

Attachment Theory

As a coach it's important to understand how a coachee's brain has been wired. We know this from the neuroscience as it underpins where biographical enquiry is important. Attachment Theory is one way to explore this. What have been their experiences, what are their relationships like – who is close who is distant what was valued in your family etc.

John Bowlby developed the evolutionary theory of attachment which suggests that children come into the world biologically pre-programmed to form attachments with others, because this will help them to survive.

Attachment is about getting your needs met and the bond we form with our first primary caregiver, usually a parent. It's a universal human phenomenon and the way we develop it eventually affects the way we find, keep, and end relationships. We know from the neuroscience that the limbic brain needs to develop socially and emotionally in order to connect with others in a healthy way. This connection happens through verbal and non - verbal cues: body language, facial expression and tone of voice. In this way we develop empathy and understanding and the ability to respond to others.

The central theme of attachment theory is that primary caregivers who are available and responsive to an infant's needs allow the child to develop a sense of security. The infant knows that the caregiver is dependable, which creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world.

These attachments are long held patterns that echo across adult life. Every coachee will be in relation, context and interdependent with others. So our goal is to help raise awareness of these and then develop more secure patterns.

There are 4 key attachment styles

Secure – 50% of population

People with a secure attachment style can:

- Regulate their emotions
- Are confident in exploring the environment
- Rebound from disappointment and loss
- They are empathetic and optimise relationships
- They make sense of the world – creating meaning for themselves & feel good about themselves

- They have no problem getting close to others – they share feelings and seek support
- They are happy to depend on others and to be depended on

You will see a free narrative style, flexible and coherent self-reflection and a balanced perspective. They will come to coaching looking for a challenge and development. They are often in the talent pool.

Avoidant / Dismissive 30 % of population

Their needs were not met by the care giver and so they had to find a way of meeting their needs alone.

People with an avoidant / dismissive attachment style:

- Rely on self to get needs met – often not in touch with their inner needs
- Do it on their own
- Down play emotions
- There is a disconnection / lack of empathy
- Can be a commitment phobe
- Are uncomfortable getting close to others
- Are uncomfortable depending on/ trusting others
- Worry they will have to do the abandoning

They can present as dismissive with an incoherent narrative; they minimise emotional significance with a lack of recall about early life. They might present in coaching as not being in touch with their emotions or emotionally distant. They can present when they have career problems such as no promotion, difficult relationships or not engaging with the team.

Tools and techniques that help them extend their emotional vocabulary and where they are feeling the emotion in their body. Also feedback on how you are finding them in the relationship. Tools that help develop empathy and understanding of others. If they are motivated to change and can see the need they can have quite significant behavioural shifts.

Insecure /anxious / preoccupied – 10% of population

They often had busy parents

People with an insecure/ anxious attachment style are:

- Clingy / needy
- Uncertain of themselves inside

- Have a hyperactive attachment system and high emotional requirements
- Feel others don't get as close as they would like
- Worries they will be abandoned
- Worries if a person still loves them

They may present as preoccupied and entangled with the past. The past can intrude on the present. They can appear quite anxious and unsure of their relationships with others. They can run 'please others' patterns and have very open boundaries. Can use feelings as fact. They will need tools that help develop their assertiveness and the ability to step into their power.

Disorganised / Fearful / Avoidant 10% of population

These people don't come to coaching as often – they have significant childhood trauma and grief.

As a coach we need to create a “securely attached space”; we meet them where they are.

How to develop a secure attachment

- Be in a relationship with a securely attached person
- Making sense of your childhood story – by raising awareness and creating a coherent narrative about past present and future helping them become more resilient, flexible, and empathetic
- Daily Reset rituals e.g. mindfulness, walking in nature, yoga, tai chi
- Develop positive views of self
- Build emotional vocabulary and capacity for empathy
- Have an awareness of a need for repair
- Build a perception of the needs of others
- Build a willingness to engage in new experiences

Here is a link to a quiz to get a sense of your own attachment style
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/tests/relationships/relationship-attachment-style-test>

Or The Attachment Project

[The Attachment Project: Learn Attachment Theory from Experts](#)