

INFANT ATTACHMENT CATEGORIES



ACT

Participant
Resource
Notebook

*The Art &
Science of
Attachment-*
Practice
Tools

SECURE (B)

Securely attached children protest separation from their parent, but are consolable after separation, and are able to adjust to the stranger and strange situation. They quickly return to a calm state upon reunion with their parent. They prefer to be with the parent rather than the stranger, and become refueled, satisfied, and secure upon reunion with their parent. The child will easily reengage in exploratory, play behavior. .

ANXIOUS/AMBIVALENT (C)

The anxious/ambivalent child clings to the parent in the strange situation, exploring and investigating the strange situation in only a limited manner. The child remains focused on the parent, showing strong and prolonged protest and distress upon separation. Not consoled by the stranger, the child is not pacified by the parent upon reunion either. The child will seek contact with the parent on reunion, yet resists, turns away, and spurns the parent on return. This child has a difficult time returning to a calm state after parental reunion, and shows prolonged signs of distressed/clingy behavior. The child does not easily reengage in exploratory play.

AVOIDANT (A)

Children who have an avoidant attachment pattern are overly independent and autonomous. They do not seem to need or use the parents as a secure base and are not upset by the parents' departure. They show few overt signs of distress from separation from the parent and they accept the stranger, showing no preference for the parent over the stranger. Upon reunion with the parent, these children ignore the parent and maintain an angry distance. They gaze avert and appear detached.

DISORGANIZED/DISORIENTED (D)

This category was added by later research, developed to describe children who could not be classified according to the "ABC" system, many of whom came from abused and neglected populations. The disorganized/disoriented child shows a lack of consistent patterns throughout the strange situation, displaying a diverse array of feelings and defensiveness. The child may become "affect frozen," appear to be confused about what is going on and would be both proximate and distant to the parent. The child has a strong, prolonged reaction to separation, responding in traumatized and distorted ways. This category is used for pathological characteristics.

References

Ainsworth, M., Blehar, M., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Main, M., & Weston, D. (1982). Avoidance of the attachment figure in infancy: Descriptions and interpretations. In C.M. Parkes & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), *The Place of Attachment in Human Behavior* (pp. 31-59). New York: Basic Books.