



Dr. K's Guide to Mental Health

Anxiety Module | The Anxious Personality | Notes

Some people have an anxious personality that develops through childhood experiences. What we learn in childhood shapes our comprehension of the world and how we view relationships. Children pick up on the emotional responses from caregivers. Based on the facial expressions of the people around them, they generate an understanding of the world. In Attachment Theory, the type of emotional mirroring children receive determines their attachment style and explains how some people develop an anxious personality.

Type of Emotional Mirroring Received	Attachment Style	Personality
Consistent and appropriate responses to a child's needs	Secure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows them to "learn the rules of the game" so the world is consistent and safe• Fosters confidence• Become adventurers, can explore, and can return to caregiver if there is a problem
Poor responses, child receives inappropriate emotional responses	Insecure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wires for life on "very hard difficulty"• Increases the tendency to predict danger and worry• Sees danger in safe places which translates into a high level of worry over benign things
Inconsistent emotional response from caregivers	Anxious-Ambivalent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knows that others are capable of love, but can't quite figure out what the rules of the game are• Mixed feelings towards people; sometimes isolating, pushing people away, or craving social connection; craves affection but builds walls• Can get angry at others for not being emotionally available to them, but does not know how to ask people for help• Develops protective shell to "not care" about relationships because relationships can hurt
Unavailable, no response to emotional needs	Avoidant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learned that emotional displays are not acceptable; being told to "toughen up" or "stop being a baby" when displaying emotions• Feels the need to be a pillar; cold and emotionless on the inside



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In cases of severe attachment issues, sometimes these will manifest fully as what we call a “personality disorder,” which is when your brain gets wired a particular way that impairs function.

Examples of personality disorders are:

Borderline Personality Disorder – These people are afraid of abandonment and rejection. Also characterized by a poor sense of internal identity, so the way they are treated fills in the void. When people treat them well, they feel amazing, and when they perceive rejection, they feel incredibly hurt.

- Can feel very anxious based on abandonment or rejection. They can also feel extremely depressed, even be suicidal.
- People often feel like they are “bipolar” because they have a lot of swings in their mood.

Narcissism – People are insecure about their worth on the inside, so have to get external validation from the outside.

Dependent Personality – People who are overly dependent on others to make decisions. They need the approval of others and are codependent. Can feel intense anxiety when other people aren't around to help them make decisions.