

We all have a biological need or drive to connect and maintain connection with our parents or caregivers, regardless of how bad or unhealthy the caregivers are. When these unhealthy attachment figures are unhealthy or unsafe, it is extremely hard, if not impossible, for children to know or believe that the parent's behavior is not about the child because of the way our brains work and because children are egocentric. Children internalize that they are "bad" because of the way their caregivers treat them. Everyone's self-worth comes from their caregivers.

When parents are healthy and safe kids develop a healthy self-worth.

When parents are unhealthy and unsafe, kids develop low self-worth.

When children are mistreated, neglected and abused, they may have a low self worth and have a hard time trusting others. They often seek out relationships that mirror this type of attachment, when they get older. Many times children can have other adults in their lives that are healthy and can help repair some of the damage. Other times when kids get in dating relationships, they can have reparative experiences, if they are with a healthy and safe partner. However they may seek out unhealthy relationships that mirror the relationship with their unsafe parent or parents, in an unconscious attempt to work out early attachment wounds.

You can talk with caregivers about the 4 attachment behaviors of parents/caregivers and how this promotes healthy attachment and self worth, even in older kids. You can talk about what these attachment behaviors look like in whatever age the client is.

**4 Attachment Principles:** These 4 principles are derived from Mary Ainsworth's research on how caregivers facilitate secure attachment with their infants. When caregivers exhibit these behaviors, we see infants exhibit secure base, safe haven, separation protest and proximity seeking in healthy ways.

1. Sensitivity to signals:
  - a. Recognize that the person is signaling a need, accurately interpret the signal, and make every attempt to meet that need in a timely manner
2. Acceptance vs. rejection of needs
  - a. Make positive attributions about the person's behavior
3. Physical and psychological availability
  - a. Be physically and emotionally present
4. Cooperation vs. interference in ongoing behavior
  - a. Be your child's cheerleader as they attempt to meet their goals