

## Anxious Attachment Dynamics

### *Tips for Managing Relational Distress*

Relationship conflict is seen as separation distress. Distressed couples: Blame or withdraw, engage in critical demanding or defending, and resentfully comply with one another.

Anxiously attached partners have pressing and urgent fears around whether they matter to their loved ones; they are preoccupied with the with the fear of abandonment and being unloved.

When we get overwhelmed with emotions by feeling criticized, accused or not heard we default to our programmed rigid responses of fight, fix or flight. We are stuck in habitual ways of reacting. The anger arises as a result of not being able to seek comfort or by not feeling heard and not having normal needs for contact and intimacy met by our partners.

When we feel emotional starvation and emotional hunger, we get angry and critical, yet underneath we feel sad and it is painful.

When we feel rejected, we feel shame. Our anger is a desperate attempt to connect with our partner and prevent more rejection, but it actually does the opposite.

Partners criticize each other to evoke responses from one another but end up pushing each other away; or they shut down and withdraw to avoid rejection and end up shutting each other out, which elicit fears of abandonment.

Softer relational exchanges appear to disconfirm their belief that their partners will abandon them. In a softening event, a previously withdrawn partner's new accessibility and responsiveness actively challenges the more anxiously attached partner's cognitive belief that he or she will be abandoned and is essentially defective and unlovable.

Try deeper, softer emotions, and send new signals to each other that evoke new and more positive responses from one another.

If the more hostile partner softens and asks for their needs to be met in a vulnerable fashion, the partners can become mutually accessible and responsive to each other's attachment needs and fears.

We need to find more positive, less angry and less controlling ways of expressing our emotions and needs and of inviting our partners to engage with us. We need to be brave and ask for comfort in regard to our attachment fears. Clearly state your needs in a manner that invites responsiveness. This corrective experience demonstrates the powerful impact of sharing fears and vulnerabilities and elicits attuned caregiving rather than avoidance or rejection.

You want to know that your pain impacts your partner. Are you there for me; am I important to you; and will you come when I call? Lack of emotional presence is a trigger for one partner to experience panic and rejection.

- Secure Functioning: Understand how you are wired for love and attachment, know your survival skills.
- Self-center: Retain emotional balance and flexibility in the face of confrontation, rather than becoming flooded with anxiety or anger.

Self-reference: Tune into your primary emotions so you can identify needs. Offer coherent messages to others about your fears and needs that evoke responsiveness  
Receive what is being expressed. Learn to tolerate ambiguous or negative responses from another with less defensiveness and reactivity. Don't lose yourself to the pressure and demands of others. Respond to another with empathy and sensitive care in a way that constantly renews relational bonds. Validate anger and view it through the lens of a reaction that is triggered by perceived abandonment.

Become an expert in your partner's strengths not weaknesses.