

UNDERSTANDING ANXIOUS- PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT

with Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.



WELCOME



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THIS WEBINAR WILL EXPLORE:

- ▶ What is Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment ?
- ▶ How does this attachment pattern develop?
- ▶ What impact does this attachment pattern have on relationships (who you choose and how you behave)?
- ▶ Techniques to break free from negative cycles, develop more relationship security, and achieve closer, more fulfilling relationships
- ▶ Tools to calm down and relieve anxiety that arises in relationships



ATTACHMENT THEORY?



How do I get these
people to take
care of me?

SECURE vs ANXIOUS AMBIVALENT ATTACHMENT

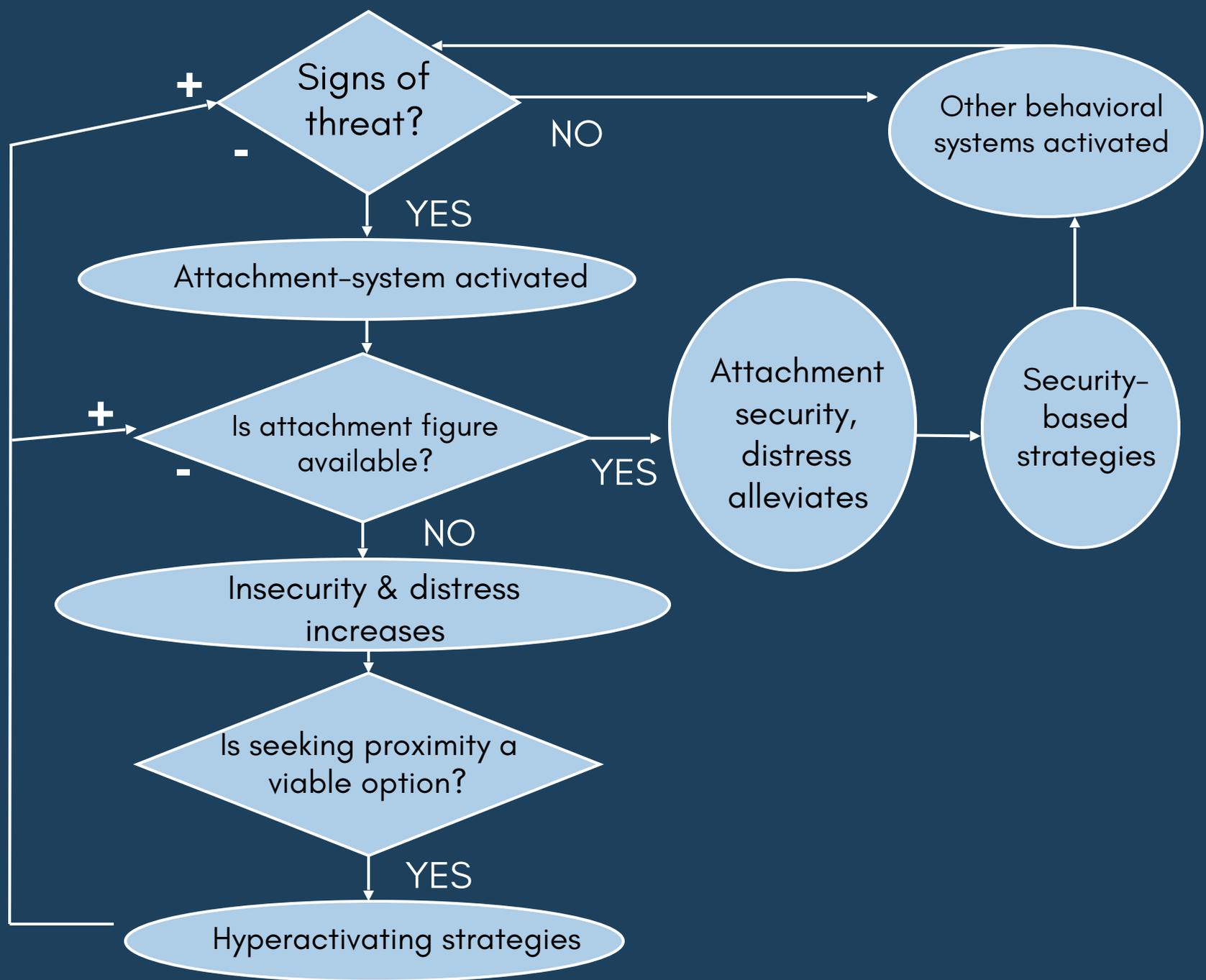
ATTACHMENT STYLE

- ▷ Secure
- ▷ Insecure - anxious/ambivalent



PARENTAL INTERACTIVE PATTERN

- ▷ Emotionally available, perceptive, responsive (Safe, seen, soothed)
- ▷ Inconsistently available, perceptive, responsive, and intrusive
- ▷ Child feels confused and uncertain and acts clingy or desperate
- ▷ Learns that the best way to get needs met is to cling to their attachment figure - "hyper-attached"



IMPORTANCE OF MAKING SENSE OF YOUR LIFE

- ▷ **EARLY EXPERIENCES** profoundly shape who we are.
- ▷ **BECOME A LENS** through which we see the world
- ▷ **WITHOUT THIS UNDERSTANDING** of how our past affects the present, we often unconsciously *recreate*, *repeat*, or *react to* our early environment.



HOW DOES PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT MANIFEST IN ADULTHOOD?



VIDEOS

Anxious Preoccupied Attachment

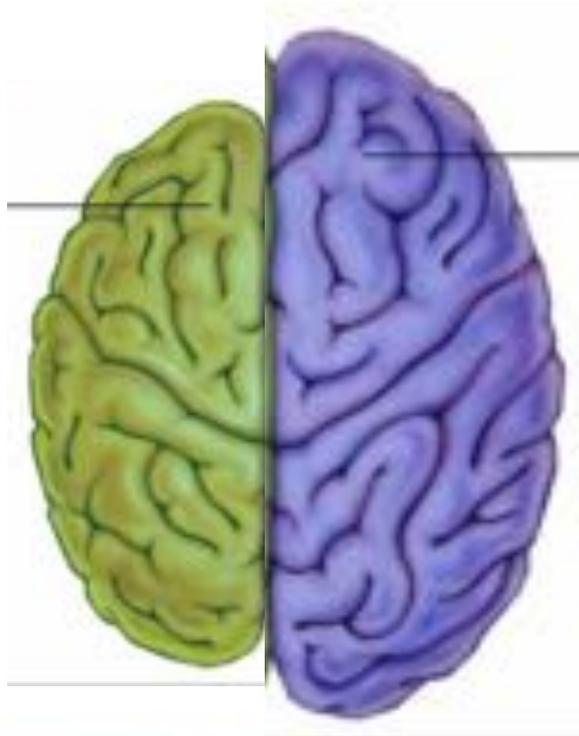


Emotional Hunger vs. Love



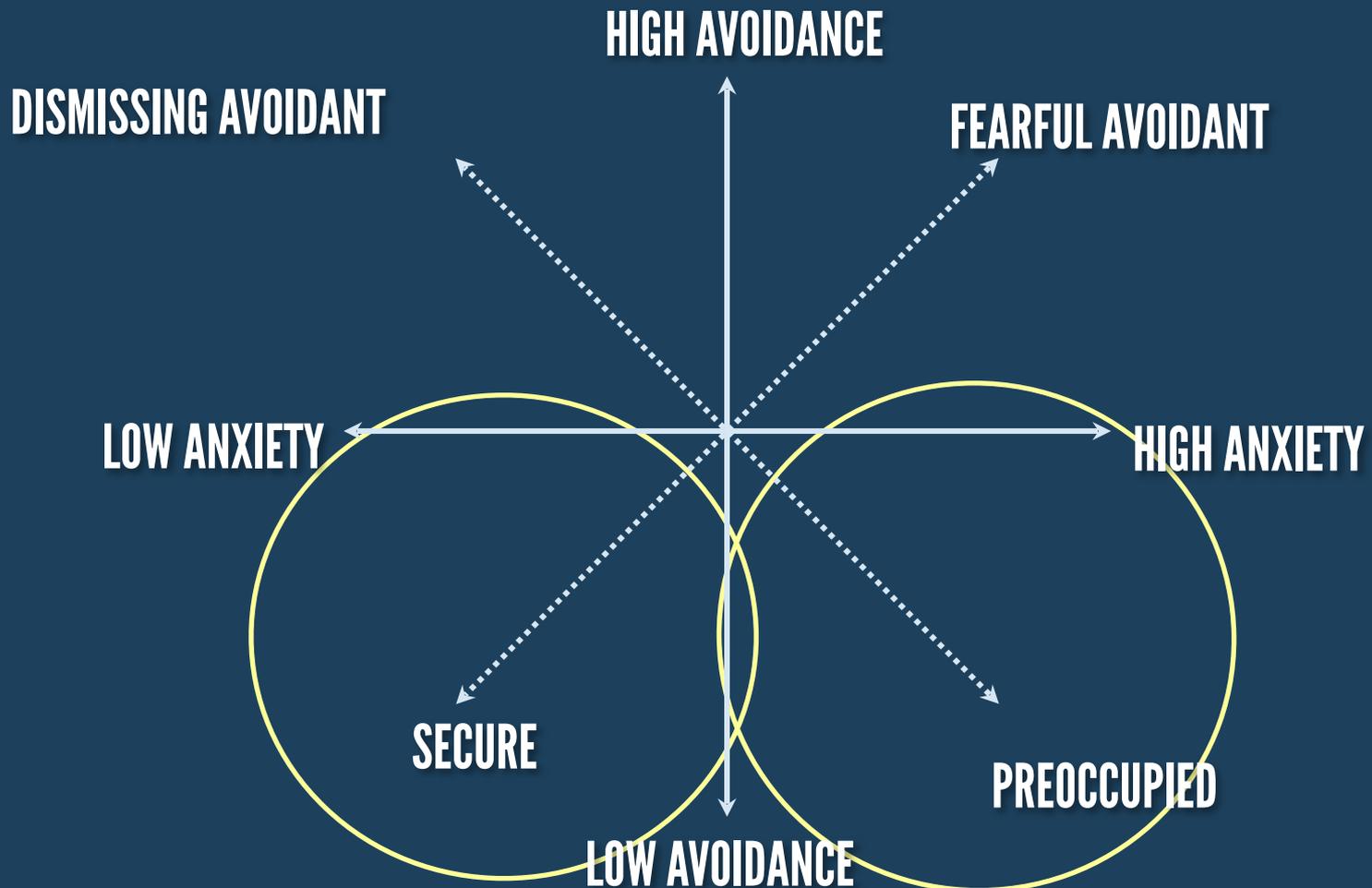
Anxious Ambivalent Attachment

- Right side of the brain becomes more dominant
- This can lead to overwhelming floods of emotion
- Narratives tend to have a lot of feeling and memories, but lack logical or linear sense



ADULT ATTACHMENT STYLES:

REGIONS IN A 2-DIMENSIONAL SPACE

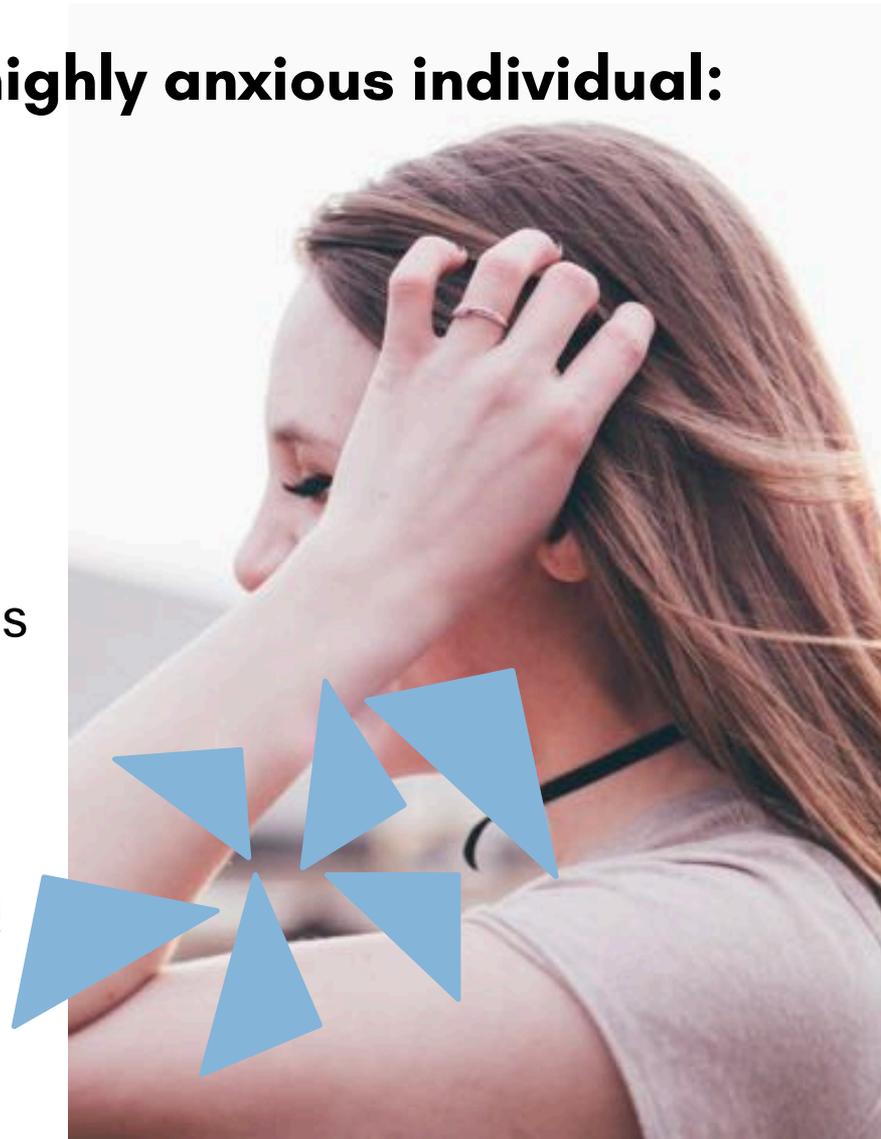


When Attachment Patterns Activate

When stressful event occurs, the highly anxious individual:

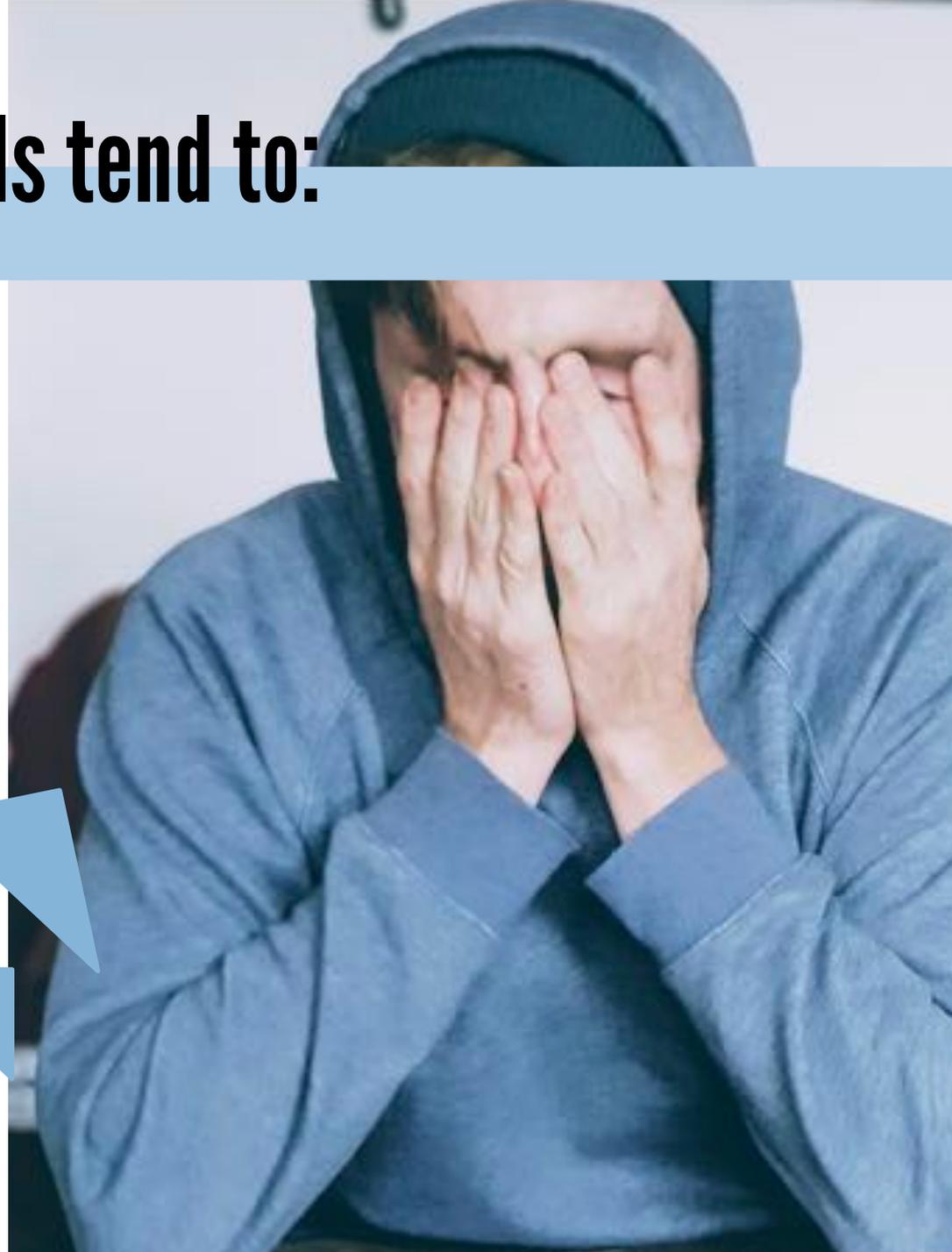
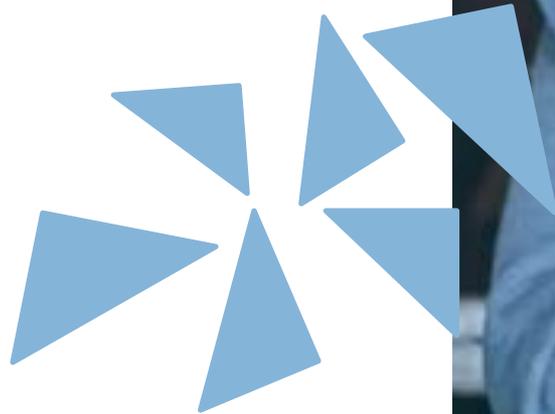
- Is keenly aware they're upset
- Wants immediate assistance
- Feels motivated to reduce distress by increasing proximity
- Uses emotion-focused/hyperactivating coping strategies
- Ruminates on worse-case outcomes
- Diverts their attention away from how to resolve the stressor

KEEPS ATTACHMENT STYLE ACTIVATED!



Preoccupied individuals tend to:

- Harbor negative self-views
- Question their worth
- Use emotion-focused/
hyperactivating coping
strategies when distressed
- Seek security from others



In relationships Preoccupied Individuals tend to:

- Select unavailable or inconsistent partners (reinforces insecurity)
- Hold guarded but hopeful views of partners
- Heavily invest in relationships (yearn to get closer to feel more secure)
- Seek obsessive proximity, support, and reassurance
- Perceive partner's intentions, motives, and actions in less benevolent terms
- Underestimate the care/support that partners have provided
- Worry about losing their partners
- Remain vigilant to signs their partners might be pulling away
- Act in ways that sometimes smother or drive their partners away



Anxious-preoccupied:

"I want to be emotionally intimate with people, but they don't want to be with me!"



Self-Report Attachment Measure

(Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998)

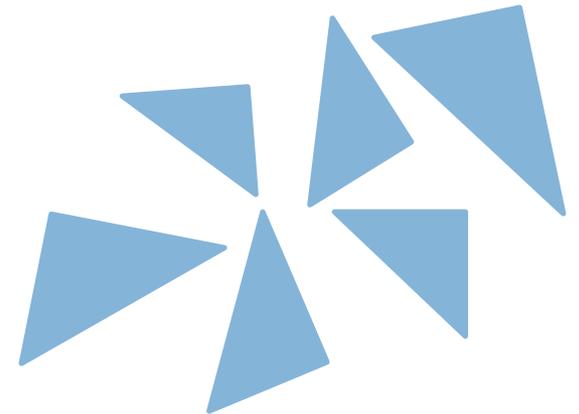
Anxiety (18 items, $\alpha > .90$)

1. I don't often worry about being rejected or abandoned. (reverse-scored)
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by a partner.
3. I get frustrated if a relationship partner is not available when needed.
4. I resent it when a partner spends time away from me.

Examples of Preoccupied Attachment in Relationships

From The Happiness Clinic

- Overthinking about why someone didn't call or text you.
- Wondering if you did something wrong or if they're mad.
- Catastrophic thinking such as imagining the worst-case scenario.
- Fantasizing about how you want or don't want the relationship to be.
- Fear that the other person doesn't like you or that you're lacking in some way.
- General preoccupation with your partner and how they aren't living up to your expectations.
- Impulses to fix things or prove yourself to the other person.
- Feelings of extreme loneliness, emptiness, neediness, clinginess or despair.
- Extreme emotional reactivity.
- Questioning whether you're imagining things or overreacting when your partner isn't available in the way you would like them to be.
- Feeling stuck in anxiety, anger, or resentment.
- Fear of abandonment.

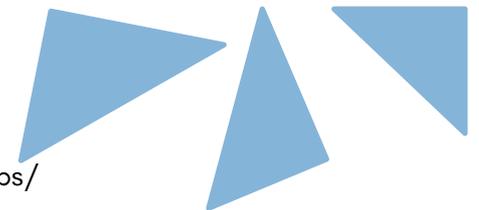


Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment in Relationships

From The School of Life



An Anxiously attached person in a relationship will have the characteristic feeling of not being properly appreciated and loved. They would – they tell themselves – like so much more closeness, tenderness, touch and sex – and are convinced that such a union could be possible. The person they are with, however, seems to them humiliatingly and hurtfully detached. They never seem to want them with as much intensity as they offer them. They are hugely saddened by their coldness and distance and gradually fall into moods of self-loathing and rejection, feeling unappreciated and misunderstood, as well as vengeful and resentful. For a long time, they might keep quiet about their frustrations until eventually desperation erupts. Even if it is a very inappropriate moment (perhaps they and their partner are exhausted and it's past midnight), they won't be able not to insist on addressing the issues right now. Predictably, these sort of fights go very wrong. The anxious lover loses their calm, they exaggerate and drive their points home with such viciousness that they leave their partner convinced that they are mad and mean.



ATTACHMENT AND CAREGIVING

Studies have shown that attachment anxiety and avoidance are related to:

- ▷ Deficits in caring for relationship partners
- ▷ Engaging in altruistic behavior

(e.g., Kuncze & Shaver, 1994; Gillath et al., 2005).

ANXIOUS PEOPLE TEND TO BE:

self-focused when engaged in supposedly caring/altruistic actions, leading to intrusiveness, poor assessment of others' actual needs, and personal distress



Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment and Sexuality

- *An anxious-insecure attachment style is characterized by an increase in anxiety and negative emotional expression.*
- *Those with insecure attachment styles are more likely to engage in casual sex and promiscuity, and often experience low levels of commitment and intimacy (Dempster, et al., 2015).*
- *Individuals with an insecure-anxious attachment have difficulties expressing themselves in a sexually assertive manner.*



VIDEO

Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment



ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT AND PARENTING

- An anxious attachment score in parents showed a positive relationship with parenting stress, hostile parenting attitude, and psychopathology, but a negative association with an affectionate parenting attitude.
- Children of parents reporting higher attachment anxiety self-reported greater positive and negative emotion, as well as greater use of emotion regulation strategies.
- These children also demonstrated lower physiological emotion regulation at follow-up.

Sources: <https://www.jkacap.org/journal/view.html?doi=10.5765/jkacap.180014>
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-018-1241-y>



Psychological Defenses



- Meeting someone who's attuned and responsive can be challenging as it stirs up old pain
- Being loved by someone threatens one's defenses.
- Adaptations to our early environment that aren't adaptive in our adult lives
- Long-held habits that allow us to feel safe, self-focused or self-contained

Critical Inner Voice

The language of our defenses

The critical inner voice is a well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward ourselves and others.

The nagging “voices” that make up this internalized dialogue are at the root of much of our self-destructive and maladaptive behavior.

The critical inner voice is not an auditory hallucination; it is experienced as thoughts within your head.

This stream of destructive thoughts forms an anti-self that discourages individuals from acting in their best interest.



Critical Inner Voice and Preoccupied Attachment

He doesn't really love you.

You need to make them happy.

You need to keep them interested.

They're going to leave you.

You need them to reassure you.

You're unloveable.

You need to get their attention/ approval.

STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP MORE SECURE ATTACHMENTS



- **Identify your pattern**
- **Form a coherent narrative**
- **Work on your pattern in therapy**
 - Find a therapist with attachment expertise
- **Develop earned security in a relationship**
 - Engage with secure partners
 - Practice tools to build your own inner security
 - If you're not with someone secure, go to couples' therapy

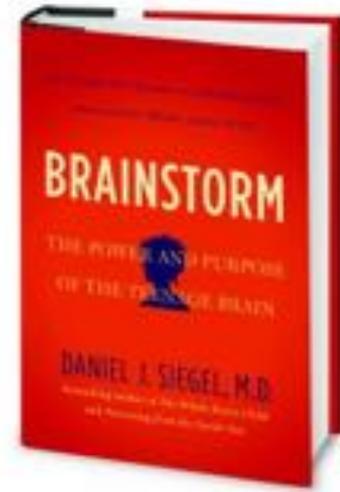
From: "https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_stop_attachment_insecurity_from_ruining_your_love_life"

1. IDENTIFY YOUR PATTERN



QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION

The following questions are designed for self-reflection, guiding you to think about your early life experiences. These questions were adapted from Dr. Dan Siegel's book *Brainstorm*. In your journal, write responses to each of the following questions. Your responses can be as long or as short as you like.



FAMILY BACKGROUND

Who was in your family? Include significant adults, siblings, etc.

What was it like growing up in your family?

What was your parents' philosophy about raising children?

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTACHMENT

Was there anyone in your life, other than your parents, who served as a parental figure or to whom you felt attached? Please state a few words to reflect your relationship with those individuals as well.

What were the major conflicts in your family? Did you have conflict with anyone?

Was there anyone you could turn to or any place you could go to help you feel comforted during difficult times?

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Did you ever experience a long separation from your parents in childhood? What was that like for you?

How were you disciplined as a child?

Have you ever felt threatened by your parents?

Have you ever felt rejected by your parents?

LOOKING BACK ON YOUR EARLY RELATIONSHIPS

Choose five adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother or mother-like figure. Try to think back as far as you can remember to your early childhood.

Now, try to think of a memory or an incident that would illustrate each of the words you chose to describe the relationship. Write these memories or incidents down.

ADJECTIVE 1:

MEMORY :

ADJECTIVE 2:

MEMORY :

ADJECTIVE 3:

MEMORY :

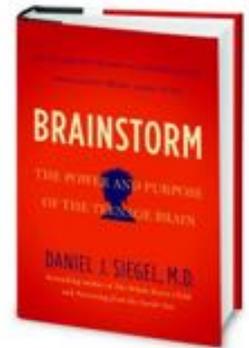
ADJECTIVE 4:

MEMORY :



Reflect on Your Attachment Models

- Look over your responses to the “Questions for Self-Reflection” and “Look Back on Your Early Relationships” exercises. As you read through your responses, think about the attachment model or models you have experienced in your life. Were they secure, avoidant, ambivalent, and/or disorganized? Remember, many of us have experienced more than one of these attachment models.
- Keep in mind that, as Dr. Dan Siegel writes in *Brainstorm*, “Your attachment model is a summary of how you’ve adapted to the relationships you’ve had with the important people in your life. It’s not however, a sign of some problems to have inside you – it’s merely a reflection of a learned response to real-life events, to your actual relationship in your early days.”
- We invite you to reflect on your attachment models in your journal. Consider how your early relationships and the attachment models you developed in response shape how you connect with others today.



2. FORM A COHERENT NARRATIVE



**FEEL THE FULL PAIN OF YOUR
CHILDHOOD AND MAKE SENSE OF IT.**



FORMING A STORY:

The Benefits of Narrative

~ James Pennebaker & Janel Seagal, Journal of Clinical Psychology, 1999

"...writing serves the function of organizing complex emotional experiences."

"Forming a story about one's experiences in life is associated with improved physical and mental health across a variety of populations."

When we create a narrative of who we are, we link past and present so we can become the active author of a possible future, too.

- Dr. Dan Siegel



TIPS FOR WRITING A COHERENT NARRATIVE

- ▷ Write as an adult.
- ▷ **Write rationally.**
- ▷ Write autobiographically.
- ▷ Write intuitively.
- ▷ Write with feeling.
- ▷ Write about how the past influences your present.
- ▷ Write with balance.
- ▷ Write with self-compassion.



MINDFULNESS

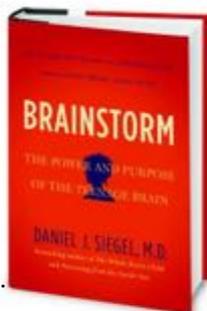
Mindfulness helps integrate the brain for all attachment patterns.



PRACTICE INTEGRATING YOUR BRAIN

PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT:

- Cultivate the ability to name your internal emotional states (“name it to tame it”). Simply describe what you feel, you don’t need to explain it.
- Write in a journal. Use your left hemispheres drive to tell a logical, linear, language-based story.
- Pay attention to when your attachments system goes into overdrive. Focus on keeping an internal state of calm at these times.

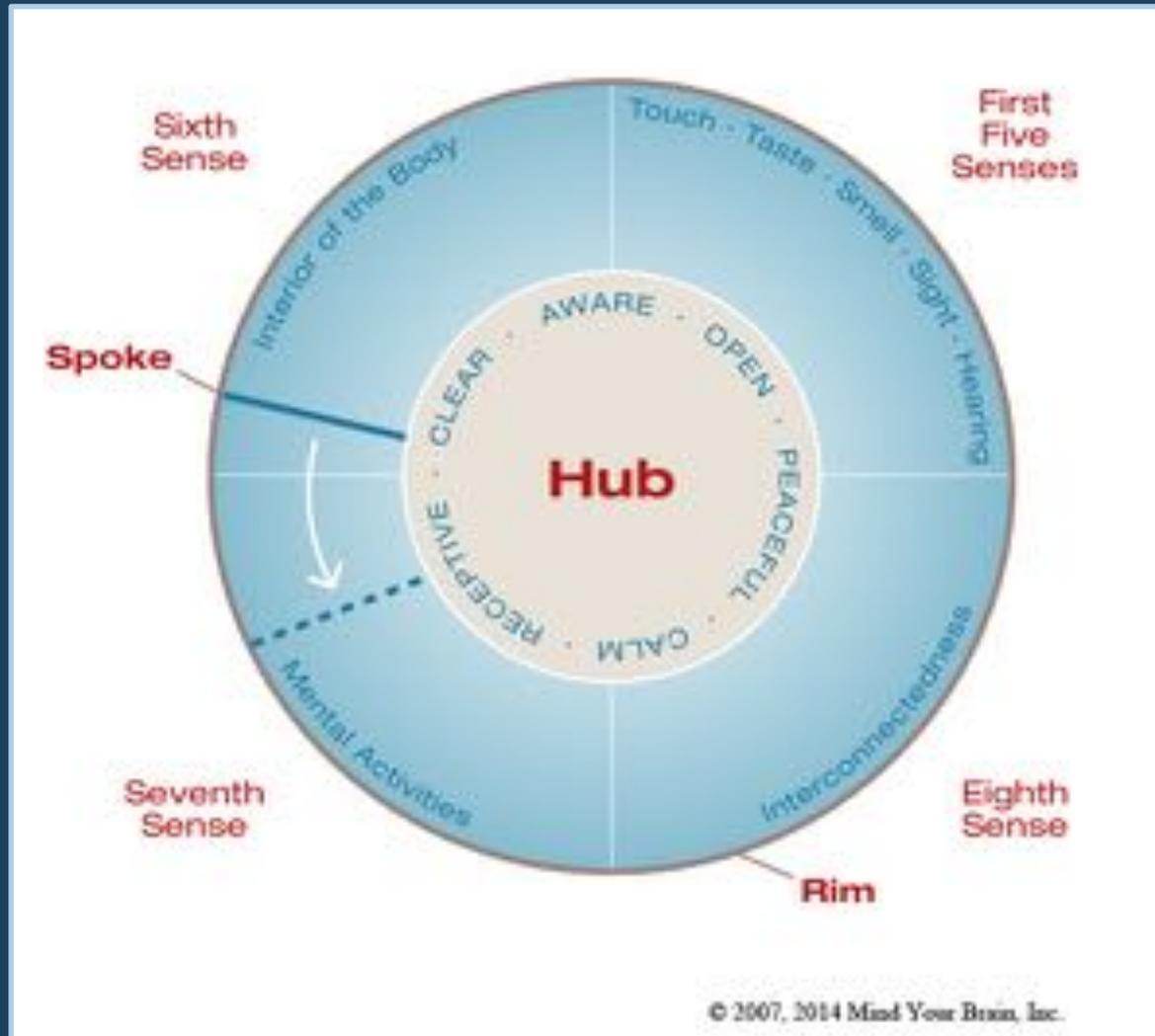


TOOLKIT

A row of sharpened pencils is shown at the bottom of the slide. Most are dark-colored, but one red pencil stands out prominently in the center. The pencils are arranged in a slightly curved line, and their tips are sharp and pointed upwards.

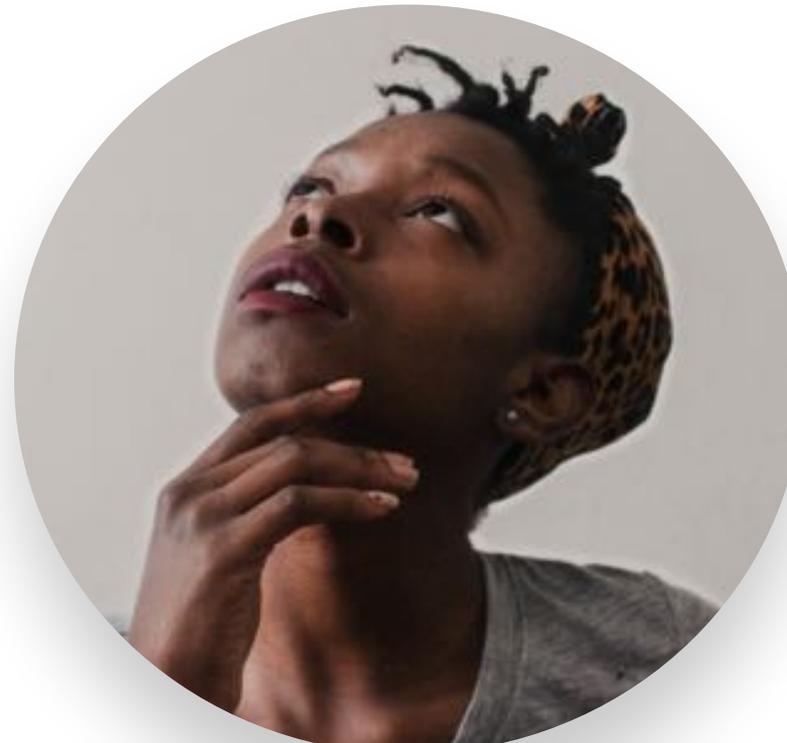
- Name It to Tame It
- Wheel of Awareness
- RAIN Approach
- Balancing the Mind
- Strengthen Your Internal Observer

WHEEL OF AWARENESS



THE RAIN APPROACH

- Recognize
- Accept/Acknowledge/Allow
- Investigate
- Non-Identification



IDENTIFYING TRAUMAS

List some emotional or physical traumas or traumatic events that have happened in your life. These do not have to be “Big T” traumas. A trauma can be any significant, distressing event or incident that shaped you as a child – things that made you feel bad, scared, ashamed, etc.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

THINK ABOUT A RECENT TIME THAT YOU GOT TRIGGERED...

How did you feel at the time?

What event or feeling in your childhood do you think led you to feel triggered in the recent situation?

Write a story that makes sense out of why you felt triggered.



CHOOSE YOUR WORDS

Choose from the descriptive list given below and pick the word that best describes the deeper emotion that comes up when you get triggered emotionally. This is often some kind of fear about yourself or how others feel about you. It may be some kind of anguish or hurt.



Lonely

Dismissed and Unimportant

Frustrated and Helpless

On Guard and Uncomfortable

Scared

Hurt

Hopeless

Helpless

Intimidated

Threatened

Panicked

Rejected

Like I Don't Matter

Ignored

Inadequate

Shut Out and Alone

Confused and Lost

Embarrassed

Ashamed

Blank

Afraid

Shocked

Sad

Forlorn

Disappointed

Isolated

Let Down

Numb

Humiliated

Overwhelmed

Small or Insignificant

Unwanted

Vulnerable

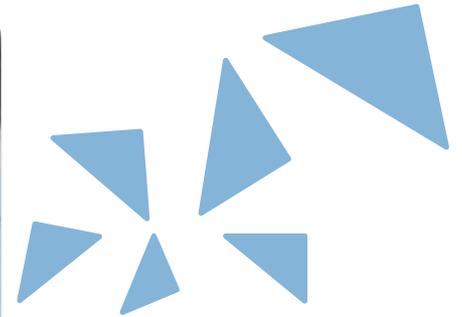
Worried

3. WORK ON YOUR PATTERN IN THERAPY



DEVELOP SECURITY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

- Psychotherapy is an excellent vehicle to develop an earned secure attachment.
- Find a therapist that resonates with you and who is knowledgeable about attachment. Stay in therapy for two to five years.



Clinical Implications of Attachment Research

- A) Preoccupied patients are more likely to seek treatment, because they have a negative model of themselves but a positive model of others.

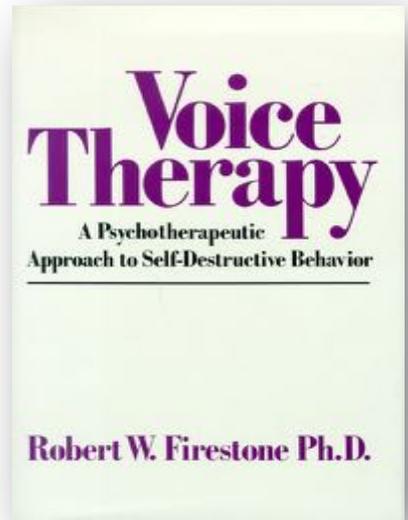
- B) Even though preoccupied patients may appear to be working very hard in treatment such work may not allow for shifts in attachment patterns.

IMPLICATION OF ATTACHMENT THEORY FOR TREATMENT

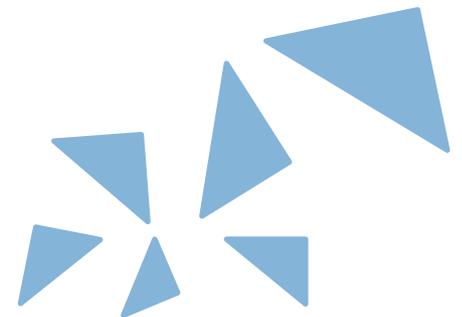
- ▶ **BEHAVIORAL AND FAMILY SYSTEMS THERAPIES** focus on making unconscious memories conscious and available for inspection.
- ▶ **COGNITIVE THERAPIES** focus on changing the stories we tell ourselves about the way families operate.
- ▶ **PSYCHODYNAMIC THERAPIES** focus on resolution of old memories and traumas.
- ▶ **MEDITATIVE THERAPIES** teach techniques to attain distance from distressing life events in order to make sense of them



Voice Therapy



1. Formulating the problem
2. Verbalizing the voice and releasing affect
3. Developing insight about the source of the voice
4. Answering back to the voice
5. Developing insight about how voices are influencing behaviors
6. Planning corrective suggestions for changing behavior



Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples

In three-year follow-up of couples who received EFT, results demonstrated improvements in dyadic adjustment, trust, and forgiveness, as well as decreases in the severity of the attachment injury.



SELF-COMPASSION

“Being touched by and not avoiding your suffering”

“

From Kristin Neff:

Self-compassion is not based on self-evaluation. It is not a way of judging ourselves positively; it is a way of relating to ourselves kindly.

Three Elements:

1. Self-kindness Vs. Self-judgment
2. Mindfulness Vs. Over-identification with thoughts
3. Common humanity Vs. Isolation



INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGY

Curious



Open



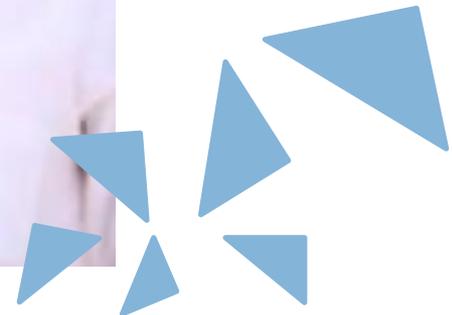
Accepting

Loving

Emotionally Focused Therapy

Les Greenberg Pursuer/ Distancer

Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment = Pursuer



Emotions and Needs

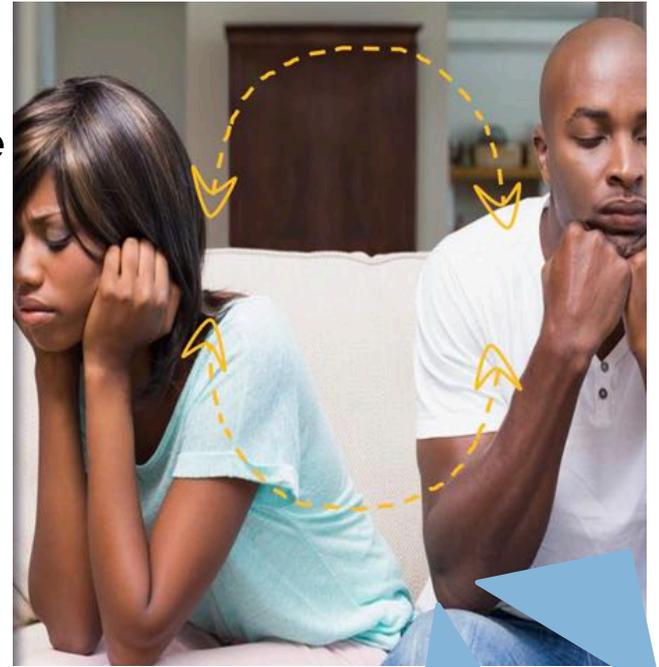
A. Frustrating Patterns	B. Secondary Feelings	C. Reactive Patterns	D. Primary Emotion* (Fear/Shame/ Sadness/Anger)	E. Needs Global/ Specific
When you...	I feel...	And react by...	This obscures my...	What I really want is...
Are late	Angry	Criticizing	Anxiety and feeling rejected	To feel important to you/ You to call

Fill in the following sentences with your emotions and needs.

- When you...
- I feel...
- And react by... _____
- This obscures my..._____
- What I really want (generally) is...
- What I really want (specifically) is...

Perpetuating Cycles

- Engage in pursuing and demanding behaviors that push or provoke the other person to withdraw or withhold (playing the other half of old, familiar dynamics)
- Their relationships start to look more and more like those of their past
- Reinforces their working model, confirming what they already believe about themselves, love, and relationships
- Blame the cycle, not each other



4. DEVELOP EARNED SECURITY IN A RELATIONSHIP

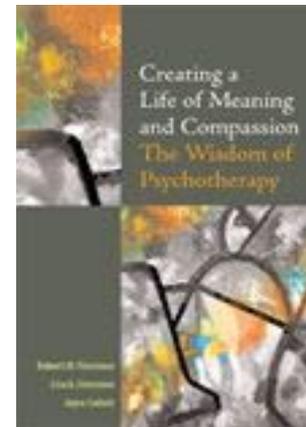
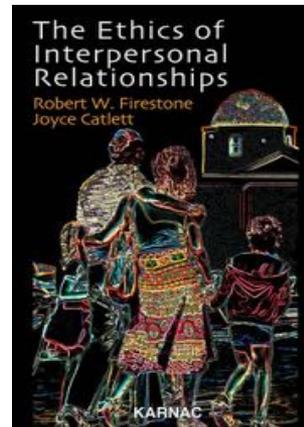
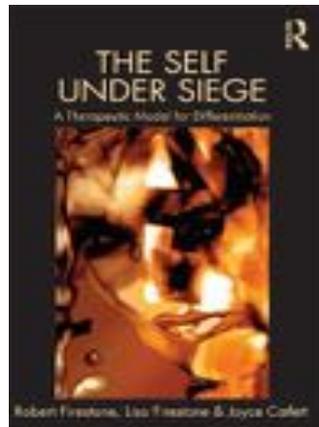
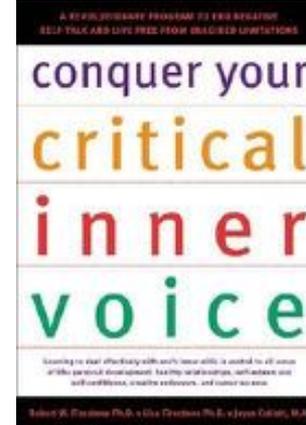
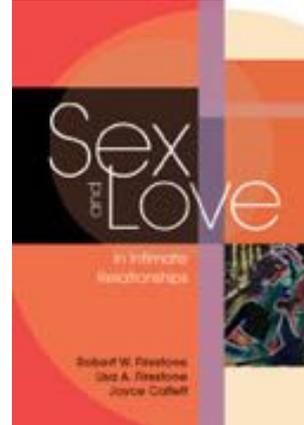
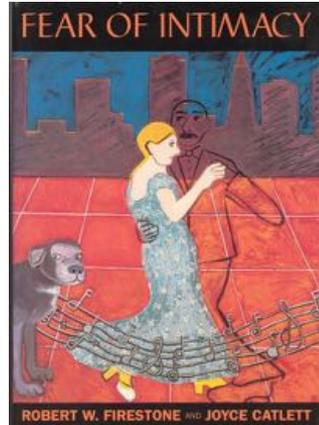


CHALLENGING PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS

- Create a toolkit to calm yourself down when activated (take a walk, breathe)
- Identify the critical inner voice, driving you to act.
- Remind yourself that feelings are not facts.
- Treat yourself with compassion.
- Resist the temptation to seek reassurance from your partner.
- Notice how much you talk at someone versus connect with them.
- Learn to let go of relationships that aren't meeting your needs.



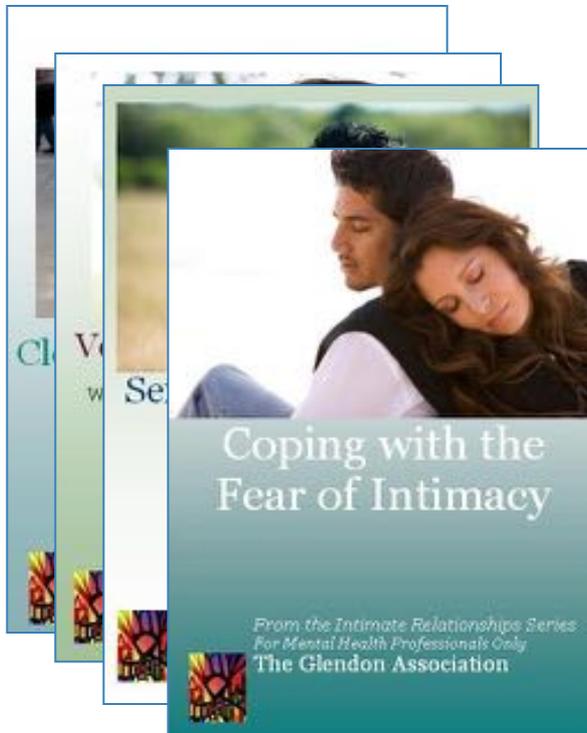
BOOKS



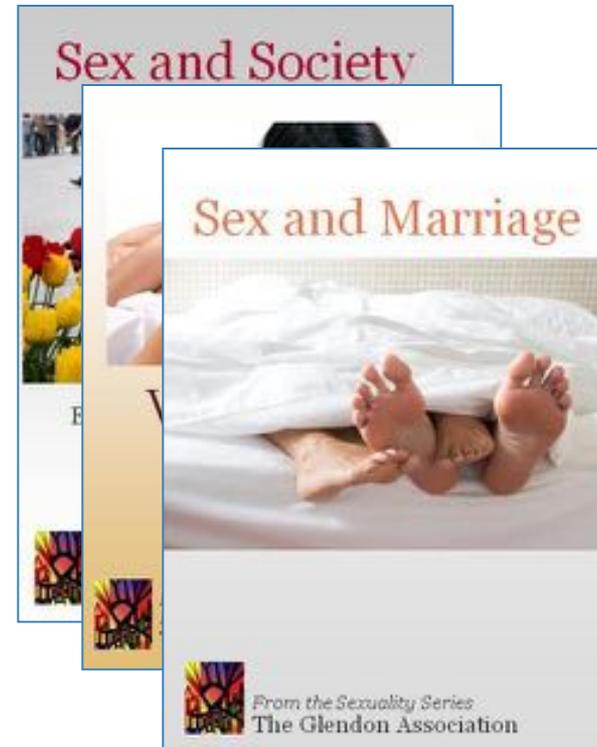
Visit WWW.PSYCHALIVE.ORG for resource links.

FILMS

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS SERIES

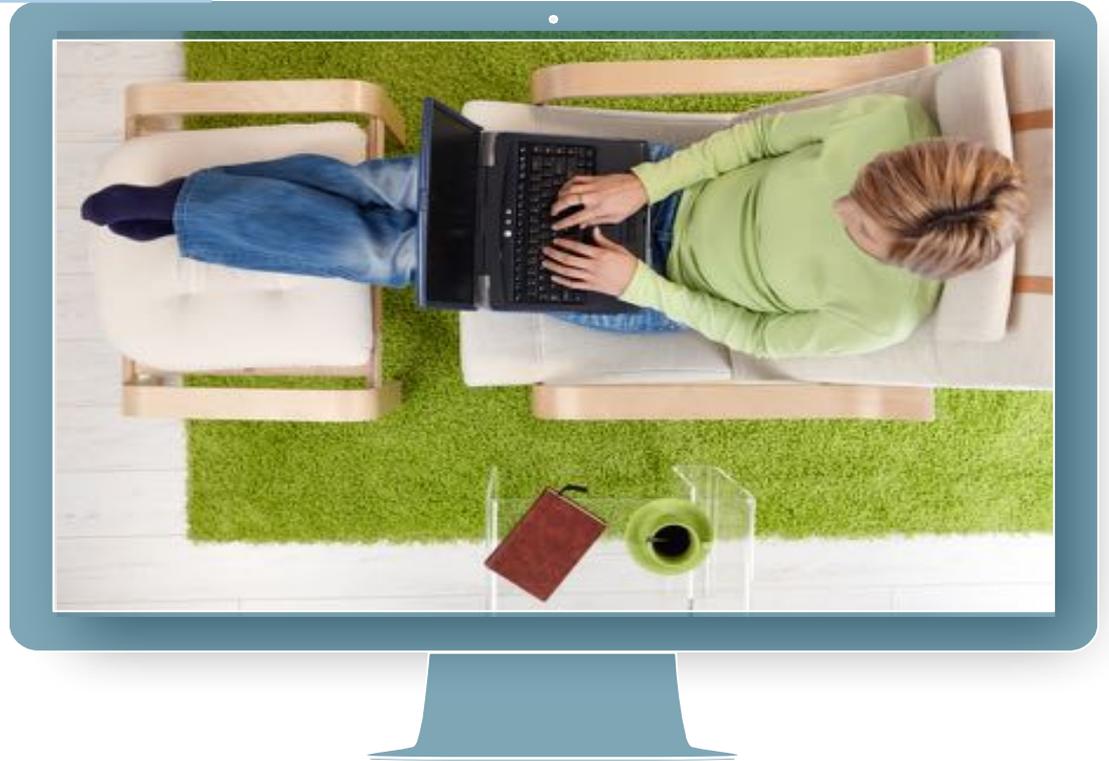


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THANK YOU SO MUCH!



Any questions?

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