

## Adult Attachment Overview (derived from [Hold Me Tight](#) by Sue Johnson and Wikipedia)

### Love is...

- A basic primary need like oxygen or water
- A brilliant survival technique wired in by evolution
- A sign of support, health, and strength
- An oxymoron—we need others in order to be independent

### Adult Attachment Drives

- We monitor and maintain emotional and physical closeness with our beloved
- We reach out for this person when we are unsure, upset, or feeling down
- We miss this person when we are apart
- We count on this person to be there for us when we go out into the world and explore
- We strive for a secure attachment

### Attachment Styles

- Secure—secure in relations and while absent from loved ones; based on consistent needs-fulfillment
  - Comfortable with closeness and depending on others
  - Better at seeking support and giving it
  - More easily roll with inevitable hurts from loved ones
  - Understand and like ourselves better
  - More curious and open to new information
  - The more we can reliably reach out to partners, the more separate and independent we can be
- Insecure
  - Anxious—hypervigilant monitoring and pursuit; based on inconsistent needs-fulfillment in childhood
  - Avoidant—disregard for others and distancing; based on consistent lack of childhood needs-fulfillment
  - Anxious-Avoidant—vacillation between pursuit and hostility; usually based on abuse, trauma
- Attachment styles based on positive and negative self-esteem and sociability

(from Bartholomew & Horowitz)

	Positive View of Self	Negative View of Self
Positive View of Others	Secure Attachment	Anxious-Preoccupied
Negative View of Others	Dismissive-Avoidant	Fearful-Avoidant

### Health Effects of Negative Relationships and Isolation

- Loneliness raises blood pressure to the point where risk of heart attack and stroke is doubled (Louise Hawkley)
- Emotional isolation is a more dangerous health risk than smoking or high blood pressure (James House)
- Negative relationships increase the chances of angina, heart attack, high blood pressure, and congestive heart failure (various studies)
- The more belligerent and contemptuous partners are, the higher the levels of stress hormones and more depressed the immune system (Janice Kiecolt-Glaser)
- Relationship distress raises the risk for depression tenfold
- Rejection and exclusion trigger the same circuits in the anterior cingulate as physical pain (Naomi Eisenberg)

Simply holding the hand of a loving partner can literally calm jittery neurons in the brain (Jim Croan).

When we are close to, hold, or make love with our partners, we are flooded with the “cuddle hormones” oxytocin and vasopressin, which seem to turn on the reward centers of the brain, release calming chemicals like dopamine, and turn off stress hormones like cortisol.

## Attachment Anxiety

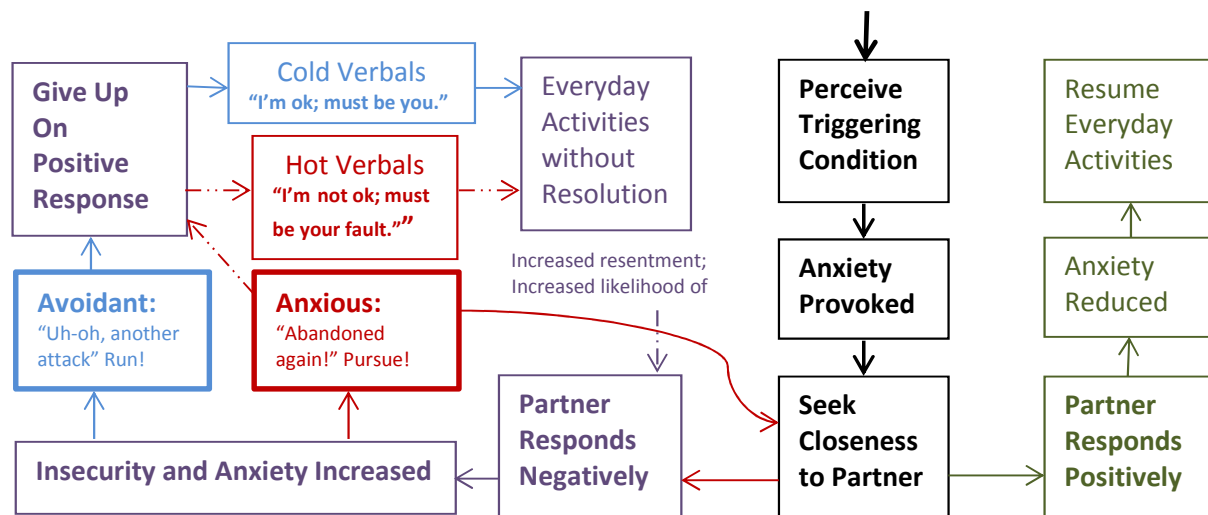
"We are never so vulnerable as when we love." –Sigmund Freud

"And the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, your risk is even greater." –Erica Jong

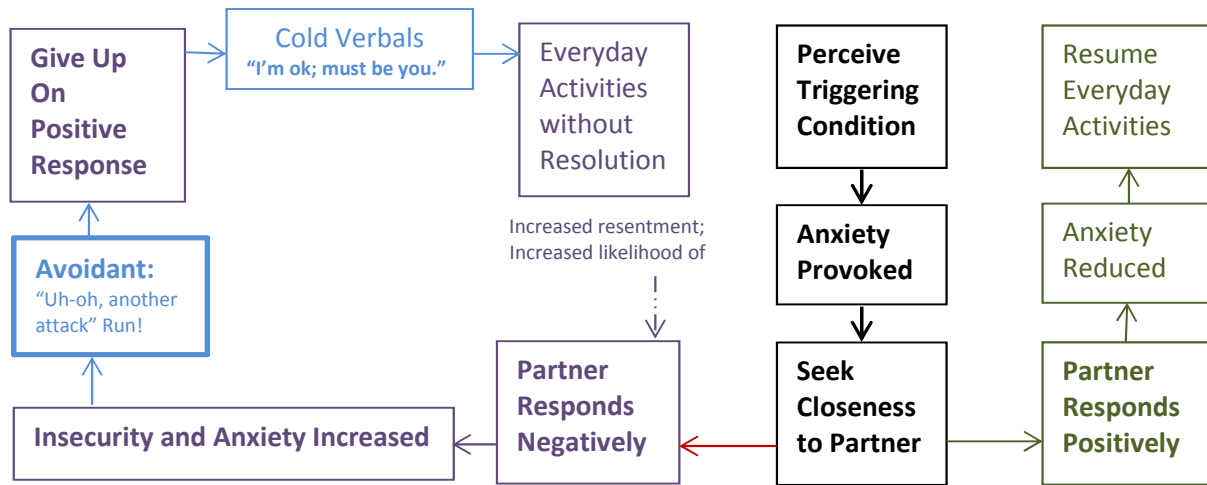
- Conditions in our inner world, our interpersonal world, and our environment may trigger anxieties; as adults, we crave closeness and comfort from partners just as children crave proximity and soothing from caregivers.
- Our efforts to maintain contact/proximity and to achieve a secure attachment may be hampered by:
  - Fear of what we might get:
    - Anger or cold shoulder
    - Grandiosity, criticism, derision, labeling, dismissiveness
    - Defense responses
  - Fear of what we might NOT get:
    - Comfort, safety, reassurance, assistance, information, consistency
    - Support, validation, acceptance, empathy, encouragement
    - Intimacy, touch, closeness, desire
    - Matching vulnerability, openness, authentic presence, equality, participation
- The connection we need most gets disrupted by attempts to relieve or avoid the anxiety of insecure attachments. It takes risking open vulnerability about the insecurity to "get out of our own way" and invite partners to do the same with their insecurities.
- Affect regulation: this is emotional stuff. Staying emotionally safe through avoidance keeps the bad stuff out, but backfires by also not letting the good stuff in. On the other hand, preoccupation with emotion keeps us in a cycle of anxiety ("clinginess") that may push others away by leaving them feeling attacked or judged.

## Working Models and Relationship Patterns

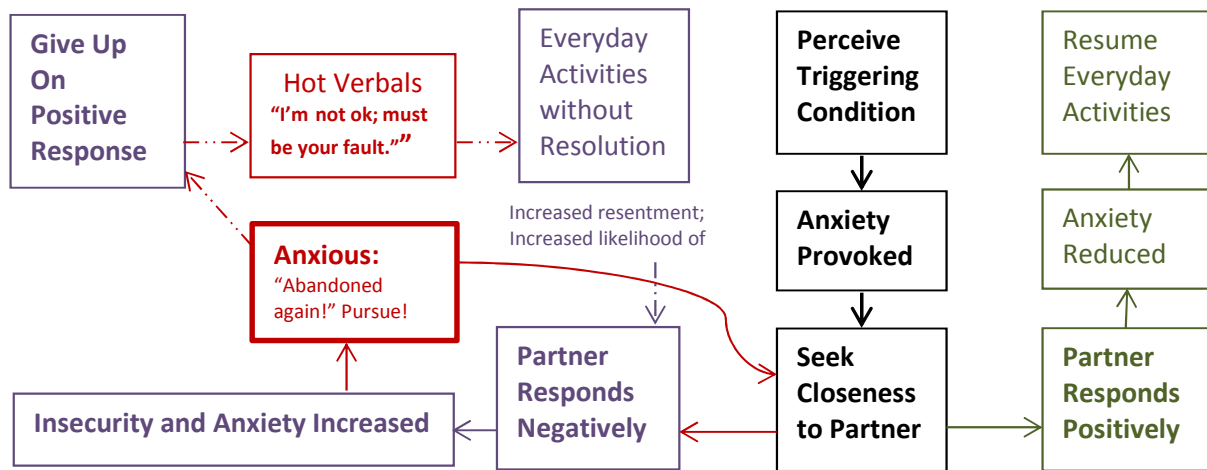
- John Bowlby (founder of attachment theory) believed that children form expectations about access to caregivers based on the consistency and quality of interactions. These expectations translate to working models that involve how children perceive themselves (worthy of care or not), caregivers (available and valuable or not), and their world (safe and enriching or not).
- Those acting on **insecure** attachment models will typically rely on either **anxious preoccupation** or **avoidant distancing** to reduce vulnerability and regulate emotion when partners respond negatively to an attachment request, thus subverting the deeper need to change the underlying working model by being defensive against their insecurity or anxiety. (Mikulincer, Shaver and Pereg)
- These working models are fairly stable (although subject to change with new experiences) and may play out as patterns of behavior in adult romantic relationships, such as Sue Johnson's "dances." The most common pattern is created when the anxious pursuer perceives distance as abandonment provoking more anxiety and the avoidant distancer perceives preoccupation as an attack based on relentless pursuit. (See "Vicious Cycles")



## Avoidant/Distancer



## Anxious/Pursuer



## Combined

