

Attachment Across Development



Infancy (0–2 years)

Primary attachment to caregivers for protection, comfort, and survival.



Childhood (3–12 years)

Parents/caregivers remain central. Attachment network begins to expand (siblings, grandparents, close others).



Adolescence (13–18 years)

Parents still important. Peers become increasingly significant. Identity and autonomy develop.



Young Adulthood (18–30 years)

Romantic partners often become major attachment figures. Parents, friends, and mentors remain important.



Adulthood (30+ years)

Spouse/partner may be primary. Ongoing attachment to children, friends, family, and sometimes God or spiritual community.

"The faces may change. The need for connection doesn't."



Early Experiences Influence. They Don't Dictate.

Early Experiences Help Shape Internal Working Models

"Are others available?"
"Can I depend on them?"
"Am I worth responding to?"
"What happens when I reach for someone?"

Later Experiences Can Update These Expectations

New, consistent, supportive relationships can lead to greater security over time — a process sometimes called **earned security**.

Transformation Is Possible

- ✓ Multiple relationships can serve attachment functions.
- ✓ Our attachment network can expand and reorganize.
- ✓ Later relationships can provide new experiences that change old expectations.
- ✓ You are not permanently defined by your earliest experiences.

What Makes a Relationship an Attachment Relationship?

Not every important relationship is an attachment relationship. Look for these four key functions:



Proximity

Do I want access to this person?



Safe Haven

When I'm distressed, do I turn toward this person?



Secure Base

Does knowing this person is there make me more confident exploring life?



Separation Distress

Does prolonged or threatened separation from this person create particular distress?

Examples: Attachment or Not?

Relationship	Can Be an Attachment Figure?
Parent	Yes (very commonly)
Spouse / Partner	Yes (very commonly)
Boyfriend / Girlfriend	Yes (can become one)
Close Friend	Yes (can function as one)
Sibling	Yes (can function as one)
Mentor	Sometimes
Therapist	Sometimes
Pastor / Spiritual Leader	Sometimes
God	Yes (for many people)
Employer	Usually not
Teacher	Usually not (though can be highly influential)