from inconsistent parenting that swings from neglect to attentively meeting a child’s needs. Adults with ambivalent attachment look for people to help them feel safe—but often trust people who aren’t safe at all.
3. **Disorganized attachment:** parental extremes initiate this attachment style. For example, a mother who is frightened, passive, or unresponsive can result in a child who is non-responsive, depressed, or even angry. An adult with disorganized attachment can experience a fragmented internal sense of self and contradictory interaction patterns with others (from *Core Healing from Trauma*, pages 174-178).
4. **Secure attachment:** with basic human needs met throughout infancy and early childhood, this person can connect with others, seeing life as safe and people as welcoming.

God has provided everything we need to experience security through His Son, but insecure attachment can blind us to His gifts, especially if we’re having difficulty trusting anyone (including God). Enhancing the brain’s remarkable neuroplasticity by making consistent positive choices, it’s possible to move from unhealthy attachment patterns into secure adult attachment with God and with others.

An Overview of Developmental Basics

Age/Stage	Healthy Development	If Development Was Disrupted <i>Then</i> , DO THE OPPOSITE NOW
Birth to two years	Learns to trust	<i>Like newborn babes... crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation (1 Peter 2:2-3).</i>
Ages 2 and 3	Learns by imitating others	<i>Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us...(Eph. 5:1-2).</i>
Ages 4 to 6 Ages 6 to 12	Learns through identification Learns through education	<i>...Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge... (1 Timothy 6:17a).</i>
Ages 12 to 18 Ages 18 to 24	Learns via peer pressure Learns via role experimentation	<i>Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12).</i>
Adulthood stages: 24 to 34 34 to 60 60 to 75 75 until death	Continuing to grow and learn: the Lord's eye is upon those who fear Him... (see Psalm 18:18, 20)	<i>His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence (2 Peter 1:3).</i>

For additional ideas on strengthening healthy attachment, you can work through *Core Healing from Trauma*, a biblical counseling workbook for individuals or groups, available on Amazon (<https://cutt.ly/occdejH>). You can also watch “Strengthening Your Core,” a 12 - video series on YouTube at <https://cutt.ly/Or6EiiW> or subscribe to my blog at <https://corehealingfromtrauma.com/>.