

HOW OUR PARENTS PASSED ON THEIR BAGGAGE

AMANDA, 38, A DUBAI-BASED LAWYER FROM AUSTRALIA, TELLS US HER STORY

"I was six when my sister was born and stood by watching my once-vibrant mother suffer terribly with postnatal depression. She withdrew into herself and even though she was always around physically, emotionally she seemed to shut down. My father was wonderful, but worked long hours, and often travelled with his job in logistics. Thirty years later my sister and I have very different outlooks on life, and I really believe this was due to the differences in our early years. She has bounced from one relationship to another, always pulling the rip-chord when a boyfriend started mentioning marriage, always shunning any kind of emotional intimacy; even with friends, she always kept her distance and found it difficult to relax and be herself. After her last relationship abruptly ended I urged her to talk to a therapist, and she realised that she was displaying all the attributes of an Avoidant attachment style – someone who goes out of their way to avoid closeness and emotional connections, and this is in all probability due to our mother's distance when she was an infant."

CIARA, 44, A STAY-AT-HOME MUM FROM ITALY, TELLS US HER STORY

"I know that I'm a nightmare wife! I flit between being happy and settled in my marriage, to being wildly insecure and needing constant reassurance of my husband's love for me. We've been married for 13 years and have two children, but I can't stop thinking something is going to go wrong, or that he's going to be unfaithful, or wondering why he's with me. I heard about attachment theory a few years ago through a friend and I seem to fit into the Anxious attachment style. My parents were wonderful, but quite fickle with their attention – my husband once called them 'erratic' and I think this sums them up well. They would flit between being very interested and passionate about what I was doing to being too busy to bother with me and my brothers, and it's actually reassuring to know that how I behave is linked to that. It doesn't mean that I can necessarily fix this in myself, but I'm getting there."

"It's a logical leap for psychologists to state that what happens during your infancy has long-lasting effects into adulthood"

get on in the workplace, particularly around team-based activities. A fear of committing, difficulty developing trust, having revolving-door syndrome, whereby people jump from one romantic involvement to another, may be attributed to a person's attachment style."

Attachment styles

There are three principal attachment styles that psychologists say best sum up the majority of people. Secure people, who are said to make up around 54 per cent of the population, are completely comfortable with intimacy, and find it easy to trust and depend on others. They are warm and loving, and communicating their needs and feelings comes naturally to them.

Avoidant people, who make up 25 per cent of the population, have difficulty completely letting go and trusting their partners. They equate intimacy with a loss of control and feel fiercely independent, often coming across as aloof, or unemotional. They tend to either avoid relationships, or yo-yo between partners, maintaining emotional distance.

Anxious people, on the other hand – who are said to constitute 21 per cent of people – have a preoccupation with how much their partner loves them and need to be very close to their partners. On the plus side, these people have a great capacity for intimacy, but their insecurities could be stifling to potential partners. They often misinterpret tiny shifts in their partner's moods as signs that the relationship isn't working, and could become overly sensitive very easily.

Changing your type

In *Attached*, psychiatrist and neuroscientist Dr Amir Levine and Rachel Heller reveal how understanding your own attachment style, and that of your partner, can build stronger, more fulfilling attachments. "If you're single and looking for the right partner, this information can set you on the right track since you can learn how to figure out a potential partner's attachment style early on and find the right match.

"But, importantly, it is also useful for those who are already in a 'mismatched' relationship because we can learn to become more secure."

The ultimate aim, Dr Logan adds, is to "experience secure attachment – to be able to trust, depend on others, feel safe, to know that there's always somebody on your side." And chances are, if either you or your partner has a secure attachment style, over time the avoidance or anxious attachment attributes will lessen.

Dr Levine says that one of the questions he's asked most is whether people's attachment styles can change. "The short answer is yes. The longer answer is – but not necessarily when you want them to. Research shows that one in four people will change their attachment style over a four-year period. Change occurs mostly when you get into a relationship that really shakes your beliefs about love. If, for example, you expect people to let you down, or reject you once they get to know 'the real' you, and then you meet someone who's supportive and loving no matter what – over time, you'll probably become more secure. It's much trickier if you are anxious and want to change someone avoidant (or vice versa). What usually happens in these relationships is that you exacerbate each other's tendencies. In this case, you'll need to work together to get on track."



4 WAYS TO SECURE ATTACHMENT

1 Find your style

Become acquainted with your own attachment pattern. Knowing why you behave in certain ways in certain situations will help you understand yourself better.

2 Choose friends wisely

Surround yourself with people with secure attachment styles. Research shows that about 50 per cent of adults are secure in their

attachment style – which is pretty good odds for finding a stable, dependable mate. Studies suggest that a positive experience with a securely attached person can, in time, override your insecure impulses.

3 Think about therapy

Find a great therapist with expertise in attachment theory. To make the leap from insecure to secure attachment in your relationships you need

to seek professional help. Dr Logan at The LightHouse Arabia explains why this is necessary: "A psychologist will seek to work through the factors in your infancy and early experiences that caused you to internalise this model of thinking and behaving. Exploring those experiences, and the patterns or difficulties they have created, will allow you to move forward with a new reference point."

4 Seek help as a couple

If you and your partner do have differing attachment styles, go to couples' therapy. If you're an anxious type and your man is an avoidant, a couples' therapist can help both of you become more secure together. Even if you feel like your relationship is going well at the moment, consider taking this step as a pre-emptive strike against trouble in the future. **AQ**