



EMMA GERASIMATOS

# ATTACHMENT AND COUPLES THERAPY

## Attachment Styles

Our attachment styles are formed as children in a direct response to the way our primary caregiver attended to our needs. Our personal flavour of attachment style as an adult impacts how we deal with stress and connection in our adult primary relationships and is often at the root of our distress in couple relationships.



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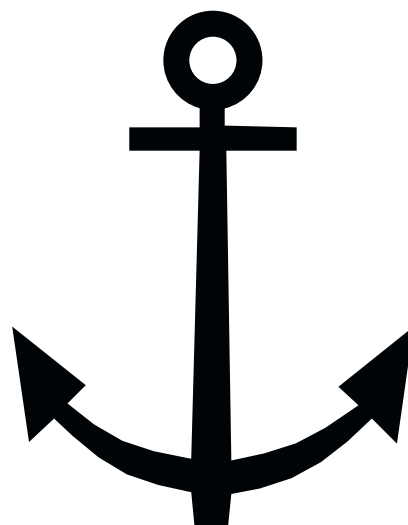
Knowing our own attachment style and that of our partners can be the window to learning how better to communicate, self soothe, soothe each other and therefore function more effectively as a couple.

Our adult attachment style can be impacted by experiences such as divorce, interpersonal trauma, workplace bullying and so on. Furthermore, our attachment style can be improved upon with conscious effort in our primary relationships. We can become more anchored with effort!

Stan Tatkin uses the terminology wave, island and anchor to describe the different attachment styles.

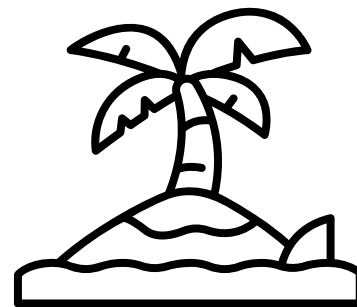
## Anchors

Anchors are notoriously easygoing, and mostly unencumbered by fears of abandonment or loss of autonomy. They are collaborative and cooperative by nature, and they're comfortable with physical and emotional intimacy. They can maintain that closeness for extended periods without anxiety. They usually developed these traits because they had a secure relationship with a primary caregiver, and they're able to bring that acquired sense of security into their adult relationships.



## Islands

Islands have a hard time staying connected to their long-term romantic partners. In therapeutic language, this is the “avoidant” style. Islands are often independent, highly creative, and accomplished adults. But they frequently feel trapped in primary romantic relationships — especially when the going gets tough.

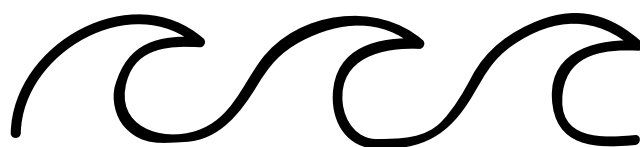


They prize solitude and fear being subsumed by another person’s wishes and needs. Islands are threatened by conflict and drama; they’re more likely to withdraw, keep secrets, and fear being exposed by partners who encroach on their privacy. As a result, their companions often feel neglected, unimportant, and burdensome. Though islands can seem antisocial or selfish, they are often reacting to early experiences when they felt neglected by their caregivers. Experience taught them to self-soothe rather than risk depending on anyone else for support.

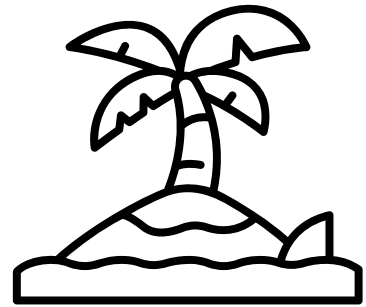
Islands often want close relationships but are afraid of the responsibilities of another person; they fear being needed but not really wanted. Their defensiveness is largely unconscious, driven by the conditioning of their nervous systems and brains.

## Waves

Waves deeply desire connection with a partner. They’re usually generous people, and their passionate intensity can make them fun to be around. Yet most waves believe that true intimacy is not really possible, and they live in fear of abandonment, withdrawal, rejection, and punishment. While islands have a fear of dependency, the primary issue for waves — sometimes called “angry resistant” individuals — is dashed hope.



The partners of waves often feel like their relationships are roller-coaster rides. Waves tend to cling to their companions while also behaving in ways that can be hostile and distancing. Separations and reunions may trigger pushing their partners away, even as they want connection. This comes from fearing deeply what they most want: a truly intimate relationship.



As children, waves often experienced role reversal with at least one parent, who was likely to have been depressed, anxious, dependent, overwhelmed, or angry. They were charged with caring for that adult's emotional well-being, and this meant their own needs for connection went unmet. So, as adults, when they reach out for connection, they expect to be disappointed. Their reflexive negativism is a defense against that disappointment. It is sometimes referred to as an "allergy to hope."

### Which style are you?

#### Are you an island?

Here are some statements typical of an island, see how many resonate with you...

- I know how to take care of myself better than anyone else would I'm a do it myself type of person
- I thrive when I can spend time in my own private sanctuary If you upset me, I have to be by myself to calm down
- I often feel my partner wants or needs something from me that I can't give I'm most relaxed when nobody else is around
- I'm low maintenance, and I prefer a partner who is also low maintenance

#### Are you a wave?

Here are some statements typical of a wave, see how many resonate with you...

- I take better care of others better than I do myself
- I often feel as though I'm giving and giving and not getting anything back I thrive on talking to and interacting with others

- If you upset me, I have to talk in order to calm down Mypartner tends to be rather selfish and self-centred I'mmost relaxed when I'm around my friends
- Love relationships are ultimately disappointing and exhausting. You can never really depend on anyone



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Remember you can be a mixture of both, or a bit islandish or a bit waveish. We tend to be more one than the other, particularly when we are under stress. Neither is better than the other and neither is worse. Just very different ways of dealing with anxiety and getting our needs met, or not at the case may be.

### Strengths and Vulnerabilities

#### Island Strengths

- Independent and self-reliant
- Take good care of themselves
- Productive and creative, especially when given space
- Low maintenance

#### Island Vulnerabilities

- Feeling intruded upon
- Feeling trapped, out of control
- Fear of too much intimacy
- Fear of being blamed

#### Waves Strengths

- Generous and giving
- Focused on taking care of others
- Happiest when other people are around
- Able to see both sides of an issue

#### Waves Vulnerabilities

- Fear of being abandoned
- by your partner
- Fear of being separated from your partner
- Discomfort at being alone for too long
- Feeling you are a burden



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## How partners can help each other

### Helping the Island

#### Vulnerability

#### The Antidote

##### Feeling intruded upon

- Approach quietly rather than calling partner's name
- If your partner is busy, say, 'I need to talk to you in a couple of minutes and then leave
- Let me know when you are ready, if its more than a couple of minutes, I'll start then you can join

##### Feeling trapped, out of control

- I need a few minutes of your time then you can get back to what you are doing
- I can see you have had enough, we can continue later
- You have a couple of choices

##### Fear of too much intimacy

- Pay attention to the level of intimacy your partner is comfortable with and ease into closeness
- Do you want me to stop?
- Is this annoying you?

##### Fear of being blamed

- I really appreciate what you did but you were out of line in.....
- I understand why you did what you did, your heart was in the right place
- Its not all your fault and even if it were, that would be OK



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## How partners can help each other

### Helping the Wave

#### Vulnerability

#### The Antidote

Fear of being abandoned  
by you

- Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere, you couldn't get rid of me if you tried
- Please stay close to me, I want to be in close contact today
- You are my rock

Being separated from you

- Make use of technology such as text messaging, just hi's and I love you's or anything that shows you are thinking about them during the day

Discomfort being alone  
too long

- I'm looking forward to our dinner tonight, looking forward to seeing you
- Call me if you want to talk
- I'll make sure I call you when I get there, even if it's late

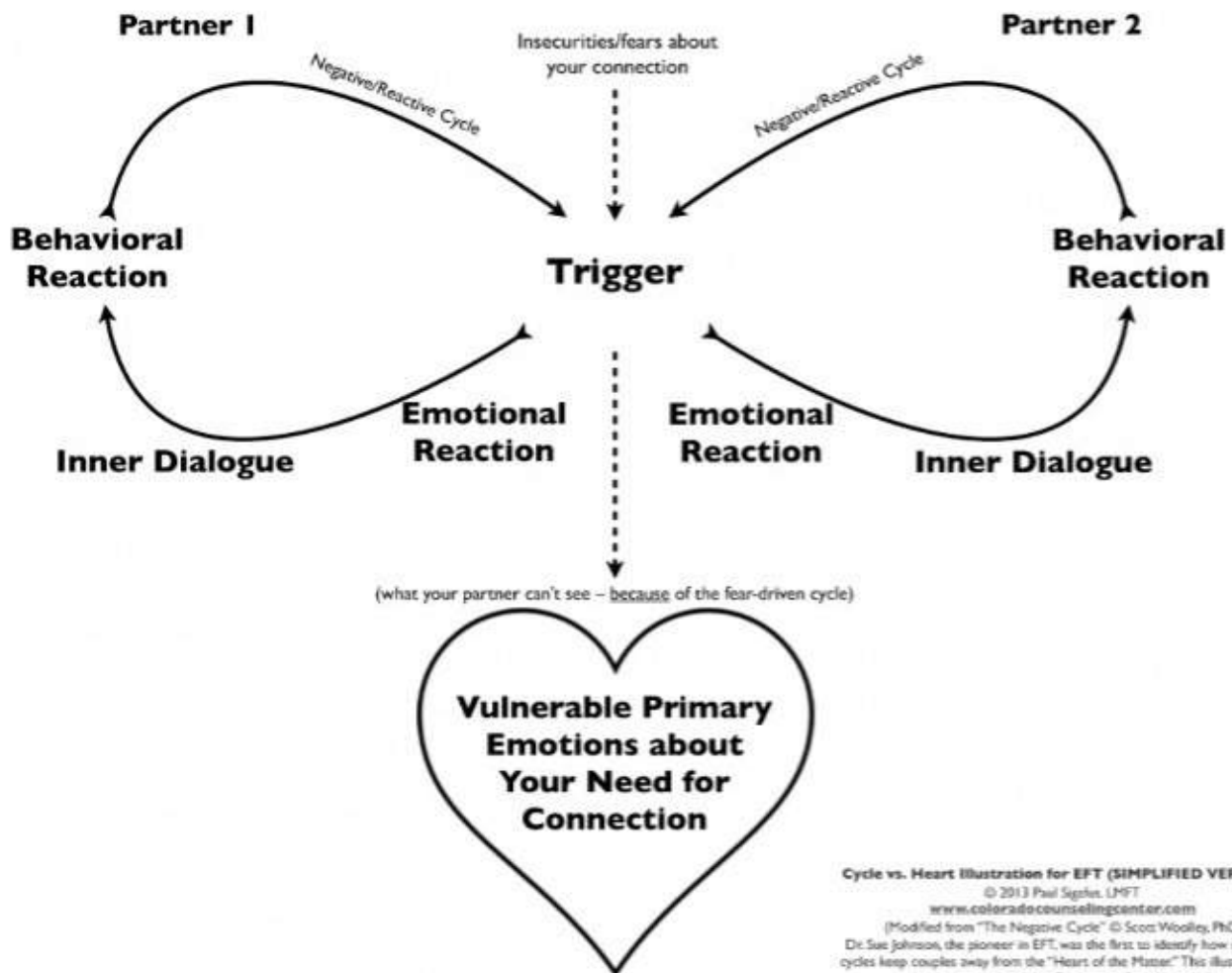
Feeling he or she is a burden

- You're no more of a burden to me than I am to you
- I love that we know exactly what to do to take care of each other
- You are a lovely burden, I'll always enjoy carrying



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What goes on when we are triggered



## Three sentences

1. When.. I see/hear/notice/this thing happens
2. I make up.....
3. And I feel.....