

ATTACHMENT STYLES IN MARRIAGE



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Outline

What is attachment?

How does attachment have an impact on me?

How do our attachment styles as a couple impact our interactions?

What is Attachment?

"After fourteen years, though, a huge change took place when we discovered the unseen forces that determined how we loved. We realized our lessons in love didn't start in our marriage. They started in infancy and lasted all the years we lived with our parents. Our experiences growing up, good and bad, left a lasting imprint in our souls that determined our beliefs and expectations about how to give and receive love."



How We Love: Discover Your Love Style, Enhance Your Marriage, Expanded Edition (Yelkovich's, 2017)

Design of Attachment System

- Protest emotional disconnection.
- Get spouse to see that you are disconnected.
- Get spouse to respond in a caring manner.



Example in Scripture

Psalm 38: 8-10 "I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me."

Individual Impact

Psalm 139:1-2 "O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off."

Secure Base

Psalm 18:2 "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."



Self-Reflection

"Can you recall being comforted as a child after a time of emotional distress?"

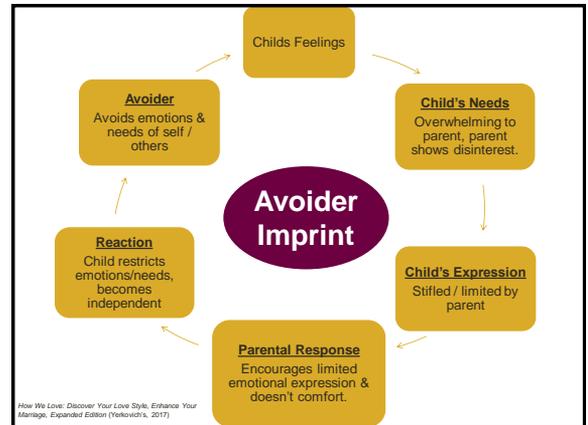
"What happened when you cried?"

How We Love: Discover Your Love Style, Enhance Your Marriage, Expanded Edition (Yerkeovich, 2017)

Components of Comfort



How We Love: Discover Your Love Style, Enhance Your Marriage, Expanded Edition (Yerkeovich, 2017)



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Avoider Characteristics

- Generally private and self-sufficient.
- Usually "fine" and express few emotions.
- Tend to resist giving / receiving affection.
- Generally don't ask others to commit or invest emotionally.
- Tend to be task-oriented high achiever.
- Prefer doing over emotional connection.
- May feel resentful toward spouse wanting something more.
- Don't think about own feelings / needs very often.

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Couple Interactions

Proverbs 30:18-19 "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid (young woman)."

A.R.E. You There For Me?

Accessibility

- Can I reach you?
- Will you open up to me?

Responsiveness

- Can I rely on you to respond to me emotionally?

Engagement

- Do I know you will value me and stay close?

Credited For Connection (Johnson And Sanderfer, 2016)

Couple Role Play

Reflection Exercise

1. Read through the Attachment Styles in Appendix.
2. Identify the attachment style which most closely represents the way you respond or behave in your marriage.
 - It may be helpful to highlight specifics characteristics and think of examples.
3. Schedule some time to sit down with your spouse and talk through your respective attachment styles.
4. Focus on seeking understanding and identifying your "couple cycle" created when you seek to emotionally connect based on your attachment style, but end up feeling disconnected.

Credited For Connection (Johnson And Sanderfer, 2016)

Couple Cycle – Part 1

When _____, I do not feel safely connected to you.
(e.g., when we fight about my parenting, when we don't seem to speak for days, when you say you are too tired for sex and we have not made love for a few weeks)

I tend to _____ . I behave this way to try to cope with difficult feelings and find a way to change our interaction. *(e.g., complain, nag, ignore you, run, move away)*

I do it in the hope that _____. *(e.g., we will avoid more conflict or I will persuade you to respond to me more)*

As this pattern keeps going, I feel _____. *(e.g., frustration, anger, numbness, emptiness, or confusion)*

Credited For Connection (Johnson And Sanderfer, 2016)

Couple Cycle – Part 2

What I then say to myself about our relationship is _____. *(e.g. You do not care about us, I am not important to you, I can never please you.)*

My understanding of the cycle that makes it harder for us to safely connect is that when I move in the way I described above, you seem to then _____. *(e.g. shut down, push me to respond)*

The more I _____, the more you _____ . We are then both trapped in pain and isolation.

Maybe we can warn each other when this cycle begins. We can call it _____.

Credited For Connection (Johnson And Sanderfer, 2016)

Helpful Questions / Thoughts

Name two concrete and specific things a safe, accessible, responsive, and engaged spouse would do on a typical day and how those things would make you feel.

Think about what you most need in order to feel secure and loved by your spouse and share with him/her. (e.g., affirmed, understood, blessed, safe, touched, chosen, included)

Seek to not personalize your spouse's moves in your couple cycle.

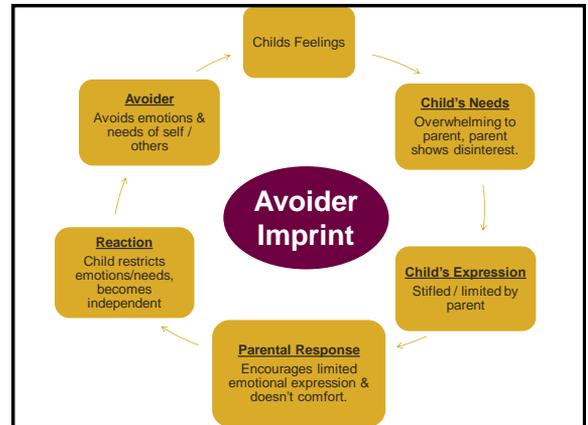
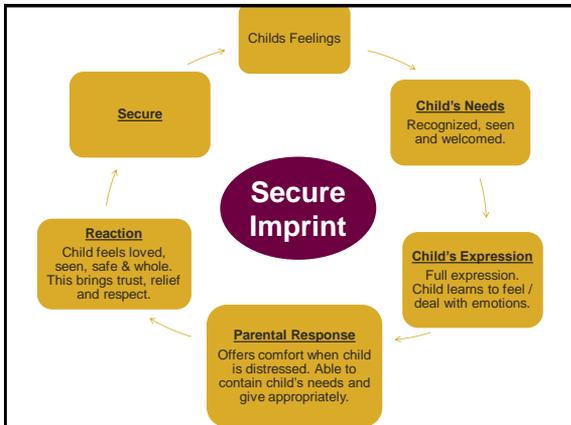
Continue to practice the skill of self-reflection to learn about your own emotional experiences.

Recommended Resources

1. <https://howwelove.com/love-style-quiz/>
 - Take free quiz to determine love style.
2. Yerkovich, M., & Yerkovich, K. (2017). How We Love: Discover Your Love Style, Enhance Your Marriage, Expanded Edition.
3. Johnson, S., & Sanderfer, K., (2016). Created for Connection: The "Hold Me Tight" Guide for Christian Couples.

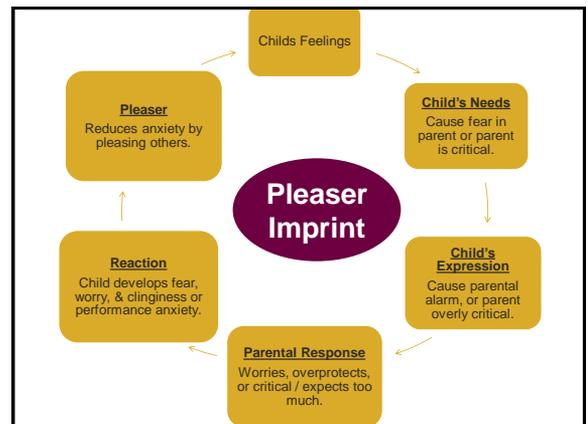
Appendix: Attachment Styles

Information in this section taken from "How We Love: Discover Your Love Style, Enhance Your Marriage" (Milan & Kay Yerkovich, Revised Edition, 2017)



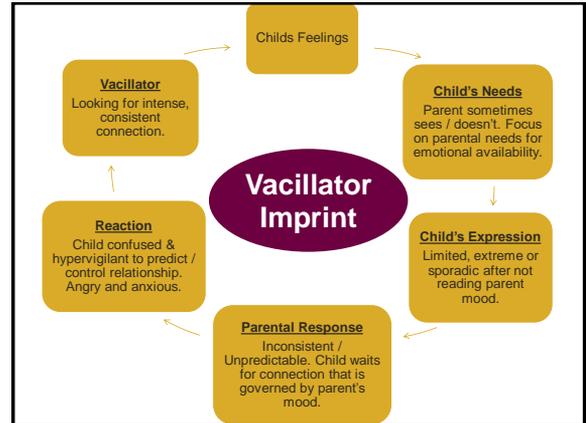
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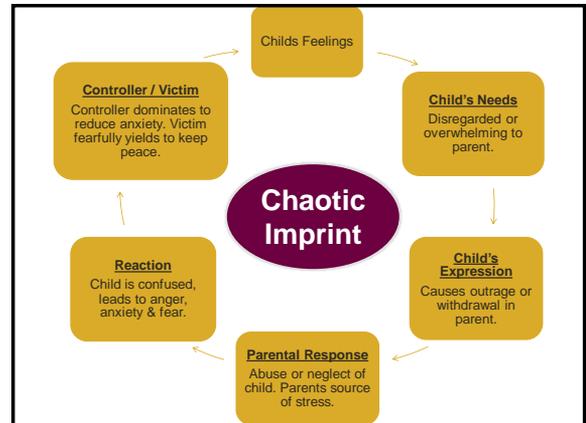
Pleaser Characteristics

- "The good kid."
- Wrestle with fear of rejection or criticism.
- Seek deeper connection through meeting others' needs.
- Tend to minimize own needs.
- May struggle to tolerate emotional distance.
- Prefer making up quickly and moving on after conflict.
- Can be very jealous but rarely show it.
- Difficult time saying no.
- Generally don't feel angry or seek to quickly stop anger.
- May feel like a doormat, become resentful.



Vacillator Characteristics

- Especially sensitive and easily feel disappointed, rejected or unwanted.
- Desire deep, passionate connection with spouse that is rarely achieved.
- Pattern of idealizing others early in relationship.
- Feel betrayed / abandoned when others are not emotionally available.
- High level of emotional distress present in relationships.
- Others say they feel like they are walking on egg shells around me.
- Feel angry rather than sad when others disappoint.



Controllers Characteristics

- Experienced considerable stress and intense anger from parents.
- Used to chaotic home life.
- Protection is achieved through aggression.
- Ignores past and stays busy in the present.
- Belief that spouse couldn't survive without me.
- Relationship problems are usually spouse's fault.
- Belief that spouse purposefully makes you mad.
- Belief that things would go smoothly if spouse listened and did the things asked of them.
- Rarely feel any emotion except anger.

Victims Characteristics

- Experienced considerable stress and intense anger from parents.
- Used to chaotic home life.
- Protection is achieved through passivity.
- Don't like to consider alternative if not quiet and submissive.
- Blame self for relationship problems.
- Occasionally scared of spouse.
- Feels resentful, angry, trapped, and hopeless.
- No one really knows me or relationship difficulty.
- Spouse is nicer to friends than me.

Attachment Style Continuum

Mild – few characteristics

Strong – nearly all characteristics



Remember: The degree to which you or your spouse can relate to specific attachment style characteristics is on a continuum. It is important to identify specific behaviors you relate with and move towards growth in that particular area.