

Attachment Styles & Substance Relationships

How You Bond with People Is How You Bond with Substances

Guide & Worksheets · The Recovery Files

Explore the powerful parallels between your attachment patterns in relationships and your relationship with substances.

The same nervous system that learned how to bond with people also learned how to bond with substances. This page walks that parallel across 26 topics in 8 areas.

In this workbook

Part 1 — The eight areas (26 topics)

- **Attachment Foundations** — Understanding attachment theory and how it shapes all our relationships
- **Secure Attachment** — Healthy attachment patterns and their parallels with substance use and recovery
- **Anxious-Preoccupied** — The clinging, craving, and fear of abandonment — in love and in addiction
- **Dismissive-Avoidant** — Emotional walls, independence at all costs — how distance operates in both arenas
- **Fearful-Avoidant** — The push-pull of wanting closeness but fearing it — the chaos connection
- **The Substance Parallel** — Direct comparisons between how you attach to people and how you attach to substances
- **Relationship & Use Patterns** — Recognizing cycles, dynamics, and behavioral patterns across both domains
- **Earned Security & Recovery** — Building secure attachment in relationships AND in your relationship with recovery

Part 2 — My Attachment & Recovery Profile

Part 3 — Worksheets

- Anxious Attachment & Substance Use
- Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment & Substance Use
- Secure Attachment & Substance Use Recovery

The topic generator and your progress are in the app.

Clinical Note

Attachment patterns are deeply ingrained but not permanent. Research on "earned security" demonstrates that adults can develop more secure attachment through self-awareness, therapy, and intentional practice in safe relationships. Share these insights with your counselor or therapist to deepen your treatment experience.

Crisis Resources

If you're experiencing a crisis or strong urges to use, reach out immediately:

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text: 988

SAMHSA National Helpline

1-800-662-4357 (24/7)

PART 1 · THE EIGHT AREAS

Attachment Foundations

Understanding attachment theory and how it shapes all our relationships

What Is Attachment? More Than Just Relationships

Attachment is the deep emotional bond you form with people, things, and experiences that feel essential to your survival and well-being. Your earliest caregivers taught your nervous system how to bond — and that blueprint extends to every significant relationship in your life, including your relationship with substances.

Key Points

- Attachment patterns develop in early childhood based on caregiver responsiveness
- These patterns become automatic templates for ALL significant relationships
- Substances can fill the same emotional role that an attachment figure does — providing comfort, safety, and regulation
- Understanding your attachment style is not about blame — it's about awareness and choice

Reflection Question

Think about your earliest memories of seeking comfort. Who or what did you turn to when you were scared, sad, or overwhelmed as a child? How has that pattern shown up in your adult life — both in relationships and in substance use?

Interactive Exercise

Map your attachment timeline:

- Who was your primary caregiver? Were they consistent, distant, unpredictable, or frightening?
- When did you first discover substances? What emotional need did they initially meet?
- Can you see a connection between what you needed from people and what substances provided?

Action Step

This week, pay attention to moments when you feel a strong pull toward something — a person, a craving, a habit. Ask yourself: "What am I really seeking right now — comfort, safety, escape, or connection?"

The Four Attachment Styles: Your Relational Blueprint

There are four primary attachment styles: Secure, Anxious-Preoccupied, Dismissive-Avoidant, and Fearful-Avoidant (Disorganized). These styles are not fixed personality traits. They are learned adaptations that made sense given your early environment. The good news? They can change.

Key Points

- Secure: Comfortable with closeness AND independence — trusts the process
- Anxious-Preoccupied: Craves extreme closeness, fears abandonment, needs constant reassurance
- Dismissive-Avoidant: Prioritizes independence, keeps emotional distance, fears losing control
- Fearful-Avoidant: Wants closeness but is terrified of it — creates chaotic, unpredictable patterns

Reflection Question

As you read these four styles, which one resonated most? Did you feel a reaction in your body — a tightness, a recognition, maybe even resistance?

Interactive Exercise

Rate yourself on each style (1-10):

- Secure: ___/10 — "I trust people and feel worthy of love"
- Anxious: ___/10 — "I worry constantly about being abandoned"
- Avoidant: ___/10 — "I don't need anyone and prefer to handle things alone"
- Fearful: ___/10 — "I want people close but push them away when they get there"

Action Step

Share your self-ratings with a counselor, sponsor, or trusted person this week. Ask them if they see what you see.

Your Substance as an Attachment Figure

For many people in active addiction, their substance of choice became their primary attachment figure. You turned to it when stressed. You felt lost without it. You organized your life around it. You protected your access to it. That is not just "using drugs." That is an attachment relationship.

Key Points

- Substances provide a predictable emotional response — something many attachment figures did not
- The brain processes substance attachment through the same reward and bonding pathways as human attachment
- Breaking from a substance often triggers grief responses identical to losing a relationship
- Recognizing this isn't about excusing use — it's about understanding what recovery truly requires

Reflection Question

If your substance were a person, how would you describe your relationship? Was it a protector? A lover? A captor? A best friend who turned toxic?

Interactive Exercise

Complete these parallels:

- "When I was stressed, I turned to ____ the way I wish I could have turned to ____"
- "I felt safest when ____ was available, just like I feel safest when ____ is around"
- "When I couldn't access ____, I felt ____ — the same way I feel when ____ pulls away"

Action Step

Write a letter to your substance as if it were a person you're ending a relationship with. Include what it gave you, what it took, why you stayed, and why you're choosing to leave.

PART 1 · THE EIGHT AREAS

Secure Attachment

Healthy attachment patterns and their parallels with substance use and recovery

What Secure Attachment Looks Like in Relationships

Securely attached individuals are comfortable with emotional closeness and also okay being independent. They trust their partners, communicate needs openly, and handle conflict constructively. Secure attachment doesn't mean perfect relationships — it means the ability to navigate imperfection without spiraling.

Key Points

- Secure people can ask for help without feeling weak
- They tolerate disagreements without catastrophizing
- They give others the benefit of the doubt
- They can self-soothe AND accept comfort from others

Reflection Question

Think of someone in your life who seems securely attached. What do you notice about how they handle stress, conflict, or vulnerability?

Interactive Exercise

Assess your secure behaviors:

- I can ask for what I need without apologizing: Often / Sometimes / Rarely
- I trust people until given a reason not to: Often / Sometimes / Rarely
- I can sit with conflict without needing to flee or fix it: Often / Sometimes / Rarely
- I feel worthy of love even when things are hard: Often / Sometimes / Rarely

Action Step

Practice one "secure" behavior this week: express a need clearly, tolerate a small disagreement without escalating, or sit with discomfort without numbing.

What "Secure Attachment" to Recovery Looks Like

Just as there is secure attachment in relationships, there is a secure relationship with recovery. You don't white-knuckle every day or panic at every trigger. You trust the process. You use tools when needed, seek support without shame, and accept that recovery is imperfect.

Key Points

- A secure recovery relationship means trusting the process without blind faith
- You can acknowledge difficulty without catastrophizing
- You reach for support appropriately — not desperately or never
- You tolerate setbacks as part of the journey, not proof of failure

Reflection Question

On a scale of 1-10, how secure does your relationship with recovery feel right now? What would need to change for it to feel more secure?

Interactive Exercise

Compare your relationship with recovery to a relationship with a person:

- Do I trust recovery to be there for me?
- Am I comfortable asking for help from recovery supports?
- Do I panic when things get hard, or do I have faith in the process?
- Can I tolerate imperfection in my recovery without giving up?

Action Step

Identify one area where your recovery relationship feels insecure. What specific action could you take this week to build more trust?

PART 1 · THE EIGHT AREAS

Anxious-Preoccupied

The clinging, craving, and fear of abandonment — in love and in addiction

The Anxious Attachment Style: Craving Closeness at All Costs

People with anxious attachment live with a persistent fear that the people they love will leave. They crave extreme closeness, read into every silence, and interpret distance as rejection. The underlying belief: "I'm not enough, and if you really knew me, you'd leave."

Key Points

- Anxious attachment develops when caregivers were inconsistent — sometimes present, sometimes absent
- The person learns that love requires vigilance, performance, and pursuit
- Anxiety in relationships often presents as jealousy, clinginess, or emotional volatility
- The core wound is unworthiness — the belief that you have to earn love

Reflection Question

Have you ever been told you're "too much" or "too needy" in a relationship? How did that feel? Did it make you pull back — or try harder?

Interactive Exercise

Identify your anxious behaviors:

- Do you check your phone constantly when waiting for a reply?
- Do you interpret silence as rejection?
- Do you need verbal reassurance that someone loves you?
- Do you lose yourself in relationships — making the other person your whole world?

Action Step

Practice sitting with the discomfort of not reaching out when you feel the urge to seek reassurance. Set a timer for 30 minutes and notice what happens to the anxiety.

Anxious Attachment to Substances: The Craving Connection

If you relate to anxious attachment in relationships, you may recognize the exact same pattern with substances. The obsessive thinking about when you'll use next. The panic when your supply runs low. The relief — that overwhelming wave of "okay, I'm safe now" — when you finally use.

Key Points

- Obsessive thinking about substances mirrors obsessive thinking about an inconsistent partner
- The panic of running out mirrors the panic of being abandoned
- The relief of using mirrors the relief of receiving reassurance
- Substance-seeking behavior mirrors the "protest behaviors" of anxious attachment

Reflection Question

Think about the last time you were running low on your substance. Describe the emotional experience. Now compare that to a time a relationship felt threatened.

Interactive Exercise

Complete these parallels:

- "When my partner doesn't text back, I feel _____. When I can't access my substance, I feel _____."
- "I check my phone _____ times a day for messages. I used to think about using _____ times a day."
- "After a fight, I need _____ to feel okay. After a stressful event, I need _____ to feel okay."

Action Step

The next time you experience a craving, pause and ask: "Am I really craving the substance, or am I craving the feeling of security and relief it provides?"

The Chase-and-Relief Cycle

Anxious attachment creates a recognizable cycle: fear of loss → desperate pursuit → temporary relief → fear returns. In addiction: craving builds → desperate substance-seeking → use and relief → tolerance builds and craving returns stronger. Same cycle, different object.

Key Points

- Both cycles are driven by anxiety and reward systems working together
- Temporary relief reinforces the pursuit behavior each time
- Tolerance develops in both arenas: you need more reassurance, more substance
- Breaking the cycle requires learning to self-regulate without an external source

Reflection Question

Draw or describe your personal chase-and-relief cycle — both for a relationship AND for your substance use. Where do the cycles overlap?

Interactive Exercise

Map Your Dual Cycle:

Relationship: Trigger → Pursuit → Relief → Duration

Substance: Trigger → Pursuit → Relief → Duration

What patterns emerge when you compare these side by side?

Action Step

Identify one moment this week where you catch yourself in the "chase" phase. Practice pausing instead of pursuing. Tolerate 10 minutes of discomfort.

PART 1 · THE EIGHT AREAS

Dismissive-Avoidant

Emotional walls, independence at all costs — how distance operates in both arenas

The Dismissive-Avoidant Style: Independence as Armor

People with dismissive-avoidant attachment learned early that depending on others leads to disappointment. They developed radical self-reliance as a survival strategy. "I'm fine on my own" isn't just a statement — it's a fortress.

Key Points

- Avoidant attachment develops when caregivers were emotionally unavailable or dismissive
- The person learns that needs are burdens and vulnerability is dangerous
- Avoidant individuals often appear high-functioning and emotionally "together"
- The core wound: connection equals loss of control — closeness feels suffocating, not safe

Reflection Question

When was the last time you let someone truly see you — your fear, your need, your pain? If you can't remember, what does that tell you?

Interactive Exercise

Identify your avoidant behaviors:

- When someone gets too close emotionally, I tend to: ____
- My go-to phrase when struggling: "I'm fine" / "I don't need help" / Other
- In arguments, I usually: shut down / leave / get intellectual / change the subject
- The idea of asking for help makes me feel: ____

Action Step

This week, practice one small act of vulnerability: tell someone how you actually feel, ask for something you need, or admit you're struggling.

Avoidant Attachment to Substances: The Silent Partnership

Dismissive-avoidant individuals often have a "low-key" but deeply entrenched relationship with substances. The substance doesn't need you to open up. It doesn't require conversation, commitment, or emotional labor. It just... works. That's exactly the kind of relationship an avoidant person gravitates toward.

Key Points

- Avoidant users often minimize severity — "It's not that bad" mirrors "I don't need anyone"
- Substances offer regulation without the vulnerability of human connection
- The avoidant user may function well outwardly while being deeply dependent privately
- Denial runs deeper because admitting need goes against the core survival strategy

Reflection Question

Have you ever told yourself your use "wasn't that bad" or that you "could stop anytime"? Does that sound like anything else you say — maybe about needing people?

Interactive Exercise

The Avoidant Inventory:

- I use substances to: avoid feelings / maintain control / decompress alone / appear normal
- I minimize by telling myself: _____
- The hardest part about admitting I have a problem: _____
- If substances were a person, they'd be the partner who: _____

Action Step

Tell one person the unminimized truth about your substance use this week. Not the version you tell your doctor. The real one.

How Avoidant Attachment Blocks Recovery

Recovery requires the very things avoidant attachment styles resist most: asking for help, admitting powerlessness, being vulnerable in groups, and trusting a process you can't control. Every step of recovery pushes against the avoidant's core defense.

Key Points

- Step One asks avoidant individuals to admit they need help — their deepest fear
- Group therapy requires the vulnerability they've spent a lifetime avoiding
- Sponsorship requires asking for and accepting guidance
- Recovery slogans like "you can't do this alone" directly challenge the avoidant belief system

Reflection Question

What part of recovery feels most uncomfortable or threatening? Is it the vulnerability? The dependence? The surrender of control?

Interactive Exercise

Rate your engagement honestly:

- I share authentically in group: Always / Sometimes / Rarely / Never
- I call my sponsor when struggling: Always / Sometimes / Rarely / Never
- I attend meetings even when I don't want to: Always / Sometimes / Rarely / Never
- I allow others to see my real emotions: Always / Sometimes / Rarely / Never

Action Step

Choose one recovery activity that makes you uncomfortable precisely because it requires vulnerability. Do it this week. Growth lives outside the fortress.

PART 1 · THE EIGHT AREAS

Fearful-Avoidant

The push-pull of wanting closeness but fearing it — the chaos connection

Fearful-Avoidant: The Push-Pull of Wanting and Fearing

You desperately want closeness — your heart aches for connection — but the moment someone gets close, your survival system screams "danger." So you push them away. Then you feel the loss and pull them back. The core wound: "I need you, but needing you will destroy me."

Key Points

- Typically develops when caregivers were both comfort AND source of fear
- The nervous system learns an impossible lesson: "The person I need is the person who hurts me"
- Creates an approach-withdrawal cycle that becomes automatic
- Emotional dysregulation is a hallmark — intense highs, devastating lows

Reflection Question

Do you recognize the push-pull cycle in your relationships? Can you identify a specific moment when you wanted someone close and then suddenly felt the need to create distance?

Interactive Exercise

Track Your Push-Pull Pattern:

- I most want closeness when: _____
- I most want to push away when: _____
- The switch usually happens because: _____
- When I push away, I feel: _____
- When I pull back, I feel: _____

Action Step

The next time you feel the urge to withdraw from someone being kind, pause. Name the feeling: "I'm scared, not unsafe." See if you can tolerate 60 more seconds of closeness.

Fearful-Avoidant Attachment to Substances: The Love-Hate Relationship

You hate what substances do to your life. You swear you're done. Then the craving hits and you need it with an intensity that bypasses all rational thought. You use, feel relief, then feel disgust. You promise "never again" — and you mean it. Until you don't. This is the push-pull of disorganized attachment with a chemical.

Key Points

- The love-hate cycle mirrors the approach-withdraw cycle with people exactly
- Attempts to quit feel like breaking up with someone you love AND hate
- Relapse patterns often follow the push-pull rhythm
- The shame of going back intensifies the cycle

Reflection Question

Describe your "love-hate" relationship with your substance. What do you love about it? What do you hate? Do these two sides ever exist simultaneously?

Interactive Exercise

Write two short letters to your substance:

Letter 1 — The Love Letter (what it gave you, why you kept going back):

Letter 2 — The Breakup Letter (what it cost you, why you need to leave):

Now read both. Notice the emotional tug-of-war.

Action Step

Identify one moment this week where you feel pulled toward use AND disgusted by the pull at the same time. Sit with both. Write: "I want ____ AND I know ____." Hold both truths.

Trauma, Disorganized Attachment, and the Roots of Chaos

Fearful-avoidant attachment almost always has its roots in trauma — particularly relational trauma where the people meant to protect you were also the people who hurt you. This teaches your nervous system a devastating equation: safety = danger.

Key Points

- Relational trauma disrupts the ability to trust any source of comfort
- The nervous system gets stuck toggling between fight/flight and freeze
- Substances initially bypass the relational fear — but eventually replicate the same dynamic
- Healing requires addressing the original attachment wounds, not just the substance use

Reflection Question

Without sharing details you're not ready to explore: Did your early caregivers sometimes feel safe and sometimes feel frightening? How might that experience have taught you that needing something is inherently dangerous?

Interactive Exercise

Nervous System Awareness:

- When I feel safe, my body feels: _____
- When I feel threatened, my body feels: _____
- Can I tell real danger from attachment fear? Often / Sometimes / Rarely
- The substances I chose tended to make my nervous system feel: _____

Action Step

Begin building your "window of tolerance." Practice one grounding technique daily: name 5 things you see, 4 you hear, 3 you touch, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.

PART 1 · THE EIGHT AREAS

The Substance Parallel

Direct comparisons between how you attach to people and how you attach to substances

The Honeymoon Phase: Falling in Love with a Person vs. a Substance

Every significant relationship starts with a honeymoon phase — that intoxicating period where everything feels magical. Substance use has an identical phase. The first time it really worked — you felt transformed. "Where have you been all my life?" In both cases, you're seeing what the experience gives you, not what it will eventually cost.

Key Points

- The honeymoon phase in both is driven by dopamine and reward pathways
- Early positive experiences create powerful emotional imprints hard to overwrite
- The honeymoon creates a "reference point" — you spend the rest trying to get back to that feeling
- Euphoric recall in addiction is the same mechanism as idealizing a past relationship

Reflection Question

Describe the "honeymoon phase" with your substance. What was it like the first time it really worked? Now describe a honeymoon phase with a person. What do the two have in common?

Interactive Exercise

The Honeymoon Comparison:

With Substance: First experience → What it made me feel → What I believed it would always be → When it changed

With a Relationship: Early days → What it made me feel → What I believed → When it changed

Action Step

Write about what you thought your substance (or a relationship) would always be — and what it actually became. Practice seeing the full picture.

Tolerance: When You Need More to Feel the Same

In both relationships and substance use, what once felt amazing gradually requires more effort, intensity, or quantity to produce the same effect. The mechanism is identical: your brain adapts to the stimulus and demands escalation.

Key Points

- Tolerance is how the brain processes repeated stimulation — not failure
- In relationships, tolerance manifests as boredom, dissatisfaction, or seeking novelty
- In substance use, it leads to escalation, cross-addiction, or more dangerous methods
- Both create a dangerous illusion: "If I just had MORE, it would feel like it used to"

Reflection Question

Can you identify a moment when your substance wasn't working the way it used to? What did you do? Have you done similar things in relationships — seeking escalation when things felt "stale"?

Interactive Exercise

Track Your Tolerance Pattern:

- My substance use escalated from ____ to ____ over ____
- The feeling I was chasing: ____
- In a relationship, I've escalated by: ____
- The feeling I was chasing: ____

Action Step

Practice being present with "enough." Choose one thing this week and resist the urge to make it more. Sit with the discomfort of ordinary.

Withdrawal: The Pain of Letting Go

Withdrawal from substances is physical and psychological. But relationship withdrawal is equally real. The obsessive thoughts about an ex. The physical ache. The desperate urge to call. These aren't just emotions — they are neurochemical withdrawal. Your brain is missing its dopamine source.

Key Points

- Relationship heartbreak activates the same brain regions as physical pain and substance withdrawal
- Both include obsessive thinking, physical symptoms, and desperate urges to "reconnect"
- The acute phase passes — but cravings can be triggered by reminders long after
- Understanding withdrawal as biological reduces shame and increases self-compassion

Reflection Question

Think about a difficult breakup or loss. Describe the symptoms. Now compare them to substance withdrawal. Where do they overlap?

Interactive Exercise

Withdrawal Symptoms Comparison (rate 1-10):

Relationship Loss: Obsessive thoughts / Physical pain / Sleep disruption / Appetite changes / Urge to reconnect

Substance Withdrawal: Obsessive thoughts / Physical pain / Sleep disruption / Appetite changes / Urge to use

Action Step

If experiencing withdrawal from either source, name it: "My brain is missing its source of comfort. This is temporary." Commit to riding it out one more day.

Relapse and Going Back: Why We Return to What Hurts Us

Why do people go back to toxic relationships? For the same reason they relapse: the familiar pain feels safer than the unfamiliar unknown. Your attachment system optimizes for what's known, not what's healthy.

Key Points

- The brain prefers familiar pain over unfamiliar growth — "repetition compulsion"
- Relapse occurs in the same emotional states that triggered initial use
- Going back to an ex and relapsing serve the same neurological function

- Recovery requires consciously choosing discomfort over familiarity

Reflection Question

Have you ever gone back to a harmful relationship? What was the internal conversation? Compare that to a time you relapsed — was the conversation similar?

Interactive Exercise

The Return Pattern:

- Times I've gone back to a harmful relationship: _____
- What I told myself: _____
- Times I've returned to substance use: _____
- What I told myself: _____
- The common emotional trigger: _____

Action Step

Create a "Going Back Prevention Plan" for both relationships and substances: Who will you call? What will you do with the first 30 minutes of the urge?

PART 1 · THE EIGHT AREAS

Relationship & Use Patterns

Recognizing cycles, dynamics, and behavioral patterns across both domains

The Anxious-Avoidant Dance: In Relationships and Recovery

The anxious person pursues, the avoidant retreats. The pursuit makes the avoidant retreat further, which makes the anxious person pursue harder. In recovery, this same dance happens with sponsors, treatment programs, and recovery itself.

Key Points

- Anxious-avoidant dynamics create a self-reinforcing "chase and distance" cycle
- In recovery: intense engagement → burnout → withdrawal → crisis → intense engagement
- This pattern plays out with sponsors, therapists, and meeting attendance
- Breaking it requires the anxious to self-soothe AND the avoidant to lean in

Reflection Question

In your recovery, have you experienced periods of intense engagement followed by complete withdrawal? Is your relationship with recovery more anxious or avoidant?

Interactive Exercise

Map the Chase-and-Distance in Recovery:

- When I first entered recovery, I was: all in / skeptical / terrified / numb
- Over time, my engagement: stayed steady / increased / decreased / cycles
- When recovery feels like too much, I: push harder / pull away / pretend I'm fine

Action Step

Find your recovery "middle ground" this week. If you tend toward anxious engagement, practice calm trust. If avoidant, practice deliberate connection.

Codependency: When Attachment to a Person Mirrors Addiction

The codependent person organizes their life around another person the way an addicted person organizes around a substance. They lose themselves, sacrifice their needs, monitor obsessively, and feel responsible for controlling outcomes they cannot control.

Key Points

- Codependency and addiction share core features: loss of control, continued behavior despite consequences, preoccupation
- Both involve organizing life around an external source of emotional regulation
- Both involve denial, minimization, and enabling
- Recovery from codependency follows a remarkably similar path to substance recovery

Reflection Question

Have you ever been told you're codependent? How did the dynamic mirror addiction patterns — the obsession, the inability to stop, the consequences you kept ignoring?

Interactive Exercise

Codependency Crossover Assessment:

- I worry more about others' well-being than my own: Yes / Sometimes / No
- I feel responsible for others' emotions: Yes / Sometimes / No
- I have difficulty saying no: Yes / Sometimes / No
- My mood depends on how the other person is doing: Yes / Sometimes / No

Now replace "others" with "my substance" — which answers change?

Action Step

Identify one codependent behavior this week. Practice the alternative: attend to your own emotions instead of managing someone else's.

Conflict Styles: How You Fight with Partners and with Cravings

Your attachment style determines how you handle conflict — with partners and with cravings. Anxious types treat every conflict as an emergency. Avoidant types shut down. Fearful types alternate between explosive confrontation and withdrawal. How do you "fight" a craving?

Key Points

- Your conflict response with partners predicts your conflict response with cravings
- Anxious: treats cravings as emergencies → acts impulsively
- Avoidant: denies cravings → surprised when they overwhelm
- Fearful: fights cravings chaotically → unpredictable outcomes

Reflection Question

How do you typically handle conflict in relationships? Now honestly assess: how do you handle the "conflict" of a craving? Do you see the same style?

Interactive Exercise

Conflict Style Assessment:

With Partners: First instinct → Body response → What I say/do → How it ends

With Cravings: First instinct → Body response → What I do → How it ends

Action Step

Develop a "healthy conflict" approach for both: pause before reacting, name the feeling, choose a response instead of a reaction, debrief afterward.

Secrecy, Deception, and the Double Life

Both insecure attachment and active addiction thrive in secrecy. Anxious types hide desperation. Avoidant types hide pain. Fearful types hide everything. In addiction: hiding use, lying about amounts, creating elaborate deceptions — exactly as you might deceive to protect a relationship.

Key Points

- Secrecy in both arenas serves the same purpose: protecting the bond from outside threat
- Deception becomes automatic — often unrecognized
- The energy to maintain a double life creates its own shame cycle
- Honesty is the foundation of both secure attachment and sustained recovery

Reflection Question

What have you hidden — in relationships or substance use? What were you protecting by keeping secrets? What would it feel like to live without the weight of secrecy?

Interactive Exercise

Secrecy Inventory:

- What I hid about my substance use: _____
- What I hid about my relationships: _____
- What I hid about my feelings: _____
- The reason I hid: _____
- The cost of hiding: _____
- One secret I'm ready to bring into the light: _____

Action Step

Practice radical honesty in one area this week. Tell someone a truth you would normally hide. Notice how honesty changes the dynamic.

PART 1 · THE EIGHT AREAS

Earned Security & Recovery

Building secure attachment in relationships AND in your relationship with recovery

Earned Secure Attachment: It's Not Where You Start

"Earned security" means developing secure attachment as an adult despite insecure attachment in childhood. It is real, documented, and possible. You are not sentenced to your earliest patterns. Recovery from addiction is, in many ways, the process of earning secure attachment with yourself, with others, and with life itself.

Key Points

- Research shows adults can develop secure attachment regardless of childhood patterns
- Requires awareness of insecure patterns AND deliberate practice of secure behaviors
- Healthy therapeutic and recovery relationships serve as "corrective" attachment experiences
- Recovery and earned security are parallel processes — each supports the other

Reflection Question

Where have you already experienced moments of secure connection — even brief ones? What would your life look like if secure attachment became your default mode?

Interactive Exercise

Secure Attachment Vision (Written):

- In relationships, secure attachment would look like: _____
- In recovery, secure attachment would look like: _____
- In my relationship with myself: _____
- One secure behavior I already practice: _____
- One I want to develop: _____

Action Step

Identify one safe relationship in your life. Practice one secure behavior in it this week: express a need, tolerate a disagreement, or accept care without deflecting.

Building Secure Recovery: The New Attachment Template

If your substance was a substitute for human connection, then recovery must provide something the substance cannot: genuine, reliable, imperfect, human attachment. Meetings, sponsors, therapists — these are not just "recovery tools." They are attachment figures. They are the corrective experience your nervous system needs.

Key Points

- Recovery relationships are opportunities to practice secure attachment in real time
- Calling a sponsor is practicing "reaching for connection instead of a substance"
- Tolerating imperfection in recovery relationships builds the same skill as relationship imperfection
- Every time you choose a person over a substance, you're rewiring attachment circuitry

Reflection Question

Who in your recovery life could serve as a "secure base"? If you don't have this person yet, what attachment fear might be blocking you from finding them?

Interactive Exercise

Recovery Attachment Assessment:

- My relationship with my sponsor is: secure / anxious / avoidant / fearful / I don't have one
- My relationship with meetings: consistent / on-and-off / resistant / dependent
- When I need help, I: reach out / isolate / pretend I'm fine / panic
- What I need from recovery relationships that I'm not getting: _____

Action Step

This week, use one recovery relationship the way a securely attached person would: call when struggling (not just in crisis), share honestly, and accept help graciously.

Self-Attachment: Becoming Your Own Secure Base

The ultimate goal: becoming your own secure base — the person who can comfort you, hold you accountable, tolerate your emotions, and guide you through difficulty. Self-attachment is the

foundation upon which every other secure relationship is built.

Key Points

- Self-attachment means treating yourself the way a securely attached parent would treat a child
- Self-soothing without substances is the behavioral expression of self-attachment
- Self-compassion is not self-indulgence — it's secure self-attachment in action
- Strong self-attachment means seeking support without desperation and tolerating solitude without isolation

Reflection Question

How do you treat yourself when struggling? Do you respond with compassion, harsh criticism, numbing, or nothing? If you spoke to yourself the way you speak to someone you love, what would change?

Interactive Exercise

Self-Attachment Practices:

- When anxious, a secure response to myself: _____
- When craving, a secure response: _____
- When I've made a mistake: _____
- When lonely: _____
- When overwhelmed: _____

Action Step

Develop a self-soothing practice that doesn't involve a substance, screen, or another person. Practice daily — especially when you don't need it.

Rewriting the Attachment Story

Your attachment story isn't over. The chapters written in childhood and edited by addiction are real, but not the final word. Recovery is the opportunity to write a new chapter where you learn to trust people instead of substances and find safety in connection rather than isolation.

Key Points

- Your attachment history explains patterns but does not determine your future
- Every day in recovery is an opportunity to practice secure attachment
- Recovery relationships can literally rewire your brain's attachment system
- You have the capacity to become the person your younger self needed

Reflection Question

If you could write the next chapter of your attachment story, what would it include? Who would be in it? How would you show up differently?

Interactive Exercise

The New Attachment Narrative:

- My old story: "I am someone who ____ in relationships and ____ with substances because ____"
- My new story: "I am someone who is learning to ____ in relationships and ____ in recovery because ____"
- Evidence my new story is possible: ____
- People who support my new story: ____

Action Step

Read your new narrative out loud every morning this week. Then share it with one person in your recovery community. Speaking it makes it real — a witness makes it accountable.

PART 2

My Attachment & Recovery Profile

My Primary Attachment Style (in relationships):

My Attachment Style with Substances:

The Biggest Parallel I See:

What I'm Learning About My Recovery Needs:

My Path Toward Earned Security:

PART 3 · WORKSHEET

Anxious Attachment & Substance Use

When the Way You Love Is the Way You Use

Welcome

Have you ever noticed that the desperate feeling you get when someone you love seems to be pulling away is almost identical to the desperate feeling you get when you can't access your substance? That's not a coincidence. It's attachment.

Anxious-preoccupied attachment is one of four primary attachment styles that develop in early childhood and shape how you bond with everything meaningful in your life—including substances. People with anxious attachment crave extreme closeness, fear abandonment above all else, need constant reassurance, and experience relationships with an intensity that can feel overwhelming. When this same nervous system encounters a substance that reliably provides comfort, relief, and a sense of "everything is okay"—it bonds to it with the same desperate intensity.

This interactive worksheet will guide you through understanding your anxious attachment patterns, recognizing how those exact patterns showed up in your relationship with substances, and—most importantly—beginning to build the secure foundation that supports lasting recovery.

This is not about adding another label or another reason to feel broken. This is about seeing the full picture so you can heal the actual wound—not just treat the symptom.

What You'll Explore:

- Understanding anxious-preoccupied attachment: where it comes from and how it operates
- The direct parallels between anxious attachment in relationships and anxious attachment to substances
- The chase-and-relief cycle: how the same loop drives both relationship anxiety and addiction
- A personalized action plan for building secure attachment in your recovery

Important Reminders

- This worksheet addresses deeply personal patterns. Go at your own pace and take breaks when needed.
- Attachment styles are not permanent diagnoses—they are learned patterns that can change with awareness and effort.
- This material may bring up strong emotions. If you feel overwhelmed, reach out to your counselor, sponsor, or a crisis resource.
- Your responses save as you go, on this device and to your account. No one can see them unless you choose to share.
- This is a clinical education tool, not a replacement for therapy or treatment.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Anxious Attachment****Anxious Attachment & Substances****The Chase-and-Relief Cycle****Withdrawal, Tolerance & Relapse****Resources & Next Steps****Understanding Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment**

Where It Comes From and How It Operates

The Origins: How Anxious Attachment Develops

Anxious attachment doesn't appear out of nowhere. It develops in early childhood when caregivers are inconsistent in their responsiveness. Sometimes they're warm, present, and attuned. Other times, they're distracted, overwhelmed, absent, or emotionally unavailable. The child can never predict which version of the caregiver they'll get.

Key Insight: Anxious attachment is not a flaw or a weakness. It was an intelligent survival adaptation that made perfect sense in the environment where it developed. The problem arises when this childhood strategy continues to run automatically in adult life—and in your relationship with substances.

Protest Behaviors: What Anxiety Makes You Do

When an anxiously attached person senses a threat to a relationship—real or imagined—their nervous system activates what researchers call "protest behaviors." These are unconscious strategies designed to regain proximity and reassurance from the attachment figure. They often have the opposite effect, pushing people away and confirming the anxious person's deepest fears.

The Cruel Irony: Protest behaviors are attempts to get closer, but they almost always push people further away—which confirms the anxious person's fear of abandonment and intensifies the cycle. This same dynamic plays out with substances: the more desperately you pursue relief, the more destruction it causes.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Anxious Attachment****Anxious Attachment & Substances****The Chase-and-Relief Cycle****Withdrawal, Tolerance & Relapse****Resources & Next Steps****Anxious Attachment & Substance Use**

The Same Nervous System, the Same Desperate Bond

The Substance as Your Most Reliable Attachment Figure

For someone with anxious attachment, the core problem has always been this: the people you need most are the people most likely to disappoint you. People are unpredictable. They have their own moods, agendas, and limitations. They can't always be there. They leave.

Now consider what a substance offers. It is always available (as long as you have access). It always works (at least initially). It never judges you. It never pulls away. It provides immediate, predictable relief. For an anxiously attached nervous system that has been starving for reliable comfort, a substance is the most dependable "partner" you've ever had.

The Painful Truth: Your substance didn't just get you high. It provided the one thing your attachment system has been desperately seeking your entire life: consistent, reliable, predictable comfort that didn't require you to earn it, perform for it, or worry about it leaving.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Anxious Attachment****Anxious Attachment & Substances****The Chase-and-Relief Cycle****Withdrawal, Tolerance & Relapse****Resources & Next Steps****The Chase-and-Relief Cycle**

The Engine That Drives Both Anxious Love and Addiction

The Cycle: Four Stages, Infinite Repetitions

Both anxious attachment in relationships and anxious attachment to substances run on the same four-stage cycle. Understanding this cycle is one of the most powerful tools in your recovery because once you can see it in real time, you can interrupt it.

Critical Insight: In both cycles, the relief phase is what makes the cycle so addictive. Your brain learns: anxiety → pursuit → relief. Over time, the pursuit becomes automatic and the relief becomes shorter, requiring escalation. This is how anxious attachment becomes a self-reinforcing prison—whether the object is a person or a substance.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Anxious Attachment****Anxious Attachment & Substances****The Chase-and-Relief Cycle****Withdrawal, Tolerance & Relapse****Resources & Next Steps****Withdrawal, Tolerance & Relapse**

Why Letting Go Feels Like Dying—Whether It's a Person or a Substance

Withdrawal: The Shared Neurobiology of Loss

Research has shown that the brain processes heartbreak and substance withdrawal through overlapping neural circuits. The anterior cingulate cortex, the insula, and the ventral tegmental area—brain regions associated with physical pain, craving, and reward—activate during both experiences. This means that when someone with anxious attachment loses a relationship OR loses access to their substance, the experience is literally, neurologically similar.

Why This Matters for Recovery: If you understand that early sobriety triggers a genuine grief and withdrawal response—not just from the substance but from the attachment bond you formed with it—you can approach recovery with appropriate compassion instead of self-judgment. You are not weak for grieving what you lost. You are human.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Anxious Attachment****Anxious Attachment & Substances****The Chase-and-Relief Cycle****Withdrawal, Tolerance & Relapse****Resources & Next Steps****Resources & Next Steps**

Continuing Your Journey Toward Secure Attachment and Lasting Recovery

Crisis & Emergency Resources**SAMHSA National Helpline**

24/7 treatment referral (free, confidential)

1-800-662-4357

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or Text 988

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741

A Final Thought

You learned to bond anxiously because it was the best strategy available to you as a child. That same anxious bonding system attached to a substance because the substance offered what unreliable caregivers couldn't: consistency. None of this makes you broken. All of it makes you human.

- Your attachment patterns are learned—and what is learned can be rewired
- Understanding the parallel between relationship attachment and substance attachment is one of the most powerful insights in recovery
- Earned security is real, documented, and accessible to you—regardless of where you started

PART 3 · WORKSHEET

Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment & Substance Use

The Fortress That Became a Prison

Welcome

You've spent your life being the person who doesn't need anyone. The one who handles things. The one who stays calm when everyone else falls apart. You don't do drama. You don't do needy. You've built a life around independence, self-reliance, and emotional control—and it worked. Until it didn't.

Somewhere along the way, a substance quietly stepped into the role that people couldn't fill—or that you wouldn't let people fill. It didn't require emotional vulnerability. It didn't demand conversation. It didn't ask you to open up or be present or show up emotionally. It just worked. Reliably. Privately. On your terms. It became the silent partnership that allowed you to keep the walls up while still getting something you needed but would never admit to needing: relief, regulation, or just the ability to feel something.

This interactive worksheet explores dismissive-avoidant attachment—how it shapes the way you relate to people, how that exact same pattern shapes your relationship with substances, and what happens when you begin to see the parallels clearly enough to make different choices.

This may be the hardest worksheet you'll ever do—not because the content is complex, but because it asks you to do the one thing your entire system is organized to prevent: look honestly at what you need and what it costs you to pretend you don't.

Important Reminders

- If you feel the urge to skim, intellectualize, or dismiss this material—notice that. That is the avoidant pattern in action. Slow down.
- Attachment styles are not permanent labels. They are learned patterns that can change with awareness and deliberate practice.
- This material may surface emotions you've been avoiding. That's the point. If it feels overwhelming, reach out to your counselor or a crisis resource.
- Your responses save as you go, on this device and to your account. No one can see them unless you choose to share.
- Completing this worksheet is itself an act of vulnerability. That matters more than you might think.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Dismissive-Avoidant****The Silent Partnership with Substances****Numbing, Control & the Illusion****When the Walls Come Down****Resources & Next Steps****Understanding Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment**

How Emotional Independence Became Your Operating System

The Origins: How Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment Develops

Dismissive-avoidant attachment develops when a child learns, consistently and early, that expressing emotional needs leads to rejection, indifference, or shame. The caregiver may be physically present but emotionally absent—providing food, shelter, and structure while being uncomfortable with tears, fear, vulnerability, or emotional closeness.

Key Insight: Dismissive-avoidant attachment is not a lack of feelings. It is a highly organized strategy for managing feelings by suppressing them. The emotions are there—they're just locked in a vault. Substances often become the only key.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Dismissive-Avoidant****The Silent Partnership with Substances****Numbing, Control & the Illusion****When the Walls Come Down****Resources & Next Steps****The Silent Partnership with Substances**

How Your Substance Became the Relationship You'd Never Admit to Having

The Perfect Avoidant Partner

For someone with dismissive-avoidant attachment, human relationships are exhausting because they demand the one thing you've organized your life to avoid: emotional exposure. People want to talk about feelings. People notice when you pull away. People need things from you. People are unpredictable and uncontrollable.

The Hidden Truth: The person who insists they don't need anyone often has the most intense, dependent relationship in the room—with their substance. The irony is devastating: the thing you used to maintain your independence became the thing you were most dependent on.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Dismissive-Avoidant****The Silent Partnership with Substances****Numbing, Control & the Illusion****When the Walls Come Down****Resources & Next Steps****Numbing, Control & the Illusion of Self-Sufficiency**

The Three Pillars of Avoidant Addiction—and How They Crumble

Pillar 1: Numbing—The Primary Function

While anxiously attached people often use substances to manage the pain of loneliness and abandonment, dismissive-avoidant people use substances for a different primary function: to numb emotions they were never taught to process. The substance doesn't fill a void—it seals the vault. It keeps the locked-away feelings from surfacing.

Critical Distinction: Anxious users often know they're in pain and use to manage it. Avoidant users frequently don't even know they're in pain—the numbing is so effective and so habitual that they experience it as normalcy. This is why many avoidant individuals say "I wasn't using because I was sad—I just liked it." The feelings were there. They just couldn't access them without the substance breaking through the seal.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Dismissive-Avoidant****The Silent Partnership with Substances****Numbing, Control & the Illusion****When the Walls Come Down****Resources & Next Steps****When the Walls Come Down**

What Happens When You Remove the Substance That Was Doing Your Feeling For You

The Emotional Flood of Early Recovery

For the anxiously attached person, early recovery often means managing overwhelming feelings they're accustomed to having. For the dismissive-avoidant person, early recovery is fundamentally different and in some ways more disorienting: feelings they didn't know they had begin to surface.

When you remove the substance that was keeping the vault sealed, everything stored inside begins to leak out. Grief from decades ago. Anger you never expressed. Loneliness you never acknowledged. Tenderness you suppressed because it felt dangerous. The avoidant person in early recovery often feels like they're losing their mind—not because they are, but because they're feeling emotions for the first time without a chemical buffer.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Understanding Dismissive-Avoidant****The Silent Partnership with Substances****Numbing, Control & the Illusion****When the Walls Come Down****Resources & Next Steps****Resources & Next Steps**

Continuing Your Journey from Fortress to Foundation

Crisis & Emergency Resources**SAMHSA National Helpline**

24/7 treatment referral (free, confidential)

1-800-662-4357

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or Text 988

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741

A Final Thought

You built your walls for a reason. As a child, emotional independence wasn't a choice—it was a survival strategy. The substance that replaced human connection wasn't a failure of willpower—it was an extension of the same strategy: handle it yourself, don't need anyone, stay in control.

- You are not broken for being avoidant—you are adapted. And adaptations can be updated.
- Needing help is not weakness. It is the beginning of a strength you've never tried.
- Vulnerability is not the opposite of strength. It is the most courageous thing an avoidant person can do.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET

Secure Attachment & Substance Use Recovery

The Recovery Files

Welcome & Overview

Understanding Secure Attachment

How Substances Disrupt Security

The Secure Attachment Parallel

Resources & Next Steps

Secure Attachment & Substance Use

Understanding How Substances Hijack Healthy Bonds — and How Recovery Rebuilds Them

Welcome

There is a common assumption in recovery that only people with "broken" childhoods or insecure attachment develop substance use disorders. This is a myth — and a damaging one. People with secure attachment histories develop addiction too. Trauma, chronic stress, environmental exposure, genetic vulnerability, medical use that escalates, professional culture, and sheer neurochemistry can all create conditions where substances begin to serve an attachment function even in people who once had healthy, stable relationship patterns.

This worksheet explores a question that is rarely asked in traditional recovery settings: What happens when a person with secure attachment falls into substance use — and what does recovery look like when you're restoring something you once had rather than building it from scratch?

Whether you once had secure attachment and lost it to addiction, or you're building it for the first time in recovery, this material will help you understand the blueprint. Because recovery is not just about putting down the substance. It's about picking up the relationships — with people, with yourself, with life — that the substance replaced.

Important Reminders

- Having had secure attachment does NOT mean your addiction was less "real" or less serious
- Secure attachment can be disrupted by addiction AND rebuilt in recovery — this is neurobiologically proven
- If you never had secure attachment, you can build it now — "earned security" is real
- This worksheet supplements but does not replace professional treatment and therapy
- Go at your own pace. Take breaks when the material feels activating

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Welcome & Overview****Understanding Secure Attachment****How Substances Disrupt Security****The Secure Attachment Parallel****Resources & Next Steps****Understanding Secure Attachment**

The Internal Operating System for Human Connection

What Secure Attachment Actually Is

Secure attachment is not the absence of problems. It is not a fairy-tale childhood or a life free from conflict. Secure attachment is an internal operating system — a set of core beliefs, emotional capacities, and relational skills — that allows a person to navigate the inevitable challenges of human connection without losing themselves or their sense of safety.

A person with secure attachment carries within them the deep belief: "I am worthy of love. Others can be relied upon. I can handle whatever comes." This template does not make life easy. But it makes life survivable in a way that feels fundamentally different from the experience of insecure attachment.

The Critical Insight

Here is what most recovery programs don't teach: the five pillars of secure attachment are the same five pillars of sustainable recovery. Trust, regulation, vulnerability, repair, and autonomy within connection — these are not just nice-to-have relational skills. They are the functional infrastructure of a sober life.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Welcome & Overview****Understanding Secure Attachment****How Substances Disrupt Security****The Secure Attachment Parallel****Resources & Next Steps****How Substances Disrupt Secure Attachment**

The Systematic Dismantling of What Once Worked

The Gradual Replacement

Addiction does not announce itself. It does not arrive as a crisis. It arrives as a solution — and for people with secure attachment, it often arrives during a period when the secure system is under unusual strain. A career crisis. A loss. Chronic pain. A traumatic event. The substance steps in and does what the attachment system was struggling to do: regulate, soothe, numb, connect, escape.

This is not a character flaw. It is a neurobiological process. The brain's attachment circuitry — the same oxytocin, dopamine, and endorphin systems that bond you to people — gets redirected toward the substance. The substance becomes, in the brain's language, your primary attachment figure.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Welcome & Overview****Understanding Secure Attachment****How Substances Disrupt Security****The Secure Attachment Parallel****Resources & Next Steps**

The Secure Attachment Parallel

Healthy Relationships and Lasting Recovery Follow the Same Blueprint

The Mirror Image

Here is the insight that transforms how we understand recovery: every skill required for a healthy, secure relationship is the same skill required for lasting recovery. This is not an analogy or a loose metaphor. It is a neurobiological reality — the brain uses the same attachment circuitry for both human bonds and the bond formed with substances. This means the road back from addiction is, at its core, a road back to secure attachment.

The Substance as a False Secure Base

In attachment theory, a "secure base" is a relationship that provides safety, stability, and the confidence to explore the world. Substances become a false secure base. They mimic every function of a secure attachment figure.

The fatal flaw of the false secure base: A substance can regulate you, but it cannot repair with you. It cannot grow with you. It cannot reflect you back to yourself. It cannot help you make meaning of suffering. And over time, it takes more from you than it gives — the exact opposite of what a true secure base does.

PART 3 · WORKSHEET**Welcome & Overview****Understanding Secure Attachment****How Substances Disrupt Security****The Secure Attachment Parallel****Resources & Next Steps****Resources & Next Steps**

Continuing the Journey of Rebuilding Secure Attachment in Recovery

Crisis & Emergency Resources**SAMHSA National Helpline**

24/7 treatment referral (free, confidential)

1-800-662-4357

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or Text 988

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741

A Final Thought

Secure attachment is not a personality trait that some people are born with and others are not. It is a set of skills, beliefs, and capacities that can be developed at any age, in any stage of recovery. Whether you're restoring something that substances disrupted or building it for the very first time, the process is the same: show up, tell the truth, tolerate the discomfort, repair when things break, and keep going.

- You bonded with a substance because you are wired to bond — that capacity is your greatest recovery asset
- Recovery is not about becoming someone new — it is about restoring who you were beneath the addiction
- The skills that build great relationships are the same skills that build lasting recovery