

ATTACHMENT

Our attachment patterns from the past can influence our adult relationships in the here-and-now.

Not everyone was so fortunate as to grow up with a so-called secure attachment where the primary caregiver(s) met most needs of the baby and growing child and where little breaks in trust were soon repaired.

In a secure attachment, we were mirrored in the eyes of our beloved caregiver(s); we would learn that their love for us would continue, even if they weren't physically with us all the time. In a secure attachment, our caregivers would successfully and lovingly regulate our immature nervous system with their mature, balanced one; reassuring us, holding us, soothing us, nurturing us.

Those of us who were less fortunate, grew up in a more adverse environment with insecure attachment patterns where our needs weren't adequately met, with people who themselves had dysregulated nervous systems. We had to respond by adapting to this more adverse environment. We would try and figure out how to elicit a response from our caregiver(s) which was likely to meet our needs or at least, would minimise the risk of getting harmed as much as possible.

As a result, we developed behavioural patterns which were designed to match our primary caregiver's behaviour towards us in a way that would stimulate them to attend to us or do us the least harm. We might have learned to fade into the background because that was the safest way to be. We might have learned to please because that would have forestalled criticism which might have led to a frightening outburst of temper. We might have learned to look after our caregiver's needs and deny our own.

Some of us would have tried to regulate our grown-up caregivers with our immature nervous systems or would have tried to be their caregivers, supplying whatever it was they needed in order to keep them from lashing out at us.

Some of us became very adept at coaxing abusive caregivers out of their aggressive and dangerous moods.

These patterns can still be operating later in life, largely, because they are unconscious. What is more, we can feel drawn towards partners who would stimulate the same "coping mechanisms" in us which we developed a long time ago as children in our birth families - simply, because this is what we know.

How counselling can help with this:

In our counselling sessions, we can look at these patterns, bring them into awareness and think about alternative or additional ways of interacting in relationships.

