

STAYING CONNECTED TO YOUR PARTNER

HOW TO OVERCOME FEAR OR
UNCERTAINTY IN THE WAY
YOU LOVE AND COMMIT

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CHAPTER 1

DANCING AROUND CLOSENESS

- ❖ Do you go in and out of relationships? Do you feel as if you keep finding the wrong person, or continue to find fault with the person you're with?
- ❖ Do you want to fall in love, yet find yourself still single?
- ❖ Are you having difficulty making the relationship or marriage you are in work?
- ❖ Do you feel that your partner is stifling you or not meeting your emotional needs at all?

If any of these questions resonates with you, you are probably having difficulty with “attachment” issues. Psychologically speaking, this means that you have trouble finding and maintaining the right level of closeness with your spouse, partner, or lover. You either want more attachment than your partner gives you, or you recoil from attachment when your partner wants more closeness than you are willing to give.

Attachment issues are at the root of many relationship conflicts. I have seen this over and over again in my work as a psychotherapist for more than twenty-five years, helping singles and couples understand the “dance of closeness” they perform every day with their partner or spouse.

In most cases, relationship problems center around one of three attachment problems: one partner needs either too much attachment (referred to as dependency), or too little attachment

(referred to as push-pull), or the person floats back and forth between the two feelings (referred to as wavering.) Much of the focus of my work as a psychotherapist is in helping people understand just which of these patterns they follow and why, so they can arrive at a true transformation in how they approach love and romance.

In this book, I want to offer you the same approach I use in my private practice. I know that there are dozens of relationship books on the market, offering a wide range of advice about how to fix a broken marriage or how to find a mate if you are single.

This book is different though. The work I will do with you is based on looking into the root causes of your behavior so you can get quickly to the core of your intimacy problems and truly understand your attachment issues to stop the dance you do with your spouse or partner.

If you are single and dating, wishing to find a mate, you will get insight into why you may keep going from one person to another, always thinking there is something wrong with each one or never being able to attach to the right one. If you are married and often feel unhappy with your partner (or your partner feels unhappy with you) or you are thinking about divorce, you will understand what might lie behind your dissatisfaction and why your relationship may suffer from turmoil. Whatever your situation, I will provide you with both the knowledge to understand your background better and the tools to change your behavior so you can create a healthy, loving relationship.

After reading this book, you will learn as much about yourself as my clients who work personally with me in my office. You will walk away from this book knowing why you do what you do in your relationships, and the steps to take in order to create lasting happiness.

If you currently have someone you are dating that you might be serious about, or if you are married, you may wish to have your mate or spouse read this book too. Relationships involve two people, so fixing your problems obviously works best if both of you attempt to understand your roles in creating a relationship breakdown.

Finally, let me add one important point. If you are reading this book while believing that your partner is “at fault” for all your problems, you won’t make much progress. Trust me when I ask you to accept right now that both of you play a role in your intimacy breakdown, no matter what you think happens on the surface of your arguments or conflicts. Don’t read this book in an effort to “fix” your partner whom you want to blame.

You need to focus in this book on getting an understanding of how your own behaviors and attitudes towards attachment play a role in your relationship conflicts. Then, if you can change yourself, you will become stronger and more able to recognize how you and your partner can resolve the problems between you. You may be able to successfully fix your relationship, but you may also realize that this is indeed the wrong person for you. At least, you will be ready to move on though, knowing much more about yourself and the type of person you may want to be with.

WHAT LIES AT THE ROOT OF MOST RELATIONSHIPS PROBLEMS

When most people first start examining their relationship difficulties in therapy, they usually focus on the wrong issues. For example, if they are constantly squabbling with their mate, they tend to go over and over in their mind what each person said and what each did. They think that by analyzing the details of their arguments and pinpointing one person to accept blame (usually their partner!), they can stop the arguing.

Or if they are constantly dating, always finding fault with people they meet, they may believe that no one can “make” them happy. They conclude that it is always the other person who is wrong or has some type of problem that interferes with the relationship.

This type of analysis is useful, but it fails to go deep enough to solve most relationship problems. Placing blame, focusing on the details of arguments, and finding faults in others is what I call surface or content therapy, which goes only skin deep and does not get to the level of true psychological understanding.

The truth is, your relationship woes reflect much deeper personality traits that may extend all the way back to your early conditioning as an infant. Believe it or not, the type of romantic bonds you form today are the result of how you learned to bond with your parents and family when you were a child. Your early environmental influences literally dictate how you attach to people today, how safe you feel in relationships, and how open you are to accepting love from others.

(Note: Your life circumstances can also play a significant role in how you attach to others. However, for the purpose of this book, our focus will be solely on the developmental contribution of attachment.)

If you are like most people who come to see me, you are probably surprised by this concept. How can my early childhood years, you may be wondering, have anything to do with my current problems with my spouse or lover? How can something that happened to me when I was two or three years old influence the fact that my spouse and I don't get along, or that I keep dating the “wrong” people? And besides, how can I go back and fix my childhood when there was nothing wrong with it or I simply can't remember it? Isn't that simply moot?

These are the types of questions that usually pop up when I talk to my clients about the early conditioning aspects of their personality development. But, if you think about it, your early conditioning clearly created the underpinnings of your personality. Even if you are not aware of it now, your early childhood became the “lens” through which you see your entire world today, including your present relationships.

There are two key psychological processes that began in early childhood and that continued throughout your adolescence and into adulthood that have shaped your attitudes towards attachment and intimacy. Understanding these two issues is the beginning of true insight into yourself and your relationships. When I work with my clients, I focus largely on these two issues. Let me give you an overview of each one, and then we will explore them in depth in the rest of the book.

FROM CHILD TO ADULT LOVER, YOU REPLAY THE SAME PATTERN!

The first psychological process that affects your ability to have a healthy, loving relationship goes back to your very earliest years. This process is called separation-individuation, referring to the time when you separated from your primary caretaker – usually your mother. Separation usually begins during infancy and reaches its peak at 36 months of life.

What happened during the separation phase is critical to your sense of self and your attitudes towards love and bonding today. As you separated from your mother, father, and/or caretaker, you received many verbal and nonverbal messages regarding your caretaker’s ability to handle your emotional and physical movement away. You were made to feel good or bad, right or wrong, and safe or unsafe when you began to explore your surrounding world. These positive or negative messages became embedded in your unconscious mind, and you have carried them with you throughout your life until now.