

## Supplemental Learning: Developing the ‘Attachment Lens’

*Unlocking Childhood with Mary Hewitt ©*

**Purpose:** This reflective practice document is intended to be an extension of Unlocking Childhood’s *Yellow Chair Chat* © session entitled: ‘**Developing the Attachment Lens**’. You may find this document helpful as you engage in self-guided learning as an individual or within a Community of Practice.

First, review the **4 Attachment Styles** and the common behavioral patterns associated with each:

<b>SECURE</b> <i>(a consistently responsive, sensitive caregiver)</i>	<b>ANXIOUS</b> <i>(an inconsistently responsive, sensitive caregiver)</i>	<b>AVOIDANT</b> <i>(a consistently cold, distant caregiver)</i>	<b>DISORGANIZED</b> <i>(caregiver may be a figure that evokes fear in child)</i>
<p><b>The Child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Will separate from caregivers to play and explore</li> <li>~ When frightened or stressed, will seek comfort from caregiver</li> <li>~ Is often perceived as “mature” and “less disruptive”, <i>not easily triggered</i></li> <li>~ Shows willingness to share feelings and be vulnerable with others</li> <li>~ Will likely become upset when caregiver leaves, and is easily soothed upon their return</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Tends to be suspicious of strangers</li> <li>~ Is often perceived as “clingy” or “overly dependent”</li> <li>~ <i>Trigger response:</i> Freeze and Fawn</li> <li>~ Is highly distressed when separated from caregiver, not easily soothed upon return</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Tends to avoid caregivers, will not seek out comfort and often refuses help</li> <li>~ Shows no preference between caregiver and stranger</li> <li>~ Avoids physical contact and eye contact</li> <li>~ Will rarely ask for help</li> <li>~ <i>Trigger response:</i> Freeze, Fight, Flight</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Shows lack of clear/typical attachment behaviours</li> <li>~ Exhibits a mix of responses to caregiver (often avoidant or resistant)</li> <li>~ Seems dazed, confused, or apprehensive</li> <li>~ May assume parental role</li> <li>~ May act as parent towards caregiver, ignoring their own needs</li> <li>~ <i>Trigger response:</i> varies</li> </ul>

Next, Using your **‘Attachment Lens’**: Review the case studies below. Then, you will brainstorm strategies to support this child in developing Secure Attachments within the classroom. An ‘Idea Key’ can be found below, which may assist you in the brainstorming portion.

**Remember:** *It’s not our role to diagnose children with attachment styles, however, we can notice common patterns/trends in their behaviour—which may offer us important insights that can assist us in creating individualized plans and approaches to best support them in the classroom.*

Case Study:	Strategies to Support Rayya:
<p><b>Rayya</b> seems <b>anxious</b> in relationships:            She often clings to you, seems highly anxious, prefers spending time with you over play, and often engages in people-pleasing. She seems suspicious of other’s intentions.</p>	
Case Study:	Strategies to Support Jordan:
<p><b>Jordan</b> shows signs of <b>avoidance</b> in relationships:            He won’t ask for (or receive) help when he needs it, is extremely independent, and struggles with group play. He seems hesitant to trust. He seems disconnected from his feelings and even denies how he feels.</p>	
Case Study:	Strategies to Support Dori:
<p><b>Dori</b> seems <b>disorganized</b> in their attachments to others:            They seem dazed, confused, and apprehensive much of the time--and struggle with change. They don’t seem to have any clear attachments at all. They sometimes take on the caretaker role.</p>	

## Idea Keys:

### *Anxious Attachment in Children*

- ~offer comfort objects for when you're busy or away
- ~provide classroom responsibilities to help child feel useful and valued, offer gratitude upon completion
- ~visual schedule for predictability and consistency
- ~offer reassurances, such as: letting the child know when you will return, what's coming next, etc.
- ~turn taking—to help define they are separate from you, and it's ok
- ~assist child in entering play and securing bonds with peers. *Gradually* remove yourself from these situations to increase independence

### *Avoidant Attachment in Children*

- ~think about how you can remind them you are there to support them, without explicitly pointing it out. (e.g. helping them with a task or challenge-learning they can rely on you)
- ~show signs you listen to them and care—perhaps they mentioned a book they loved, and you bring it to class for them the next day
- ~books/read-alouds about rejection and anger
- ~remember: avoidantly attached children can be CONVENIENT for us because they are hyper-independent. We need to find subtle but impactful ways to show them we care, and they are supported

### *Disorganized Attachment in Children*

- ~remember: these children are navigating a world that doesn't feel safe. They feel exposed and vulnerable most of the time. Remembering this can help you to continue to support them despite your discomfort, and stop the cycle of rejection and abandonment
- ~Rhythmic activities are beneficial here: coloring, counting, copying, building structures, etc.
- ~reinforce routine and consistency, also maintaining firm and loving boundaries is essential
- ~for a child with DA, it can be helpful to ensure regular meetings for professionals to ensure consistency in approaches.