



Understanding and Overcoming Relationship Anxiety

with Dr. Lisa Firestone

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2 Topics of This Webinar

1.

**Understanding
Relationship
Anxiety**

2.

**Overcoming
Relationship
Anxiety**

Part 1:

Understanding Relationship Anxiety



What is relationship anxiety?



Fears around
being in a
relationship



Fears around
NOT being in
a relationship

What is relationship anxiety?

Routine

Divorce

Infidelity

Conflict

Rejection

Vulnerability

Dependence

Engulfment

Heartbreak

Commitment

Abandonment

Insecurity

Intimacy



Health Effects of Relationship Anxiety

In a study of more than 5,600 people between the ages of 18 to 60, researchers found that those who said they felt insecure in relationships were more likely to suffer from chronic diseases — and heart disease in particular.



Common Actions in Relationship Anxiety:

- Cling
- Control
- Reject
- Withhold
- Punish
- Play the victim
- Retreat
- Avoid



The intensity of our feelings often comes from our past.

- Childhood/ developmental experiences
- Negative experiences in relationships

Theoretical Perspectives

- Attachment Theory
- Separation Theory
 - Fantasy Bond
 - Fear of Intimacy
 - Critical Inner Voice



Attachment Theory



What is Attachment Theory?



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

Understanding Attachment

Attachment patterns:

- ◇ Formed in infancy, during the first two years of life.
- ◇ Affects us throughout our lives, particularly in how we relate in intimate relationships and with our children.



Patterns of Attachment in Children

Category of Attachment

- Secure
- Insecure – avoidant
- Insecure- anxious/ambivalent
- Insecure - disorganized

Parental Interactive Pattern

- Emotionally available, perceptive, responsive
- Emotionally unavailable, imperceptive, unresponsive and rejecting
- Inconsistently available, perceptive and responsive and intrusive
- Frightening, frightened, disorienting, alarming



Internal Working Models

- ◇ Attachment style formed impacts how we behave in relationships and how we expect others to behave
- ◇ Tend to repeat or recreate early attachment patterns throughout life



Patterns of Attachment

Patterns in Childhood

- Secure - - - - - ➤
- Insecure - avoidant - - - - - ➤
- Insecure - anxious/ambivalent - - - - - ➤
- Insecure - disorganized - - - - - ➤

Patterns in Adulthood

- Secure
- Dismissive
- Preoccupied
- Fearful-Avoidant



Three Types of Attachment-related Relationship Anxiety

Avoidant or Dismissive

Avoid emotional closeness/ depending

Preoccupied Anxious

Feel insecure, desperate or overly focused on intimacy and relationships

Fearful

Afraid to get too close/afraid to not be attached

Is Your Attachment Style Affecting Your Relationship?

Secure Attachment:

Tend to be more satisfied in their relationships



Preoccupied Attachment:

Tend to be desperate to form a fantasy bond. Instead of feeling real love or trust toward their partner, they often feel emotional hunger.



Is Your Attachment Style Affecting Your Relationship?

Dismissive Attachment:

Have the tendency to emotionally distance themselves from their partner.

Fearful-Avoidant Attachment:

Live in an ambivalent state in which they're afraid of being too close to or too distant from others.



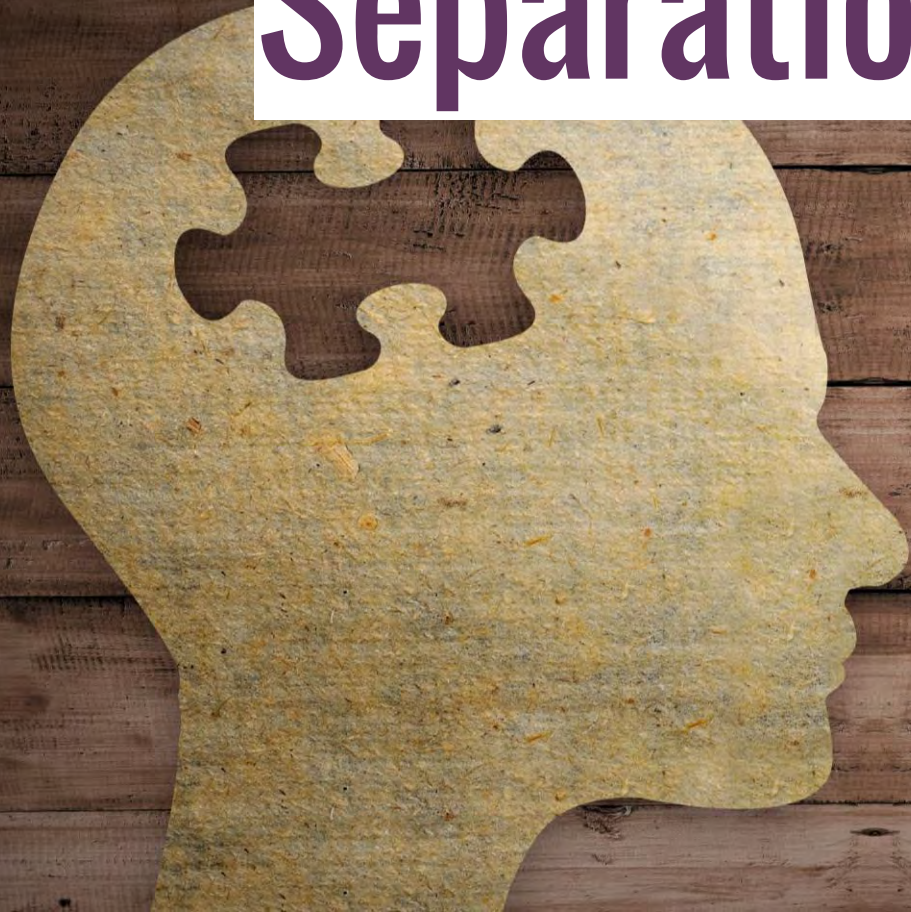


“ The fantastic news is that if you can make sense of your childhood experiences—especially your relationships with your parents—you can transform your attachment models toward security. The reason this is important is that relationships— with friends, with romantic partners, with present or possible future offspring—will be profoundly enhanced. And you’ll feel better with yourself, too! ”

~ Dr. Dan Siegel



Separation Theory





Separation Theory

Robert Firestone, Ph.D.

Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought

Two kinds of emotional pain:

UNDEFENDED



INTERPERSONAL



EXISTENTIAL

Core Conflict:



DEFENDED



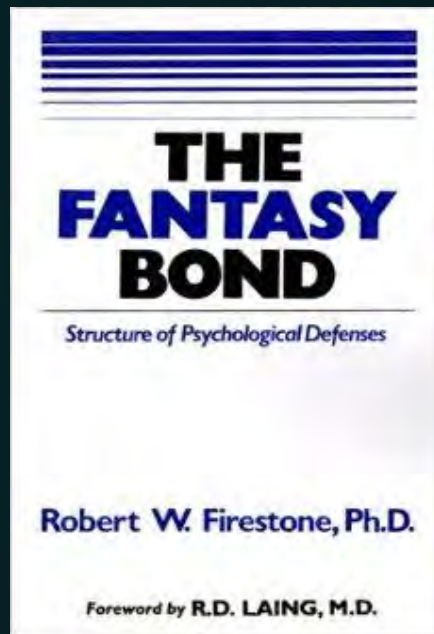
FANTASY BOND



CRITICAL INNER VOICE

From The Fantasy Bond

*Most people have a **fear of intimacy** and at the same time are terrified of being alone. Their solution is to form a fantasy bond – an illusion of connection and closeness – that allows them to maintain emotional distance while assuaging loneliness and, in the process, meeting society's expectations regarding marriage and family.*



A silhouette of a person with long hair, seen from behind, sitting on a swing. The swing is suspended by chains. The background is a bright sunset over a body of water, with the sun low on the horizon and its light reflecting on the water's surface. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

**Where does fear of
intimacy come from?**

Reasons We Defend Against Love

What are we afraid of?



Arouses anxiety and makes us feel vulnerable



Arouses sadness and painful feelings from the past



Provokes a painful identity crisis



Disconnects people from a “fantasy bond” with their parents



Arouses guilt in relation to surpassing a parent



Stirs up painful existential issues

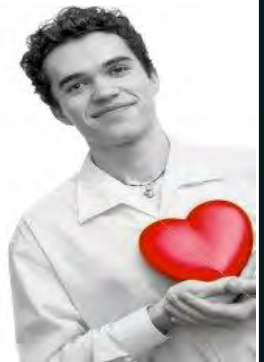
Real love makes us feel anxious and vulnerable

Threatens longstanding **psychological defenses** formed early in life in relation to emotional pain and rejection, leaving a person feeling more **vulnerable**.



Real love makes us feel anxious and vulnerable

- ◇ Letting ourselves fall in love means **taking a risk**.
- ◇ A new relationship is uncharted territory, and most of us have natural **fears of the unknown**.
- ◇ We're trusting another person, which makes us feel **exposed and vulnerable**.
- ◇ We tend to believe that the more we care, the more **we can get hurt**.



Don't get too close.



**People just
wind up getting
hurt.**

Psychological Defenses



- ◇ Being loved by someone we love **threatens our defenses**.
- ◇ **Long-held habits** that make us feel safe or self-contained
- ◇ Adaptations to our early environment that are **no longer adaptive**

Real love stirs arouses sadness from the past

- The ways we were hurt in previous relationships, starting from our childhood, have a strong influence on:
 - Why we choose the partners we do
 - How we perceive the people we get close to
 - How we act in our romantic relationships
- Old, negative dynamics may make us wary of opening ourselves up to someone new.
- We may steer away from intimacy, because it stirs up feelings of hurt, loss, anger or rejection.



Love stirs up past pain



“When you long for something, like love, it becomes associated with pain,” the pain you felt at not having it in the past.

. - Pat Love, Ph.D., Author The Truth About Love

Love provokes a painful identity crisis

- Giving and receiving love disrupts the negative, yet familiar, ways we have of thinking about ourselves.
- Many struggle with underlying feelings of being unlovable.
- We have trouble feeling our own value and believing anyone could really care for us.

Critical Inner Voice

A photograph of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair looking down with a sad or thoughtful expression. She is leaning her head against the shoulder of a man wearing a blue button-down shirt. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage.

We all have a “critical inner voice,” which acts like a cruel coach inside our heads that questions, criticizes, and undermines our relationships.

What is the Critical Inner Voice?

- Well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward ourselves and others
- At the root of much of our maladaptive behavior.
- Fosters inwardness, distrust, self-criticism, self-denial, addictions, and a retreat from goal-directed activities
- Affects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence and our personal and intimate relationships

Common “Voices” in Relationships

- You'll never find someone who understands you.
- Don't get too hooked on her.
- He doesn't really care about you.
- She is too good for you.
- As soon as she gets to know you, she'll reject you.
- You've got to be in control.
- Don't be too vulnerable, or you'll just wind up getting hurt.
- He only cares about himself.
- Why get so excited? What's so great about her anyway?
- He's probably cheating on you.
- She can't get anything right.
- Relationships never work out.

You're
better off on
your own.



Love breaks a “Fantasy Bond” with our parents

- Ultimate symbol of growing up
- Represent starting our own lives
- Symbolize a parting from our family
- Letting go on an emotional level
- Differentiating from negative dynamics that plagued our early relationships and shaped our identity



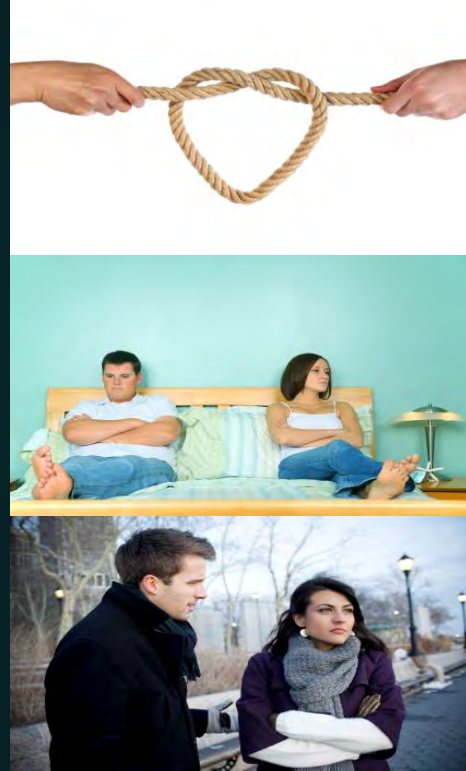
Love stirs up existential fears

Fear of losing self or other



Factors that Contribute to Relationship Distress

- ✓ Selection
- ✓ Distortion
- ✓ Provocation



A photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a green park bench. The woman, wearing a black leather jacket and black boots, is leaning forward with her head down, appearing distressed or sad. The man is sitting next to her, seen from the back. The background shows trees with autumn foliage and a warm, golden light.

Part 2:

Overcoming Relationship Anxiety



Romantic Love

vs. Passionate or Companion-like Love



- “Romantic love,” characterized by “intensity, engagement and sexual interest,” is associated with marital satisfaction, well-being, high self-esteem and relationship longevity.
- “Passionate” or “obsessive love” has the same features as romantic love but also includes feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. Passionate/obsessive love works well in short-term relationships, but it hurts long-term relationships.
- “Companion-like love” leads to only moderate satisfaction in both short-term and long-term relationships.
- Romantic love can last in a long-term relationship and keep both people happy.



Romantic Love

vs. Passionate or Companion-like Love



“Couples should strive for love with all the trimmings... Couples who've been together a long time and wish to get back their romantic edge should know it is an attainable goal that, like most good things in life, requires energy and devotion.”

- Researcher Bianca P. Acevedo, Ph.D.

Developing Secure Attachment



Developing a Secure Attachment

- Feel the full pain of your childhood and **make sense of it.**
- Create a **coherent narrative.**
- Grow toward security by developing **integration** from non-integrated brain functioning.
- Because our attachment ability is broken in a relationship, it can be **fixed in a relationship:**
 - Romantic partner
 - Close friend
 - Good therapist

It takes time to develop an **Earned Secure Attachment in a relationship. Stick with it!**



Developing Security in Relationships

- Look for a partner who is secure - makes you feel **safe, seen, and soothed**
- Develop more security in yourself



Writing a Coherent Narrative

- “It’s never too late to bring both hemispheres [of your brain] into development and activity.” ~Dr. Dan Siegel
- Writing a coherent narrative integrates your brain by drawing upon the right side of your brain for autobiographical memories and deep emotions, as well as the left side of your brain for language, logic and linear storytelling.
- Make sense of the nonsense.



Tips for Writing a Coherent Narrative

- ✓ Write as an adult.
- ✓ Write rationally
- ✓ Write autobiographically.
- ✓ Write intuitively.
- ✓ Write with feeling.
- ✓ Write about how the past present.
- ✓ Write with balance.
- ✓ Write with self-compassion.

infl

COLOR SLIDES

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An eCourse with
Drs. Dan Siegel
& Lisa Firestone

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Differentiation and Linkage

Linkage
(emotional
closeness)



Differentiation
(individuation as an individual)

Conquering Your Inner Critic



Your Critical Inner Voice vs The Real You

What my critical inner voice says about:

- Me
 - My partner or potential partner
 - Relationships
-
-

What I realistically think about:

- Me
 - My partner or potential partner
 - Relationships
-
-

Voice Therapy

Cognitive/ Affective/ Behavioral/ Approach



Voice Therapy

A Psychotherapeutic
Approach to Self-Destructive Behavior

Robert W. Firestone Ph.D.

The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step I

The person articulates his or her self-attacks in the second person and expresses any feelings that arise.



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step II

- The person discusses reactions to saying their voices.
- The person tries to understand the relationship between these attacks and early life experiences.



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step III

- The person answers back to the voice attacks.
- The person makes a rational statement about how he or she really is.



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step IV

The person develops insight about how the voice attacks are influencing his or her present-day behaviors.



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step V

- The person collaborates with the therapist to plan changes in these behaviors.
- The person is encouraged to not engage in self-destructive behaviors and to increase the positive behaviors these negative thoughts discourage.



If you are interested in attending a voice therapy training or in getting training materials please contact jina@glendon.org or visit www.glendon.org.

Self

Anti-Self



SIX

Ways to Overcome Your Relationship Anxiety

1. Recognize your anxiety ("Name it to tame it.")
2. Look at your history and make sense of it.
3. Challenge your critical inner voice.
4. Challenge your defenses.
5. Feel your feelings, including anxiety, but do the right thing.
6. Be vulnerable even if it means you feel anxious.



The Value of Vulnerability



There can be no intimacy—emotional intimacy, spiritual intimacy, physical intimacy—without vulnerability. One of the reasons there is such an intimacy deficit today is because we don't know how to be vulnerable. It's about being honest with how we feel, about our fears, about what we need, and, asking for what we need. Vulnerability is a glue that holds intimate relationships together.

- Brene Brown, Ph.D., Author The Power of Vulnerability

The background of the entire slide is a photograph of a pair of hands, palms up, holding a small, vibrant green plant with many tiny leaves. The hands are positioned in the center, with the soil visible around them. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the soil and the delicate nature of the plant.

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

A person is lying on their side on a sandy beach, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and dark blue pants. The person's head is resting on their arm, and they appear to be looking out at the ocean. The background shows the ocean with gentle waves and a bright sunset or sunrise sky with a warm orange glow. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

What to Calm Yourself Down When You Feel Anxious

Toolkit

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

Recognize

Acknowledge (Accept
Allow)

Investigate

Non-identification





Sensations

Images

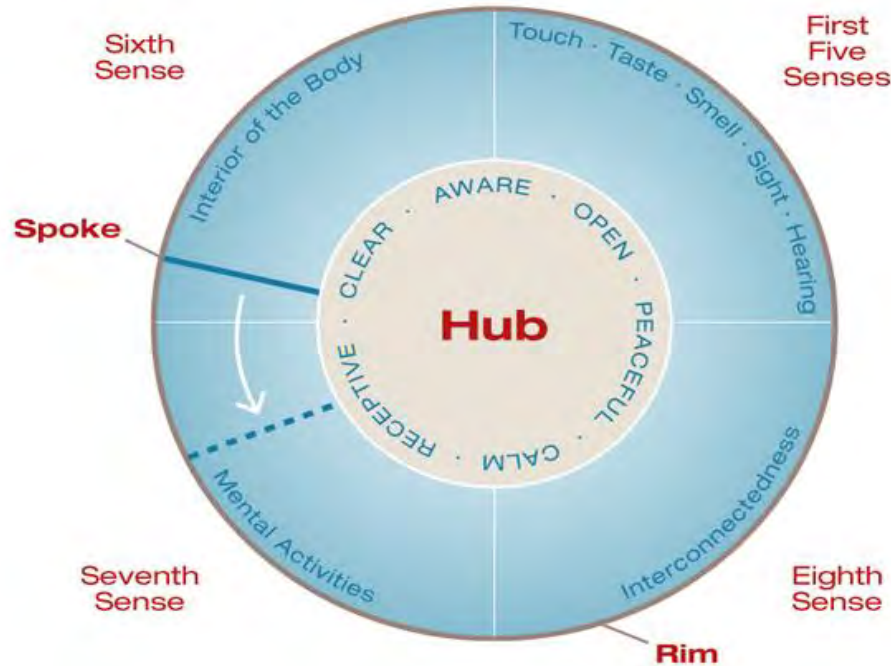
Feelings

Thoughts

Mindfulness



Wheel of Awareness



Loving-kindness Meditation

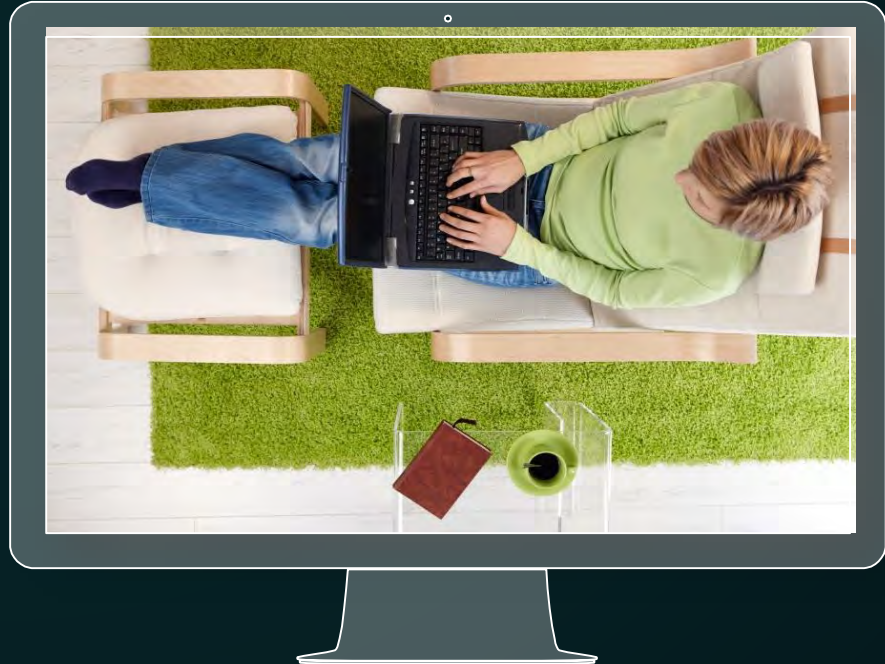


We love, because it's the
ONLY TRUE
ADVENTURE

- Nikki Giovanni

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LOVE + CONNECTION

A COURSE ON CREATING
THRIVING RELATIONSHIPS

with Drs. Dan Siegel & Lisa Firestone

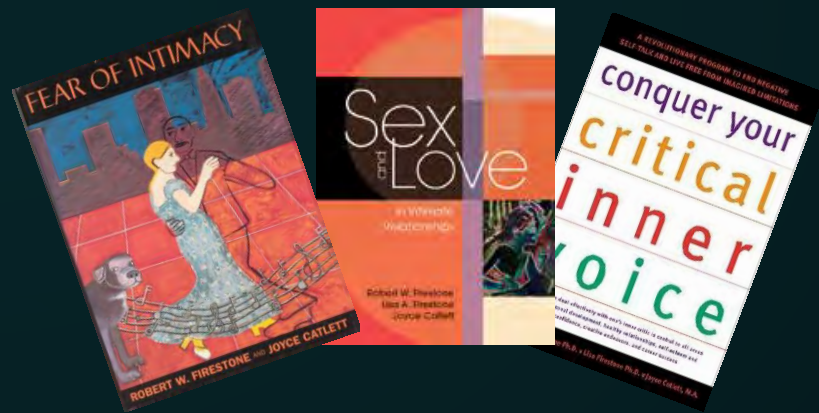
This eCourse will explore:

- What elements are essential to a thriving relationship
- How attachment history impacts relationships
- The role of self and identity in a romantic relationship
- The importance of both differentiation and linkage in preserving vitality
- The benefits of presence in strengthening love and sexuality
- The transformative power of collaborative communication
- Strategies to create and maintain deeper, more vital connections



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THANKS!

ANY QUESTIONS?

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