

An illustration of four people (two men and two women) hugging each other in a group. They are rendered in a soft, painterly style with muted colors. The background is a light beige color with decorative elements: a large brown shape on the top left, a leafy branch on the top right, and horizontal lines on the bottom left and a large brown shape on the bottom right.

# Attachment: Part 2

# Childhood Attachment Styles and Corresponding Adult States of Mind

**Child:  
Secure Attachment**

**Adult:  
Secure/Autonomous**

**Child:  
Ambivalent/ Resistant  
Attachment**

**Adult:  
Preoccupied**

**Child:  
Avoidant Attachment**

**Adult:  
Dismissing**

**Child:  
Disorganised/  
Disoriented Attachment**

**Adult:  
Unresolved/  
Disorganised**



## Characteristics of Secure/Autonomous Adults

- Coherent narrative
- Balances positives with negatives
- Not overly idealizing
- Easy access to autobiographical knowledge
- Responsive to child's communication and needs

## What is "Earned" Secure Attachment?



- Individuals with childhood experiences that are likely to result in insecure attachment
- Later formed significant emotional relationship with a close friend, romantic partner, or therapist.
- Their parent-child interactions are indistinguishable from those with secure attachments from birth



## Characteristics of Dismissing Adults

- Sense of self is disconnected
- Unable to conceptualize the mind of the child
- Decreased ability to reflect on the mental state of others as well as the self
- Child act like they don't care but demonstrate physiological responses
- Lack of interpersonal connections from childhood

## Attachment Style & Memory in Dismissing Adults



- Able to accurately recall factual (semantic) information from childhood
- Unable to recall details from childhood (episodic memory)
- No emotional connection with parents
- Lack of emotion leads to episodic memory not being encoded



# Characteristics of Preoccupied Adults

## Intrusion of the Past upon the Present in Preoccupied Adults



- Child's needs are inconsistently met
- Parents' attempts to connect with child are not contingent on the child's communication
- Don't know when to back off and when to connect with child
- Intrusive and imposes own states onto child
- Powerful wish for closeness and disabling fear of losing it

- Relate to child as if they're a mirror of themselves
- Entangled with own past so can't see the needs of the child
- Primed to recall childhood experiences from present events
- Explicit vs. implicit recollection
- Lack of self-reflection leads to passing on past experiences to child



# Characteristics of Unresolved/ Disorganised Adults

- Caused by unresolved trauma or grief
- Parents exhibit frightened, dissociated, or disoriented behaviour
- Resulting inability to regulate emotions
- Abrupt shifts in state of mind
- Tendency towards:
  - Dissociation
  - Disruptive behaviors
  - Impairment in cognition and coping capacities
  - Vulnerability to PTSD

# However...

*"Thus, although insecure attachment is considered a risk factor for pathology, not all, or even most, insecurely attached infants will develop psychopathology. Psychopathology is a developmental construction involving a myriad of influences interacting over time. Similarly, secure attachment is not a guarantee of mental health, but rather viewed as a protective factor or buffer." - Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, and Carlson*

# What can we do?

*"If we can help those with unresolved trauma heal, then we can alter the cycle of intergenerational transmission of relationship disturbances - a cycle that produces and perpetuates devastating emotional suffering." - Daniel*

*Siegel*