

SOCIALLY BRAVE WITH

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Attachment Styles
&
How They Affect Friendships



Attachment Styles & How They Affect Friendships

After I mastered the art of establishing healthy friendship boundaries with The Rooms in my house, the Curb, Proch, Living Room and Kitchen, I understood that everyone has a room in my house, I began to make true friends that I knew would be there for me. However, I couldn't shake the feeling that there was still something deeper to uncover about myself and my friendships.

I started doing some soul searching and reflection, and I discovered the idea of attachment styles, and it truly revolutionized how I understood friendships, both what type of a friend I was looking for and what type of a friend I wanted to be.

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We Need Belonging and Connection

We connect with our friends through shared activities, conversations, needing support or encouragement, and shared interests. We look for the same humor, and we want to be vulnerable with someone and have regular communication. That's a lot to ask of someone, but honestly this is what we, as humans, need from one another—belonging and connection. It helps reduce stress and, let's face it, improves overall well-being.

If your inner circle (Living Room or Kitchen) friends are not providing this type of connection, it's time to reassess the friends in your life and learn what type of friend you are looking for.

If we have the inherent need to connection so badly, why is it so difficult to make friends who bring energy to us instead of draining us?

Often, we look for the friends we would like to have and treat them the way we would want to be treated and wonder why they are not giving the same in return. I want you to understand this truth: Regardless of how close you are with your friends and how much they understand you or how much you laugh around them, you are different people.

Some value loyalty in a friend while others want someone to hang out with and have fun. Thrill seekers may want a like-minded friend to go on adventures with, while others want more of a connection to have that special friend they can call several times a day. Maybe you are the friend who needs someone to call once every couple of months.

Knowing what you want in a friend and what you are emotionally able to give back will enable you to build the types of relationships that will be perfect for you.

Even though no one single friend can meet your needs or expectations, the more you embrace who you are, the more peace you have in your life.

To understand the dynamics of friendships, you must first understand your connection or attachment style.

It's All About You and Your Attachment Style

Attachment theory is based on the joint work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. (“The Origins of Attachment Theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth”) It’s the way we’ve built relationships growing up and the experiences we learned along the way that help us develop friendships now.¹

“Attachment development typically occurs in the first six years of life. But it does continue to evolve throughout our lifespan. This means that regardless of what our attachment style is, it can eventually become a secure attachment style.”²

Attachment styles play a pivotal role in shaping the way we approach and maintain friendships. These styles, which originate from our early relationships with caregivers, influence how we perceive closeness, trust, and vulnerability in all types of relationships, including friendships. Understanding our own attachment style can offer profound insights into our relational patterns, helping us navigate the complexities of human connection more effectively.

Throughout life, attachment styles are not static; they can evolve based on our experiences, personal growth, changing circumstances, or engaging in therapy. For example, during my early years, I identified with an anxious attachment style. This often-meant craving closeness and reassurance while simultaneously fearing rejection. As I began learning and implementing boundaries, I shifted toward an avoidant attachment style, seeking emotional distance to protect myself. Over time, through self-reflection, I’ve developed a more secure attachment style—characterized by a balance of independence and healthy boundaries.

It’s important to note, however, that stress and challenging circumstances can trigger old patterns. For instance, when I am under significant stress, I tend to lean toward a secure-avoidant style, prioritizing my emotional space while maintaining trust and communication with others. Therapy can help individuals uncover past patterns, build emotional resilience, and develop secure tendencies by addressing underlying fears and learning healthier ways to connect with others.

1 I. Bretherton, “The Origins of Attachment Theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth,” *Developmental Psychology* vol 28 no. 5 (1992), 759–775, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.28.5.759>.

2 Laura Reagan, LCSW-C, “Attachment Styles: How Our Early Experiences Shape Our Relationships,” *Trauma Therapist Network*, August 3, 2022, <https://traumatherapistnetwork.com/attachment-styles-trauma-relationships/>.

This fluidity is a reminder that attachment styles are adaptive and can shift depending on internal and external factors.

Understanding your attachment style can clarify why certain dynamics feel natural or uncomfortable in friendships. For example, people with an avoidant attachment style might find too much connection overwhelming, with the need of constant interaction as a threat to their autonomy.

Conversely, those with an anxious attachment style may struggle with friends who are emotionally distant, perceiving it as a lack of care or commitment. Recognizing these tendencies allows us to approach our friendships with greater empathy and self-awareness.

Developing a secure attachment style, or at least secure tendencies, involves cultivating emotional self-regulation, practicing effective communication, and establishing clear boundaries. Strategies for emotional self-regulation include mindfulness practices such as meditation, journaling to process emotions, and engaging in physical activities like yoga or exercise to reduce stress. Effective communication can be improved by using “I” statements to express feelings without blaming, actively listening to friends without interrupting, and validating their emotions even if you don’t fully agree.

It’s about finding a balance between valuing our own needs and respecting the needs of others. As we evolve through different stages of life, our understanding of attachment deepens, enriching our ability to build meaningful and fulfilling friendships.

Attachment theory provides a powerful framework for understanding not only our own behaviors but also the behaviors of others. By embracing this knowledge, we gain the tools to navigate relationships with compassion and resilience, ultimately finding our place in a world of connection and belonging.

Basically, secure people feel comfortable with intimacy and are usually warm and loving; anxious people crave intimacy, are often preoccupied with their relationships, and tend to worry about their partner’s ability to love them back; avoidant people equate intimacy with a loss of independence and constantly try to minimize closeness.³

3 Dr. Amir Levine and Rachel Heller, MA, *Attached: Are You Anxious, Avoidant, or Secure? How the Science of Adult Attachment Can Help You Find and Keep Love* (New York: Random House, 2010), 8.

Secure attachment styles are easy to talk to, good listeners, and emotionally available. Doesn't this sound wonderful? Let's choose these friends all the time! I wish it was that easy—we are humans experiencing human behaviors. The truth is, we are all these styles in some degree or another at some point in our lives.

The healthier we get, however, and the better understanding we have of our attachment styles, we will begin to feel and attract other healthy mindsets. The saying goes that the more you understand yourself, the smaller your inner circle will be. This is the same with your friends. Dr. Crystal Lee of LA Concierge Psychology says it this way:

“We touched on the different types of attachment styles earlier, now we will go into a bit more depth in the following pages..⁴”

Secure Attachment Style

This is the style we strive to be and desire in a friend—the secure attachment style creates the most peace and allows you to build strong healthy relationships. These are your Living Room and Kitchen friends. This style can set appropriate boundaries, are safe and stable, are they are able to establish healthy friendships and regulate emotions. They enjoy being in meaningful relationships.

They practice self-care and understand their worth, and they are comfortable being vulnerable and have mastered the skill of regulating emotions. They are supportive of your goals and dreams and will encourage you to keep moving forward. They are genuinely happy for you.

What would a secure attachment style need in a friend?

1. They need a friend that will keep their word, reinforce trust, and be dependable.
2. They need and enforce boundaries; they appreciate autonomy.
3. They want to be respected because they respect their friends.
4. They require reciprocity and emotional support.

4 Dr. Crystal Lee, “How Attachment Style Shows Up in Friendships,” *LA Concierge Psychologist*, <https://laconciergepsychologist.com/blog/attachment-style-friendships/>.

What would a secure attachment style friend say?

1. "I appreciate how reliable you are," or "I know I can count on you."
2. "I value your honesty and support."
3. "I feel comfortable around you."
4. "I love that we can be honest and know we will not betray each other."

Anxious Attachment Style

Friends with this attachment style feel anxious and uncertain, typically lacking in self-esteem when it comes to relationships, and want emotional connection but worry that others don't want to be friends with them. These would be the type who may feel others are talking about them or feel betrayed if their text or phone calls are not returned within the time frame they feel is appropriate. They are deeply rooted in fear of rejection.

These are individuals who on the surface may seem like people pleasers or need more of a connection than others.

What would an anxious attachment style need from a friend?

1. Constant reassurance that you care and you're still friends.
2. They need over-connection, wanting to be contacted several times in a short time, and will feel there is something wrong with you if you don't contact them.
3. They need reassurance if things change and may become upset if they notice slight changes in the relationship.
4. They will want to be overly involved in your life and feel this is a way to be closer.

What would an anxious attachment friend say?

1. "Are we okay? Things aren't the same."
2. "Are you sure you like hanging out with me?"
3. "Why didn't you respond to my call or text?" "I feel like you are pulling away, and you're making other friends."

Avoidant Attachment Style

This is the opposite of anxious; they're going to be reluctant to be close and try to avoid emotional connection with others. They are not rude people and actually very kind giving people, but they don't want to rely on anyone and don't want to be relied on. It's easy to think this attachment style person has everything together, but they have difficulty being vulnerable.

If they help someone or help is needed often, they may feel they are being taken advantage of. They may have a hard time letting anyone in their inner circle.

What would an avoidant attachment style need from a friend?

1. They need their space and respect those who understand and are not offended.
2. They appreciate friends who don't demand constant closeness, as they won't call or text often.
3. They will often pull away and appreciate friends who don't push them to be more open.
4. They prefer it when friends do not probe for information.
5. They appreciate reliable friends who are not overly dependent on communication or interaction.

What would an avoidant attachment style say?

1. "I appreciate how you respect my need for space."
2. "I'm not always great at sharing my feelings, and I'm so happy you're okay with that."
3. "I value our friendship, even if I don't show it in the same way."
4. "I appreciate we can hang out and not talk all the time."

It's also important to remember that having an anxious or avoidant attachment style—or having friends who do—is not inherently bad. These styles are simply responses shaped by past experiences and are not a reflection of a person's worth or capacity for meaningful connection.

In friendships, an anxious individual might bring incredible empathy and attentiveness,

while an avoidant friend might offer valuable independence and perspective. The key is recognizing these patterns and finding ways to meet in the middle, fostering understanding and mutual respect. Meet them where they are and respect the differences you have.

How to Know What Type of Friend You Need

We've all heard the Jim Rohn quote, "You are the average of the five friends you hang around with most," and this is so true! In the following exercise, I'd like you to create a list of qualities and behaviors you would like to have in a friend. Why? Because the people you're surrounded with will absolutely affect your mental health and well-being! Write this list knowing no one is going to see it, and free write—you will be surprised at what comes out.

Look at past friendships, what you liked about them, whether they are still your friend, and what caused the breakup if they're not. Were they calling too much, not enough, or perhaps they had too much negativity or shared too much with you? Write it all down, and you should start to see a trend.

Below is an example to get you started:

What I appreciate

- They were happy to see me
- I enjoy their stories
- They are funny
- They appreciate my stories
- They ask me questions about my life ready to share
- They call and text me to keep in touch

What would be the opposite

- Why are they so excited?
- Sometimes they talked about others.
- I noticed them making fun of other
- I think they are love bombing me
- They ask me personal questions I'm not ready to share
- They call and text me every day

The person on the left would be someone you enjoy being around, they are funny and always have a story to tell, they take interest in you personally and want to know how you are. On the surface, you may not catch on to the opposite of what you like about them until you are forced to create an opposite list of the positives. Remember, you only need to do this once and reevaluate as you deem necessary. Once you have determined the type of friend you would like, this will be your basis for all future friends.

This is designed and rooted in self-awareness and reflection. Identifying what you value in a friendship helps clarify your boundaries and expectations, while recognizing the opposites highlights potential red flags or areas where you might compromise too much. By understanding your preferences and potential triggers, you empower yourself to build friendships that support your emotional well-being and growth. For example, one individual might realize they feel resentment when their friends frequently cancel plans. By identifying this as a trigger, they could open a conversation with their friends about mutual respect for each other's time, leading to more balanced and fulfilling friendships. This process of recognizing and addressing triggers fosters healthier, more resilient relationships.

Discovering Your Attachment Style

Now that you understand attachment styles, be honest with yourself and determine which attachment style most reflects you when you are in a healthy mindset and when you are overwhelmed. The purpose is to understand how your attachment style influences your friendships.

Ask yourself these questions about attachment styles – after the answers go back to the attachment style and match to the closest or what you match with the most.

1. How do you currently react or feel when friends need space?
2. How do you react or feel when friends need emotional support?
3. Do you avoid them if they want to connect more and be vulnerable?
4. How do you react or feel when they need reassurance?
5. How do you react or feel when they achieve their goals?
6. How do you react or feel when they fail?

Reflect on past friends, as I did above, only this time add to the list past friends and add stresses:

1. What qualities did you admire – what was your favorite and what you admired
2. What were the stresses -what did you find challenging about the behaviors
3. What did you not like -what traits did not align with yours

What are your core values – reflect what you stand for, integrity, respect, compassion, driven, goal orientated, healthy.

1. Free-write what's important to you in a friend, i.e., honesty, authenticity, constant connection, a shopping buddy, someone to travel with, spirituality.
2. Do your current friends reflect any of these traits?

Write yourself a list of what you want in a friend.

1. I believe a friend should be... supportive, honest, respect boundaries, celebrate success with me, listen to understand and not react. Sit with me, hold my hand. Read books with me, watch movies, be a godly friend.
2. I believe a friend should not . . . betray my trust, manipulate me, be judgmental, unreliable, dismiss my feelings, ignore my phone calls and text, shame me.

Write what type of a friend you have the energy and time to be?

1. I will strive to understand their feelings.
2. I will work on making sure I am compassionate.
3. Imagine yourself in your friends' shoes, how do you think you come across?
4. During conflicts, are you dramatic, do your problem-solve, do you add to the conflict, was the conflict driven from you?
5. Would you like the type of friend that you are?

I will improve as a friend by . . .

1. Listening to understand and not solving the problem.
2. Being open and considerate with thoughts and feelings.
3. Being supportive in offering to help when needed, psychically or emotionally.
4. Celebrating achievements with them, offering to take them to coffee or send a congratulatory text.
5. Working on understanding their feelings, not always agreeing but respecting.
6. Respecting personal space, as some need more than others.
7. Asking them about their boundaries if you think you have crossed them.
8. Remembering important dates, birthdays, anniversaries, what's important to them.
9. Reflecting on your actions: Did you notice a change after you said or did something?
10. Apologizing if needed and seeking resolution.
11. Believing and supporting them in their dreams and goals.
12. Being present.

If you are this type of friend, it will drain your energy and therefor you prefer not to be . . .

1. I don't want to go shopping, travel, or be adventurous.
2. I am not going to call every day.
3. I prefer not to be their therapist.
4. I don't want to go get drinks.
5. I don't want to be out past a certain time.
6. I don't want to go to house parties.

I know this sounds selfish to make a list of the type of friend you are not willing to be but think about it this way: You are not being a good friend if you are not honest with yourself and know what your limits are. It will end up draining you, and you will feel tired all the time, leaving no energy for the friends you enjoy being around. You will be a people pleaser and put others before yourself. It is not selfish to know your needs and ask for your needs to be met.

In everyday friendships, we don't walk up to our friends and ask them, "Hey, what type of friend are you looking for?" It would freak them out. We look for social cues and observe their behavior in friendship situations. If they were showing signs of an avoidant attachment style, for example, you would adjust your style toward them as well, not being as vulnerable or sharing too much personal information. Or if they were showing more signs of a secure attachment style, you could move toward trusting them to share more of yourself.

Final Thoughts

Navigating attachment styles, both your own and those of others will take some time and experience to master; however, enjoy the process of getting to know yourself better and building relationships with others.

I am not a psychologist, so I'm not here to offer psychological advice or to say you need to change in any way; this is simply about building awareness around all of your relationships so you can better value and appreciate all your friendships, regardless of attachment style. Whether secure, anxious, or avoidant (or a combination), my hope is this concept will help you find and develop the perfect friend group for you! - Wendy Knipp