
Adult Attachment Patterns

To capture a broad-stroke depiction of attachment, Mary Main and her colleagues developed a semistructured interview about childhood attachment relationships and the meaning the individual *currently gives to those past relational experiences*. The individuals account is examined for material that is explicitly expressed by the individual and for material that appears out of the interviewee's awareness (e.g., apparent incoherence and inconsistencies of dialogue) with the aim of assessing the unconscious elements of the attachment relationship.

Scoring is based upon:

- (a) descriptions of childhood experiences
- (b) language used in the interview
- (c) ability to give an integrated, believable account of experiences and their meaning

The language and conversation style used is considered to reflect the state of mind of the interviewee with respect to attachment. The Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI) is then scored from the transcript using scales that characterize childhood experience with each parent as loving, rejecting, neglecting, involving, or pressuring. Other scales assess conversational style, overall coherence of transcript and of thought, idealization, active anger, fear of loss, metacognitive monitoring, and passivity of speech. Scale scores are then used to assign the adult to one of three major classifications:

1. *Secure/autonomous*: Individuals classified as secure/autonomous describe varied childhood experiences, maintain a balanced view of early relationships, value attachment relationships, and view attachment-related experiences as influential in their development.
2. *Insecure/dismissing*: Adults are classified as insecure on the basis of incoherence, i.e., they have failed to assess and integrate the meaning of those experiential memories. Adults classified as insecure/dismissing deny or devalue the impact of early attachment relationships, have difficulty with recall of specific events, often idealize experiences, and usually describe an early history of rejection.
3. *Insecure/preoccupied*: Adults are classified as insecure on the basis of incoherence, i.e., they have failed to assess and integrate the meaning of those experiential memories. Adults classified as insecure/preoccupied display confusion about past experiences, and current relationships with parents are marked by active anger or passivity.
4. *Unresolved*: Individuals may be classified as unresolved in addition to a major classification. These adults report attachment-related traumas of loss and/or abuse that have not been resolved. The unresolved classification is given precedence over the major classification and is considered an insecure classification.
5. *"Can't Classify"*: This category is assigned when scale scores reflect elements rarely seen together in an interview (e.g., high idealization of one parent and high active anger at the other). Such interviews are highly incoherent and insecure.

ADULT ATTACHMENT PATTERNS

Individual or Group

-adapted from Dan Siegel's AAI-inspired questions from *Mindsight*, 2010

SO WHAT?

Why should anyone care about a research instrument? Well, in addition to its utility for the research community, this particular instrument is highly applicable to adults traumatized as children in clinical settings as well. The coded and interpreted interview is predictive of the adult's attachment style to his/her own children. However, in clinical settings it is multipurpose even without its official coding or interpretation.

1. Describe your early family situation: where you were born, where you lived, whether you moved around much, what your caregivers did at various times for a living.

2. Describe your relationship with your parents as a young child. Begin as far back as you can remember.

3. Please choose five adjectives or words that reflect *your relationship with your mother/caregiver* starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood—as early as you can go, but say, age 5 to 12 is fine.

MOTHER (OR PRIMARY CAREGIVER):

- a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
d. _____ e. _____

4. Think of an example for each word to illustrate a memory or experience that supports the word.

a. _____
b. _____

- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

5. Please choose five adjectives or words that reflect *your relationship with your father/caregiver* starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood—as early as you can go, but say, age 5 to 12 is fine.

FATHER (OR OTHER CAREGIVER):

- a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
- d. _____ e. _____

6. Think of an example for each word to illustrate a memory or experience that supports the word.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

7. Which parent/caregiver did you feel closer to, and why?

8. As a child, when you got upset, what would you do?

9. What was it like the first time you were separated from your parents or other caregivers?

10. What was it like for you and for them during this separation?

11. If you were sick, injured, or emotionally distressed, what would happen?

12. Were you ever very afraid or terrified of your caregivers? If so, how often?

13. How did your relationship with your caregivers change over time?

14. As a child, did anyone close to you ever die or leave you?

15. How were those losses for you, and how did they impact you and your family?

16. Are you close with your caregivers now?

17. Why do you think they behaved the way that did?

18. What are the main things you've learned about caring for a child from your caregivers?

19. How do you feel all of these issues of your attachment history have affected your ability to be open, to attune, and to resonate with others in your personal or your professional life?

20. Did you find this worksheet difficult? What was most difficult about it?
