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ADULT ATTACHMENT

Adult attachment is often examined within the framework of a scientifically designed instrument called the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) which is given by a professional specially trained to administer the evaluation. It consists of a series of questions about one's self in relationship to one's parents, spouse (or SO), and children. The results place the individual within one of four main categories of attachment: secure, ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized.

This evaluation tool can be beneficial in helping the individual understand what type of attachment patterns he/she is enacting in his/her current life. It can also predict the type of attachment patterns his/her unborn child will have. Thus, it is a powerful tool which demonstrates the connection between the past and the present, and the present and the future.

Another way of looking at adult attachment is to consider the principles generated by the field of research in light of one's personal experiences in life. The research is explaining how a reasonably adequate (doesn't have to be perfect) attachment experience creates internal emotional regulation and enables us to have successful relationships. Thus if one has challenges with relationships or with impulse control, anger, anxiety, depression, or other mood or emotional regulation issues, then one can reasonably conclude that there are some issues with attachment that warrant attention. The manner in which one does this could range anywhere from working with simple techniques to create internal emotional regulation in daily life, to deep emotional work with a therapist which incorporates an understanding of one's inner child.

The following are examples of simple techniques which one can incorporate into one's everyday life.

1. Establish daily routines for self-nurturance such as meditation, exercise, listening to music, dancing, etc.
2. Work to be aware moment by moment of how you are feeling inside. The moment you stop feeling peace, start a process of self regulation, such as deep breathing or the activities mentioned above. Deep, nurturing breathing (as well as sound) calms our stress response system.
3. Be present with your emotions. Allow them to rise to the surface, and pass through you like a gentle breeze, or a strong ocean wave. Emotions are simply energy which can be experienced and released. Their power is then

diminished, and you will have more access to your neocortex (rational or cognitive brain).

4. When you are feeling any kind of negative emotion, allow yourself to consider that there is fear underneath. Try saying to yourself, “I am feeling scared right now”. Breathe into it, and feel it in your body. The process of being authentically connected to your emotions in your body can provide relief, and allow the fear to dissipate. Sometimes adding sound (like a fog horn), or tapping on trigger points helps (as in EFT).
5. When faced with behavior, either from yourself or another, which is undesirable, consider viewing it as arising from an unconscious state of fear. Your change in perception will automatically create a different set of responses in you. This principle has enormous capacity to improve relationships of all types.
6. Much of our communication is unconscious and non-verbal. We influence each other through our state of being.

Note: The idea that negative behavior is likely to be connected to an unconscious state of fear comes from the understanding that an important function of an attachment system is to create internal security and emotional regulation. Negative behavior typically arises from an internal state of stress and fear. Research regarding the development and function of the emotional brain and the chemical responses generated in the body when faced with intense emotional situations helps provide a more complete explanation. This science also explains how the expressing of and processing of negative emotional experiences within a trusting relationship provides soothing, and opens up the pathways to our thinking brain.

There are many resources to help with these complicated concepts. For more information, you may contact Chris for a clinical consultation at 434-923-8253 or cwalker@cstone.net.

A resource list and academic bibliography are available upon request.