



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE NEWSLETTER

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WHAT'S YOUR ATTACHMENT STYLE?

Melissa Young, EAP Counselor

Attachment exerted an invisible but powerful pull on the child, just as the heavenly bodies are connected by gravitational forces. But unlike gravity, attachment makes its presence known by a negative inverse square law: the further the attached person is from their secure base, the greater the pull of attachment.

The 'elastic band' which constitutes the attachment bond is slack and imperceptible in the presence of a secure base. If the secure base becomes unreliable or the limits of exploration are reached, the bond tugs at the heartstrings"
— John Bowlby



Attachment to another person, for many, is considered the foundation of all human relationships. Each of us has an "attachment style," generally formed in childhood with our primary caregivers. These early experiences can often impact how we form and sustain our past and current significant relationships. Attachment theorists following the pioneering work of John Bowlby describe three common attachment styles, and one less common, that describe most individual's ways of developing close relationships. These styles are commonly described as; secure, anxious, avoidant and anxious/avoidant which are briefly defined as;

- **Secure:** Comfortable in a warm, loving and close relationship; Depends on a partner and allows their partner to depend on them; Accepts partner's needs without feeling threatened or rejected; Communicates needs honestly and openly, is attuned to their partner's needs, responds appropriately and does not avoid

conflict; Trusting, empathic, tolerant of differences and forgiving

- **Anxious:** Insecure in intimate relationships; Constantly worried about rejection and abandonment; Overly sensitive to partner's actions and moods, takes behavior personally; Highly emotional, can be argumentative, angry and controlling, poor personal boundaries; Communication is not collaborative
- **Avoidant:** Emotionally distant and rejecting in intimate relationships, keeps partner at arm's length; Equates intimacy with loss of independence, prefers autonomy to togetherness; Communication is intellectual, not comfortable talking about emotions, avoids conflict then explodes; Does not depend on others or allows others to depend on them
- **Anxious/Avoidant:** Has difficulty with emotional closeness, is argumentative, rages, unable to

regulate emotions; Often has a history of trauma and loss with intrusive memories, dissociation and depression, possible PTSD; May lack empathy and remorse, displays antisocial and abusive behavior

Although our attachment style is typically formed in childhood, it can be impacted by our current relationship experiences. Many of us may choose adult partnerships that exacerbate the challenges described in the last three attachment styles. However being aware of one's own style of attachment may help guide our choices, which in turn can help heal some of our "original attachment wounds."

There are many excellent resources to explore regarding attachment styles. The Counselors at the Employee Assistance Program can be one of them. If you would like to learn more about how attachment styles may affect you or someone you love, please do not hesitate in contacting us.

TECHNOLOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS: YOUR CALL

By Susan Murphy, EAP Counselor

“I love Facebook because it keeps me in touch with my friends, and what everyone is doing.”

“Texting is easier than trying to call my kid, who probably won’t answer the phone, anyway.”

“Gaming lets me have fun and chat with my friends at the same time—.”

We love our smartphones, tablets, Instagram, use the internet, play online games—and who hasn’t taken a selfie, for heaven’s sake? So much of who we are, what we do, and how we define ourselves today is based in our various uses of technological gadgets and social media. You can access information on a crisis in another part of the world in seconds, while texting a meet up time and place with your girlfriend. Or break up and make up with your lover, plan a trip to Portugal, and send a picture that was taken 3 seconds ago to your brother who lives in Antarctica, all while sipping on a caramel macchiato in a comfy chair in Starbucks.

We love our technology! But we aren’t very good in describing our emotions with it, and making our meaning clear electronically presents extra challenges—writing “LOL” describes our laughter, but it’s no substitute for actually hearing our friend or loved one laugh. Because electronic media transmit emotions so poorly compared to in-person interaction, many view it as the ideal way to deliver difficult messages—it blocks us from registering



the negative emotional responses such messages engender, which provides one the illusion that no harm is being done. Unfortunately, this also usually means we don’t transmit these messages with empathy either. We have made friends, and broken hearts too.

Complaints abound that technology is responsible for destroying relationships—while others maintain that the very same technology has been the springboard for developing exciting new relationships. Yet, a significant amount of research has revealed that not only has technology use become problematic for relationships, but specific behaviors are associated with the negative effects. In one study:

- 62% said technology interferes with their leisure activities
- 40% said their partner gets distracted by the TV during a conversation
- 35% said their partner will check his/her phone upon hearing a notification even during a conversation
- 33% said their partner checks his/her phone during mealtimes or when dining out
- 25% said their partner actively texts other people during face-to-face conversations

While many of these interruptions are likely unintentional or unconsciously done, they can still send the message that the device is more important in the moment than is the spouse or romantic partner. In addition, men’s behaviors were cited more often as likely to be occurring multiple times daily than women’s were.

If the quality of your relationship is being deteriorated by these interferences, suggestions from various sources include setting mutually agreed rules for using devices, including watching television, for times when you are together or could be together. Technology-free times for each day can be determined based on your lifestyle, family activities, or time needed to connect as a couple. Be realistic and make choices that both of you can stick to. Examine your own technology use—carefully and critically.

So, knowing that every coin has two sides, it’s imperative that we use technology wisely—it can be a means to dodge taking responsibility for your actions or to make confrontation easier—and it can offer a plethora of ways to not only build, but to maintain relationships. Heads or tails. Your call. Your relationship.

HONEY GARLIC CROCKPOT MEATBALLS

BY GINNY BAYUK, BILLING AND REPORTING SPECIALIST



INGREDIENTS

- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/2 cup ketchup
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce
- 3 cloves garlic minced
- 1 28 oz. bag fully cooked, frozen meatballs

INSTRUCTIONS

In a medium bowl, mix together brown sugar, honey, ketchup, soy sauce and garlic.

Place frozen meatballs in a 3-4 quart crockpot and pour sauce over meatballs. Stir so all meatballs are coated evenly. Cook on LOW for 4 hours, stirring occasionally.

Use as an appetizer or serve over rice for a meal!

TIPS FOR PARENTS TO HELP CHILDREN NAVIGATE DIVORCE

By Cary Imeson, LCSW

While research indicates that divorce rates in the United States have declined slightly in recent years, there are still a significant number of divorces each year and many children and families are affected. Divorce is a highly stressful for all involved. It is the second highest rated stressor — just behind death of a spouse — on many well regarded stress screening tools. Parenting well during divorce is challenging. Most parents say their children's well-being is their primary focus during this difficult transition, but many don't know how to help themselves or their children navigate this difficult process. Dr. Jenifer McIntosh is an internationally respected expert in the field of divorce and child custody. She provides the following tips for parents when helping their children deal with divorce.

1. Parents have a large influence on children's divorce outcomes

To a great extent, your child's outcomes after divorce are in your hands. That's the good news, and the challenging news as well. The way you go about divorce will make a difference to your children's ability to cope with the family separation, as well as their long term well-being.

2. Warmth, availability and emotional safety

It's important during and following divorce for parents to be available and responsive to their children. That means warm, real time parenting, not good time overcompensating. Let your children know you are willing to hear about all of their feelings — not just the ones that feel good or seem fair.

3. Doing the emotional work

Being available to your children means clearing a space in your own mind for thinking clearly about them. Sadness, anger or confusion are normal and necessary emotions for children as well as parents after divorce. Adjustment and working it through is what matters.

4. Keeping it predictable

Just like before divorce, infants and children after separation need predictability, routines, practical support, and emotional scaffolding from Mom and Dad. They need parents to stay attuned and be responsive to their needs. Make sure your parenting arrangements enable this to happen.

5. Cleaning up the conflict

Parents may take a while to sort through the conflict that came with the separation. Get all the support you need to sort it through as early as possible and go back to your mediator or counselor for "tune-ups" as needed. While you are in the thick of parenting decisions and settlements, your



children shouldn't be. Reassure them you are working to resolve things.

6. Divorcing your spouse, not your child's other parent

Building a parenting alliance with your ex-partner is crucial to your child's emotional security after separation. That doesn't mean being best friends, but it does mean agreeing on how to communicate safely and effectively about your child's needs. Enlist the support of a good mediator if that is hard to achieve on your own.

7. Don't drag it out

The longer parents' take to build an alliance and resolve their disputes, the more energy a child has to use to cope with strain and stress in the family. That can drain a child of energy they need to get on with their normal development: learning, building their identity and esteem, having good friendships, and achieving their goals.

8. Legal advice versus legal action

Many parents benefit from the advice of lawyers, to inform them about their rights and responsibilities in making parenting plans and resolving financial settlements. Be aware that getting legal advice is very different from taking legal action. Adversarial processes are necessary for a small percent of the population who have serious risks and issues that cannot be resolved otherwise. Research shows

that engaging in court can do further and long term damage to your relationship with the child's other parent. Take good legal advice, but try to minimize the need for legal action.

9. Letting your children have a safe voice

Research also shows it can be beneficial for everyone if children are given safe opportunities, free from loyalty burdens, to express how things are for them, and for their parents to better understand that. This is very different from asking children to make decisions — never a good idea. Some court and mediation programs have specially trained social science professionals who can assist with safely including children's views in your planning for post-divorce life.

10. Permission and support for safe relationships with both parents

Despite the acrimony that many parents feel for each other during the divorce process, most children want to keep their relationships with each parent and need support to do that. Loyalty conflicts are common when children see and feel a lack of respect and cooperation between their parents. Worse still is the child who survives emotionally by distancing one parent in order to keep sides with the other. Effective management of the adult emotions involved means everything for children's well-being, especially their need to preserve supportive relationships with both parents.

CODEPENDENCY: THE PEOPLE PLEASER PERSONALITY

By Jared Belsher, EAP Counselor

Codependency is often used to describe the behavior of a person who enables another person's dysfunctional behavior or addiction to continue because of excessive overhelping.

A codependent person has a desire to help others but they often end up enabling the other person's dysfunctional behavior to continue partly because they are not focusing enough on meeting their own needs. The term was originally used to identify the traits of people who were in relationships with alcoholics who enabled their partner's drinking to continue by overhelping them. Because of their desire to help others, a person who is codependent could be described as having a "people pleaser personality." The codependent person's problem is that their desire to please and help others is so strong they put the needs of others ahead of their own. Unfortunately, this codependent behavior usually ends up being detrimental to both the codependent person and the person they are trying to help.

Pleasing other people is not a negative personality trait but it can be if a person focuses too much of their energy on meeting the needs of others and not enough energy on meeting their own needs. To achieve a healthier balance in pleasing others, a codependent person should adjust their people pleasing so that they more equally balance helping themselves and helping others. A healthy amount of people pleasing is expending around 50% of our energy on meeting the needs of others and around 50% of our energy on meeting our needs.

However, the percentages may need to be adjusted depending on the person and situation. For example, a child might require more than 50% of someone's time and energy but an adult relative might require just 10-15% of our time and energy. Codependent people get stuck because they don't have flexibility in how much they help others. Codependent people will often spend 80% or more of their time and energy helping others and not enough time and energy on meeting their own needs.

How do you know if you have codependent traits? Following are some characteristics of codependent people from the Mental Health America website (<https://www.mhanational.org/issues/co-dependency>). If you identify with some of these characteristics, you may have codependent traits.



Characteristics of Codependent People

- An exaggerated sense of responsibility for the actions of others
- A tendency to confuse love and pity, with the tendency to "love" people they can pity and rescue
- A tendency to do more than their share, all of the time
- A tendency to become hurt when people don't recognize their efforts
- A sense of guilt when asserting themselves
- A compelling need to control others
- Lack of trust in self and/or others
- Difficulty identifying feelings
- Problems with setting healthy boundaries with others
- Difficulty making decisions
- Difficulty saying "no" when asked for help
- Difficulty asking for help

The good news is that codependency is treatable. The key to treating codependency is to identify the codependent traits, practice identifying and changing the underlying irrational codependent beliefs, and changing behavior by prioritizing self-care. For example, a codependent person might have an irrational belief such as, "Everyone's needs are more important than mine." This irrational belief needs to be replaced with a healthier belief such as, "My needs are just as important as everyone else's needs." The new belief then needs to be repeated until the old belief is extinguished. The challenge often is that codependent people will feel selfish or guilty when they place their needs as a priority. The guilt and selfishness they feel can prevent them from continuing to practice more healthy thinking. The key thing for codependent people to understand is that when they put their needs as a priority they aren't being selfish, they are merely considering their needs to be just as important as everyone else's needs. The ultimate goal for a codependent

person is to find a way to meet their needs and the needs of others at the same time.

Here are some things codependent people can do to help reduce their focus on helping others and improve self-care:

- 1) Talk with a counselor at the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). A counselor can help you learn more about codependency, learn how to be more assertive, learn how to set healthy boundaries, and learn how to put your needs as a priority.
- 2) Educate yourself about codependency. Research codependency online, watch videos on codependency on YouTube, and read books on codependency.
- 3) Join a support group such as Al-Anon or Co-Dependents Anonymous to learn from others about their experiences with codependence.

Saint Alphonsus Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Regular Appointment Hours:

8:30 a.m. - 6:30 p.m., Monday-Friday
(special appointment hours by request)

Phone: (208) 367-3300

Location:

6140 W. Emerald St., Boise, ID 83704

Counselors:

Susan Murphy, LCPC, ACADC
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Saint Alphonsus