

# ***Adult Attachment:*** ***Why We Need to Know Ourselves***



**Presented by Kate Cremer-Vogel MS, LCPC**

Why **DO** We Need  
to Know Ourselves?

*because*

Children ***learn what they live***  
and become adults who then  
***live what they've learned.***

***And then they raise children.***

***Who we are*** for our child becomes  
***who that child is.***



***Adult Attachment***

*Just like **who WE** are today  
is a result of  
**who our PARENTS** were  
for us.*

# So, who **WERE** your parents for you?



*Adult Attachment*

**How our parents *treated us* and  
how they *treated each other*  
taught us  
*how to be in relationships.***

*How we learned to be in relationship =  
our adult **Attachment Strategy**,  
meaning, it's  
**how we now relate to others**  
including **OUR children.***

**How we learned to be in relationship  
matters  
because it affects *how we interact*  
with our children.**

***How we interact*** with our children  
**matters**

because it ***teaches our children***  
**how to interact** with others.

... and our ***TYPE***  
of adult ***Attachment Strategy***  
dictates  
our ***parenting ability.***

Our *parenting ability*  
determines how *effective* we can be  
at *healing and raising*  
emotionally distressed children.

# What Is an *Attachment Strategy*?

An *attachment strategy* is . . .

a *set of behaviors* we developed

when we were children

*to get our needs met*

by our primary caregiver.

In childhood, we each developed a *particular attachment strategy* that enabled us to *survive*.



*Adult Attachment*

**An *attachment strategy***  
**is a combination of**  
**four attachment *behaviors*.**

**What are the**  
***four attachment behaviors***  
**that form an**  
***attachment strategy?***

John Bowlby <sup>1</sup> defined the essential characteristics of *attachment*.

- **Proximity Maintenance**—the *desire to be near* the people to whom we are attached
- **Safe Haven**—*returning* to the attachment figure *for comfort and safety* when the child needs it and/or in the face of a fear or threat
- **Secure Base**—the attachment figure acts as *a base of security* from which the child can explore the surrounding environment
- **Separation Distress**—*anxiety* that occurs *in the absence* of the attachment figure

<sup>1</sup> Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment*. Tavistock, UK: Institute of Human Relations.

<b>Attachment Behaviors</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>~ Half the time</b>	<b>Some times</b>	<b>Rarely</b>
<b>1. Does your child show a desire to be with you, his primary caregiver?</b>					
<b>2. Does your child actively use you as a safe base from which he goes out to explore his world?</b>					
<b>3. Does your child actively use you as a safe haven to which he returns for comfort &amp; safety?</b>					
<b>4. Does your child show distress when you are absent (per report of others)?</b>					

There are *four separate attachment strategies*, each a unique combination of specific variations of the *four attachment behaviors*.

What are these **four**  
**distinct**  
***attachment strategies?***

# Attachment Strategies

- There are **organized** strategies—ones that develop in a discernable pattern within the child-caregiver relationship.
  - **Secure**
    - **Insecure avoidant**
      - **Insecure ambivalent**
- There is a **disorganized** “strategy”—one that develops with no discernable pattern within the child-caregiver relationship.
  - **Disorganized**

Each ***Attachment Strategy***

is distinguished by  
an easy-to-understand  
***behavior pattern***

that gets repeated over and over.

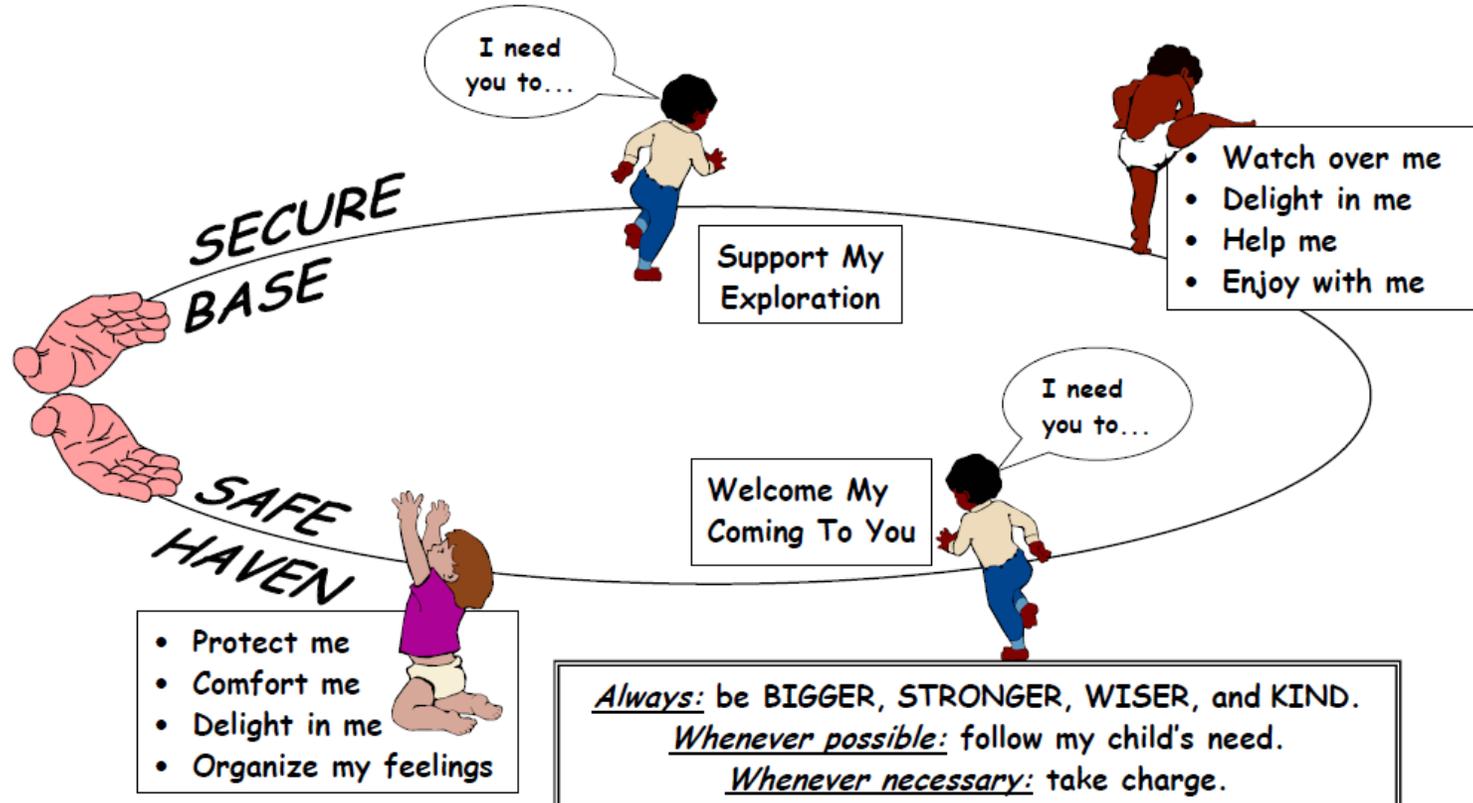
What do these  
*attachment behaviors*  
look like?

These *behavior patterns*  
can be illustrated with a  
diagram called  
The “*Circle of Security*®.”

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# CIRCLE OF SECURITY

PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD'S NEEDS



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# ***Attachment Security***

is created through an easy-to-understand  
***pattern***

that gets repeated over and over:

**The “Circle of Security<sup>©</sup>.”**

[Circle of Security link](#)

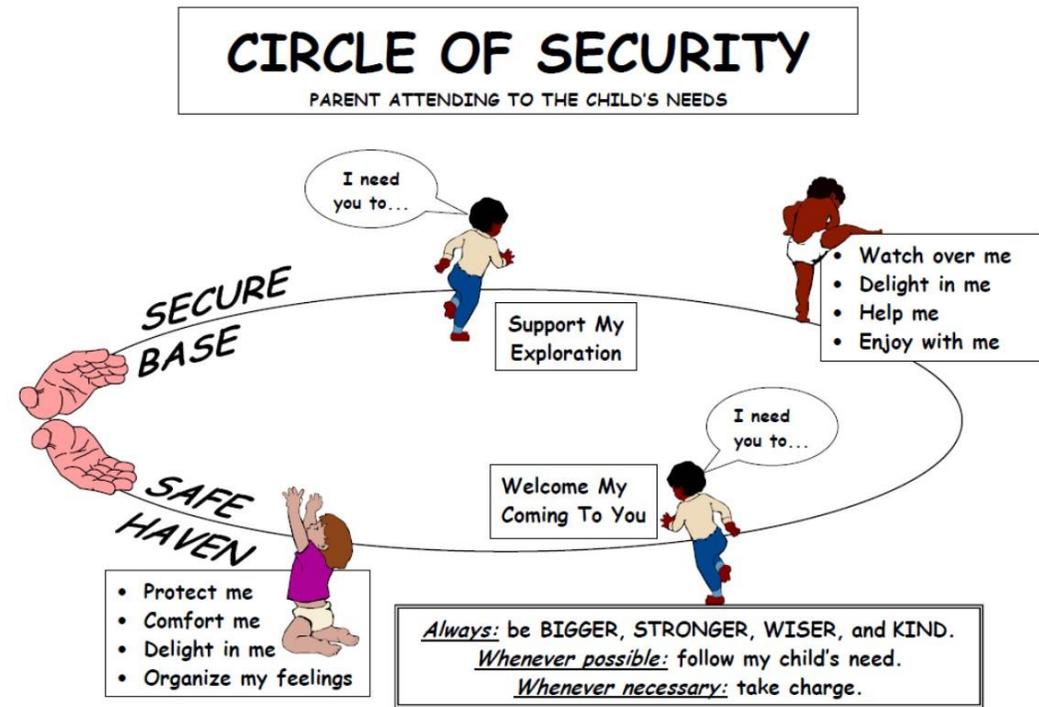


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How do each of these  
*Four Attachment Strategies*  
look on the *Circle of*  
*Security*®?

*Secure*—a relationship that creates confidence in the availability of a specific protective caregiver if needed, and supports exploration when it is safe to do so. The child does not need to focus on the needs of the caregiver, but can simply attend to what s/he wants, needs, thinks, and feels and make that known all the way around the Circle.

**SECURE**

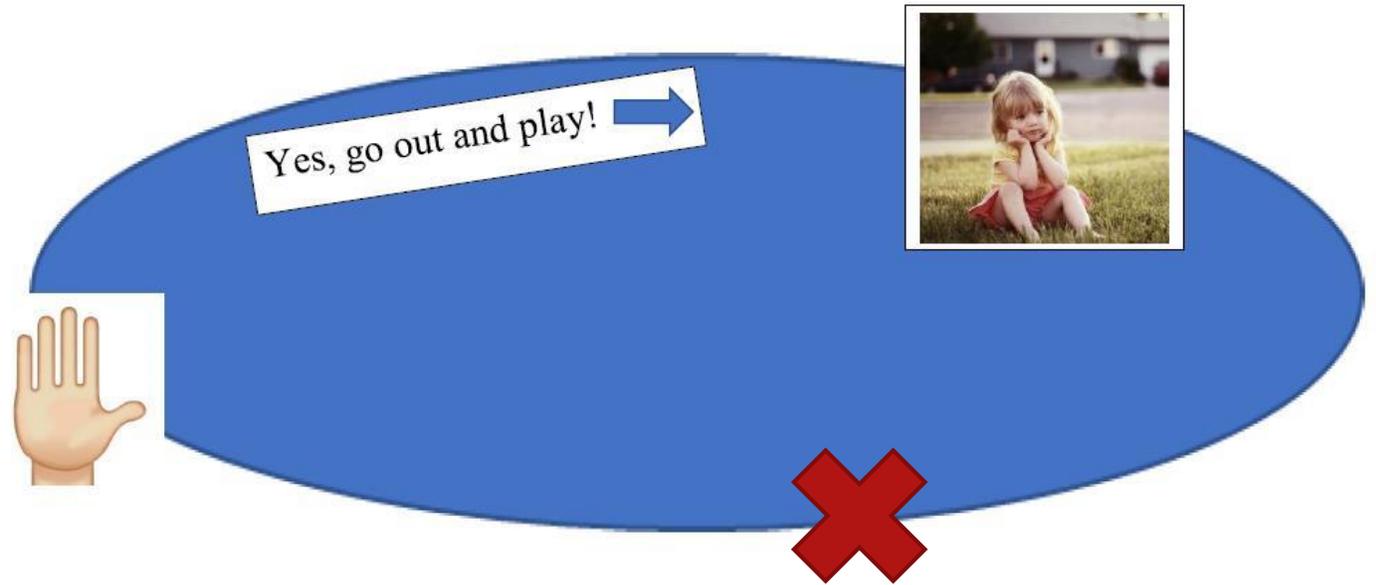


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*Avoidant*—an organized strategy of attachment that overemphasizes the exploratory aspects of the relationship (secure base/top half of Circle) while underemphasizing the need for emotional closeness and comfort (safe haven/bottom half of Circle). This strategy allows a child to stay as close as possible to the caregiver while expressing a minimum of emotional need. This attachment strategy is not considered a risk for significant psychopathology.

**INSECURE  
AVOIDANT**

## Insecure Avoidant



Parent encourages “exploration” because she is more comfortable when the child stays away.

*Ambivalent*—an organized strategy of attachment that overemphasizes the demonstration of closeness and proximity (safe haven/bottom half of Circle) while underemphasizing the exploratory aspects of the relationship (secure base/top half of Circle). The child seeks to keep an inconsistent caregiver available through a heightened display of emotionality and dependence. This attachment strategy is not considered a risk for significant psychopathology.

**INSECURE  
AMBIVALENT**

Insecure Ambivalent



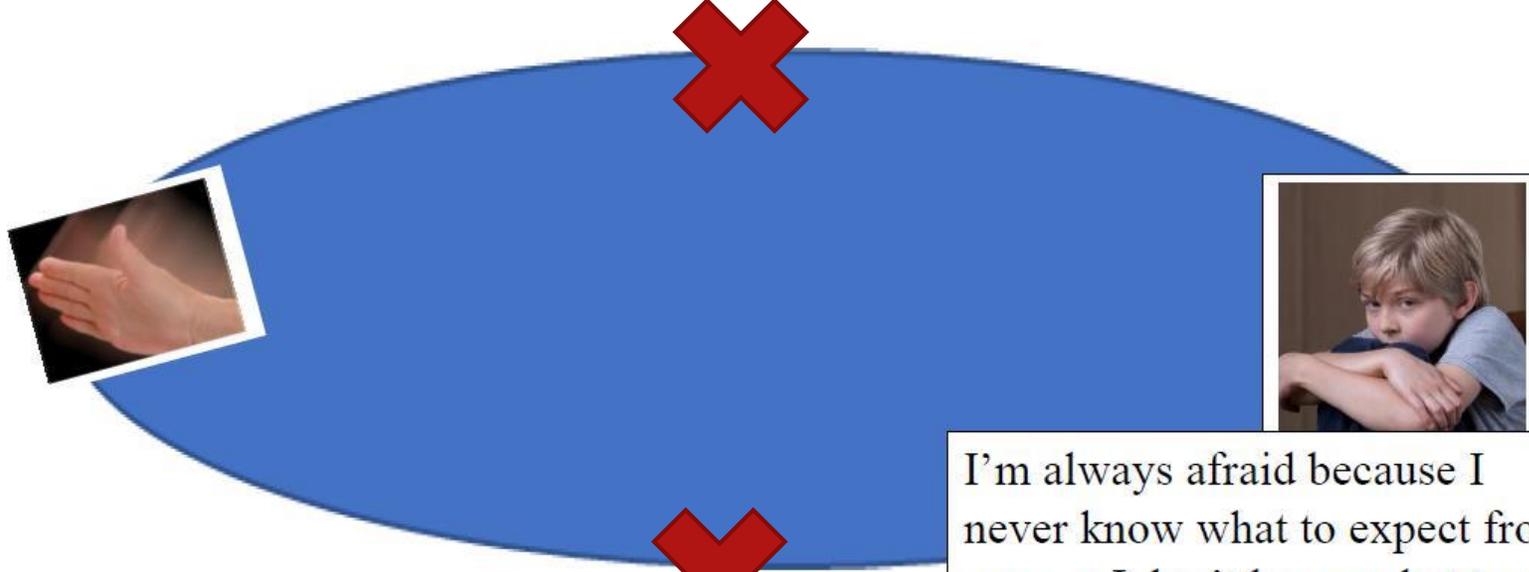
No, don't go out and play, stay here, I need you!

Parent keeps the child close for her own needs.

*Disorganized*—attachment of a child to a caregiver who is either frightened of the child or frightening to the child (or both); a breakdown in organized behavior by the child when needing to seek comfort and protection from the attachment figure, particularly when under stress. This attachment style is considered to be at risk of significant psychopathology.

**DISORGANIZED**

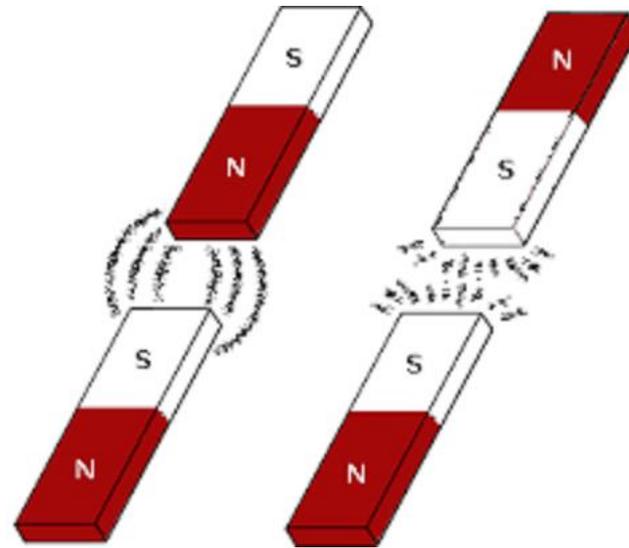
Disorganized



I'm always afraid because I never know what to expect from you, so I don't know what to do.

Parent is inconsistent: scary, abusive, loving, neglectful.

# What Is *Your* Current Adult *Attachment Strategy?*



Wkbk--40

*Adult Attachment*

# 1. “SECURE BASE”

- a. Did you feel *secure* in your primary parent’s presence, trusting that your needs would be met? Y N
- b. Did you feel *anxious* in your primary parent’s presence, though maybe trusting that your basic needs would be met? Y N
- c. Did you feel *anxious* in your primary parent’s presence and attentive to your parent’s needs (ultimately as a way to get your needs met)? Y N
- d. Did you feel *insecure/afraid* in your primary parent’s presence, never knowing what was going to come next, thus

## **2. GOING OUT TO EXPLORE**

- a. Did your primary caregiver support your interest in exploring and encourage you to do so? Y N**
- b. Did your primary caregiver seem neutral about your interest in exploring, which left you in the position of having to gather supportive energy from within? Y N**
- c. Did your primary caregiver decide if, when, and what you would explore? Y N**
- d. Did your primary caregiver sometimes ignore, reject, push, or praise you, sometimes get angry or abusive with you for wanting to explore, sometimes make fun of you, and did your caregiver sometimes leave you unsupervised? Y N**

### **3. WHILE EXPLORING**

- a. Did your primary caregiver support you, supervise you for safety, and delight in your exploring? Y N**
- b. Did your primary caregiver neither support you nor discourage you and usually leave you on your own while you were exploring? Y N**
- c. Did your primary caregiver become overinvolved with your exploration, setting its focus, parameters, and pace? Y N**
- d. Did your caregiver sometimes ignore, reject, push, or praise you when you were exploring, sometimes get angry or abusive with you, sometimes made fun of you as you were exploring, and sometimes left you alone without appropriate supervision? Y N**

## **4. RETURN FROM EXPLORING**

- a. Did your primary caregiver accept that you were done exploring, welcome you back, and help you to reregulate after exploring? Y N**
- b. Was your primary caregiver fairly neutral when you returned from exploring, dismissing any need you may have had for reregulation? Y N**
- c. Did your primary caregiver decide when you were done exploring and bring you back in order to reregulate her/himself? Y N**
- d. Did your primary caregiver sometimes ignore, reject, or praise you when you came back from exploring, sometimes get angry or abusive with you when you came back**

## **5. “SAFE HAVEN”**

- a. Did you feel safe coming back to your primary caregiver, was your primary caregiver interested in what you had to say about your exploring, and did s/he help you to make sense of the experiences you had while exploring? Y N**
- b. Did you feel anxious coming back to your primary caregiver who showed little active interest in hearing about your explorations, and when you did talk about your experiences, s/he did not attempt to help you to make sense of them? Y N**
- c. Did you feel anxious about coming back to your primary caregiver, who showed interest in your exploring when she wanted to feel good about herself, but shut you down from talking about your exploration if it did not make her feel good or made her feel embarrassed? Y N**
- d. Did you not feel safe returning to your primary caregiver who did not really care about your experience, sometimes ignored, rejected, praised, ridiculed, or got angry at you for talking about it, sometimes**

**ROUGHLY, IF THE MAJORITY OF YOUR ANSWERS CIRCLED “YES” ARE:**

**“a”** –You presently see yourself using a **secure attachment strategy**.

**“b”** –You presently see yourself using an **insecure-avoidant attachment strategy**.

**“c”** –You presently see yourself using an **insecure-ambivalent attachment strategy**.

**“d”** –You presently see yourself using a **disorganized attachment “strategy”** (since there is no discernable pattern to behavior here, there really is no “strategy,” per se).

## Now, tally up your results:

Number of Yeses for “a” questions: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Yeses for “b” questions: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Yeses for “c” questions: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Yeses for “d” questions: \_\_\_\_\_

4 or 5 Yeses for a, b, c, or d? \_\_\_\_\_

2 Yeses for one letter and 3 Yeses for another? \_\_\_\_\_

2 Yeses for one letter and 2 Yeses for another letter plus one Yes for third letter? \_\_\_\_\_

5 Yeses spread across all four letters? \_\_\_\_\_

# You may be able to give yourself a *temporary label* for your *attachment strategy*:

4 or 5 Yeses for **a**? \_\_\_\_\_ *Secure Attachment Strategy*

4 or 5 Yeses for **b**? \_\_\_\_\_ *Insecure-Avoidant Strategy*

4 or 5 Yeses for **c**? \_\_\_\_\_ *Insecure-Ambivalent Strategy*

4 or 5 Yeses for **d**? \_\_\_\_\_ *Disorganized Attachment “Strategy”*

- or -

2 Yeses for \_\_\_\_\_ and 3 Yeses for \_\_\_\_\_

2 Yeses for \_\_\_\_\_, 2 Yeses for \_\_\_\_\_, and 1 Yes for \_\_\_\_\_

2 Yeses for \_\_\_\_\_, 1 Yes for \_\_\_\_\_, 1 Yes for \_\_\_\_\_, and 1 Yes for \_\_\_\_\_

# What *might* your results *mean*?

If you had **4 or 5 Yeses** for **one letter**,  
for now, **you see yourself** as having a **particular  
attachment strategy**.

If you had Yeses spread over **2 or more letters**,  
for now, you may see yourself as being  
**unsure what your strategy might be**.

# Is My Result Accurate?



*Not necessarily.*

Attachment Strategies are *accurately assessed* by a *professional* using an instrument called the **“Adult Attachment Inventory.”**

[See pg. 7 of the “Be Child Wise” text for a sample of the AAI questions.]

Although your results  
may not be *exact*,  
taking a tour around your own  
*Circle of Security*®  
allows you to begin to see *yourself*,  
*your child*, *your child's needs*, and your  
*relationship* more objectively.

**Is My Result *Set in Stone*?**

**NO!**

**An *attachment strategy* is formed via  
thousands of  
*repetitive interactional experiences*  
with another person  
over an extensive period of time.**

Repetitive experiences create the *flesh of neural pathways* in our brain *no matter our age.*

- SO -

Repetitive *RELATIONAL* experiences  
can build and shift our  
*attachment strategy no matter our age.*

So, over time, with the right *kind* and  
right *amount of relational experiences*  
with a *securely attached* person  
can all adults develop a  
secure attachment strategy?

... it depends.

We certainly can *give ourselves and our children* a corrective relational experience with the *goal* of shifting our/their attachment strategy toward *secure attachment,*



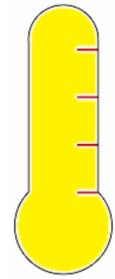
... however, due to the fact we each have a ***unique genetic inheritance*** and a ***unique prenatal/first-year-of-life experience,***

**. . . the outcome of our attachment work may not be *predictable*.  
Yet, *progress toward relational security* is essential  
and takes *center stage*  
in *our healing* experience  
and the *healing of our child*.**

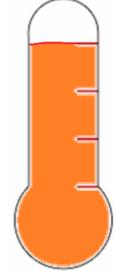
Why does it matter  
what our  
*Attachment Strategy* is?



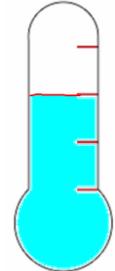
**Our Attachment Strategy** reflects our level of **trust** in others.



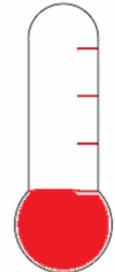
“a” –Secure attachment strategy



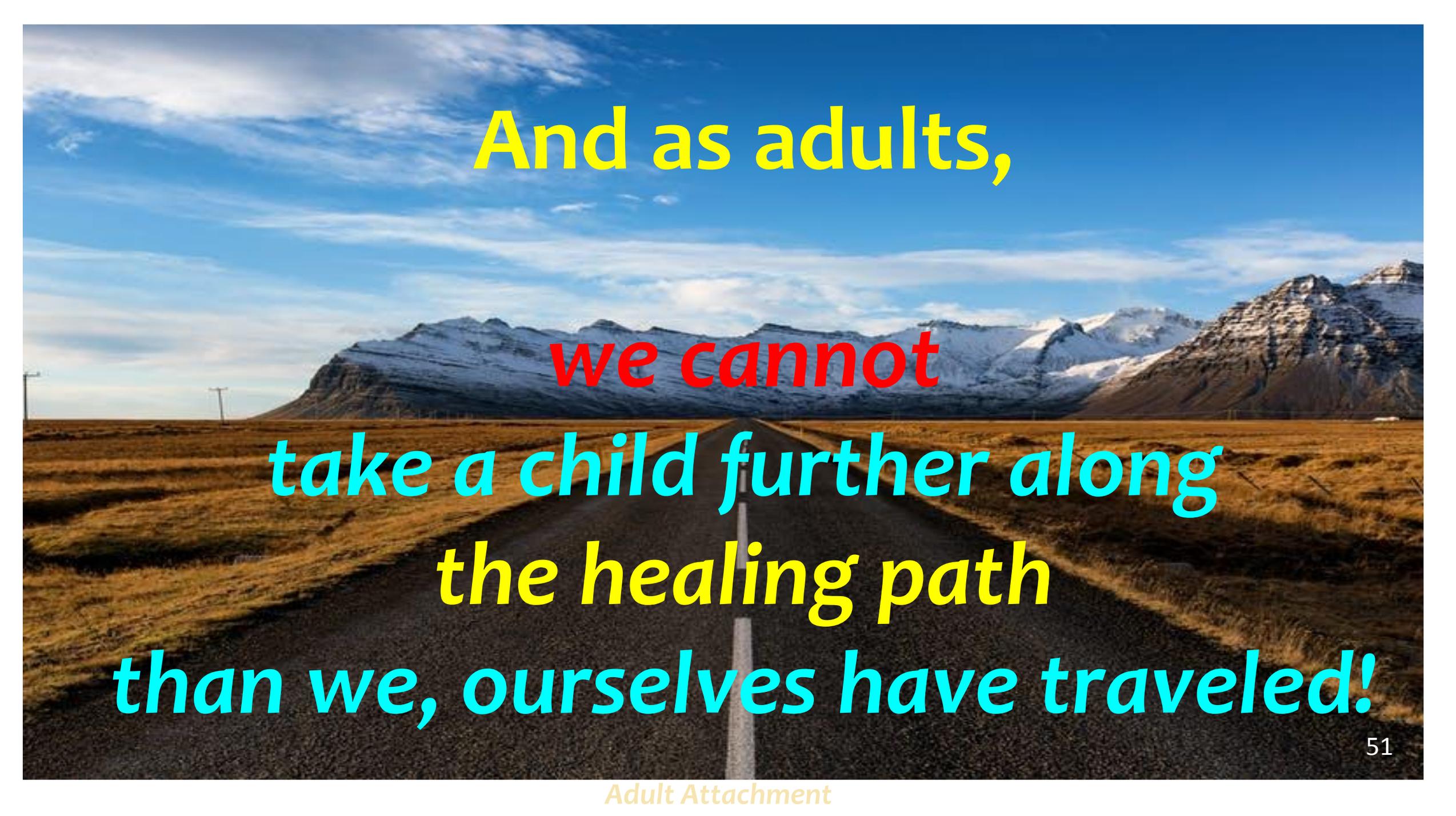
“b” –Insecure-avoidant attachment strategy



“c” –Insecure-ambivalent attachment strategy



“d” –Disorganized attachment



**And as adults,  
we cannot  
take a child further along  
the healing path  
than we, ourselves have traveled!**

**This means**  
**that a parent with a**  
***secure attachment strategy***  
**is potentially able to positively shift a**  
**child's**  
***insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent,***  
**or**  
***disorganized attachment***  
**up to a *secure* level of attachment.**

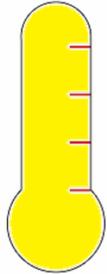
Likewise, a parent with an  
insecure avoidant, insecure  
ambivalent, or  
disorganized attachment  
*can only positively shift their child's*  
insecure avoidant, insecure  
ambivalent, or  
disorganized attachment  
*up to their own level of attachment*

Adult Attachment

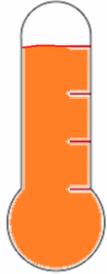
So is *fully healing* our child's  
attachment strategy a  
*possibility?*

There always is that  
*possibility,*  
but *making progress* in shifting our  
child's attachment strategy toward  
being a more *secure* one  
is *always the goal.*

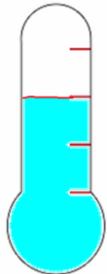
Remember, **your child's attachment strategy** reflects his/her level of **trust** in others just like yours does.



“a” –Secure attachment strategy



“b” –Insecure-avoidant attachment strategy

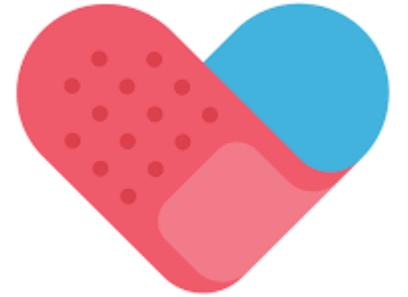


“c” –Insecure-ambivalent attachment strategy



“d” –Disorganized attachment

Is there anything I can do to  
heal the  
*attachment strategy*  
I learned in order to *survive*  
in my childhood?



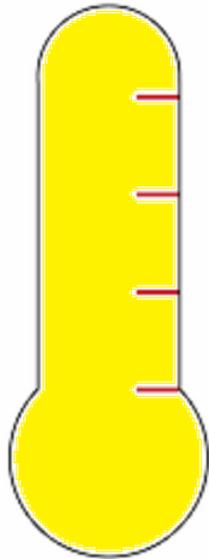
**Yes!**

Just like a child with an ***insecure*** or ***disorganized*** attachment strategy can move toward healing by being cared for by a parent with a ***more secure*** attachment strategy,

... we, as *adults can move toward healing* our insecure or disorganized attachment strategy *by being in a relationship* with a person with a *secure* attachment strategy!

If we've done this work and  
achieved the goal, our  
attachment strategy is then  
called an

***“EARNED Secure”***  
attachment strategy.



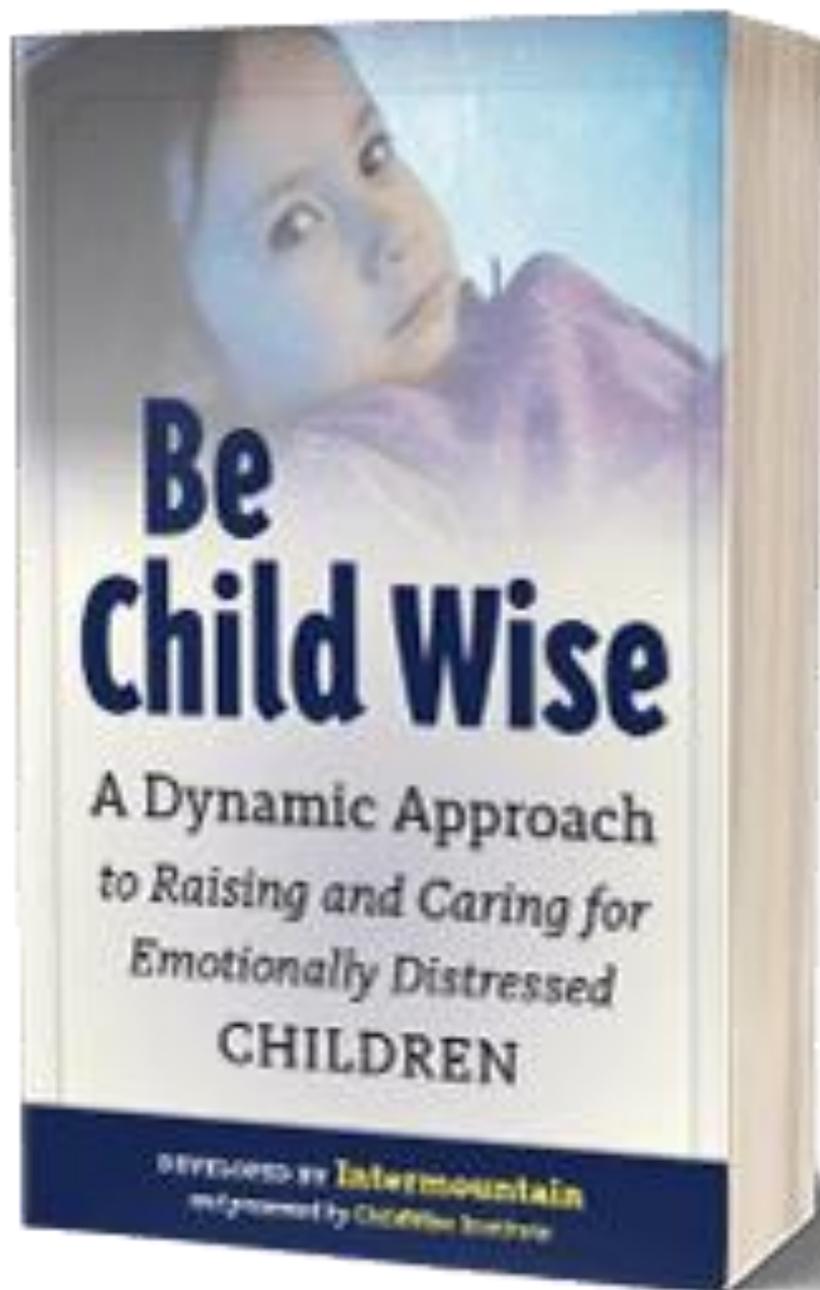
# How do I find a *securely attached* adult?

**\*Spouse**

**\*Good Friend**

**\*Therapist**





# Be Child Wise

A Dynamic Approach  
to Raising and Caring for  
Emotionally Distressed  
CHILDREN

developed by **Intermountain**  
and guided by Debbie Smith