



# ATTUNE TO ATTACH

Taught by Maribeth Poole



**ATTACHMENT PROFILES**

## 4 Example Attachment Pattern Profiles

### Snapshot: Secure Attachment

#### *“Secure Sally”*

Due to knowing well that God is all He claims to be, Secure Sally has confidence as she goes through life. She is looking forward to the ‘adventures’ that are to come. Sally is not fearful of the mistakes she will make as she relates to her family, friends, co-workers, and others. She is not unnerved by the many things she must learn. She is a non-defensive and eager learner. At the times when interpersonal conflict arises, she does not withdraw in fear or become angry and demanding. Instead, she interacts with the person pursuing mutual care and respect if at all possible. When difficult situations occur, she is not reactive. She calmly takes the time needed to learn fully what the situation is before responding. In complex situations her response is often helpful to everyone involved and people feel comfortably supported when she is there. She is able to draw out the struggles another person is having, reflectively showing her understanding as she joins them in the path that lies ahead.

#### **Description of Upbringing:**

Sally Secure grew up in an atmosphere in which her parents were finely tuned in to her physical & emotional needs, giving timely responses. Sally was encouraged to express her thoughts and opinions and talk about the hard times that come in growing up. Her parents stayed involved, helping her learn to voice her needs, receive help as needed, take care of herself, empathize and

appropriately care for others. Sally is encouraged to try new things and can do so with confidence due to the secure base in life provided by the family. The family environment set the stage for Sally to be able to return to joy from any situation or emotion. As she grew, Sally learns what brings personal satisfaction and joy. She has opportunities provided in which she can learn of the power given to her by God to bring life to others.

### **Developmental Outcome:**

Sally grows up with a sense of confidence and freedom to explore her world. She has enough inner certainty to tackle challenges in life in ways that are satisfactory to her. When emotional challenges as well as joyful times arise, she is able to fully feel the emotions while continuing to live from a kindly and respectful relational stance. She knows how to relate empathetically with others and interact in ways that repair relationships when they 'rupture'. She is not as concerned with 'fairness' as she is with bringing about mutual care and the best interest of 'her people'.

### **Relational Connection with God:**

Sally lives with an inner calm and joy in knowing God's heart towards her described in 1 Corinthians 13. He is characterized by being patient and kind. He does not get upset when she gets credit and praise, so she does not have to put herself down with false humility. She knows He is desiring for her to be honored and not shamed. He does not hold her sins and mistakes against her, but keeps a clean slate in His mind towards her. She senses how God believes in her and what she is about. His love is persevering and she experiences ways that His loving kindness, goodness and mercy follow her daily.

As a result, Sally has an easy flow of engagement with God and the world. When hard times come, she is not overly despairing due to a knowing that it is not the end of the story and God is writing the final chapter as a remarkably good one. Being confident all will be ok, Sally is not afraid to risk and fail. She enjoys the reality of John 10:9 where Jesus exclaimed “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.”

### **Snapshot: Dismissive Attachment**

#### ***“Dismissive Danny”***

Danny lives with a focus on following rules. Since he has not developed an inner confidence in handling hard situations, he feels a need to have clear guidelines to follow. This becomes more important to him than entering into the emotional pain or disturbances occurring with those he meets.

Danny’s creativity and ability to problem solve are limited due to his main focus on following rules. It is fearful for him to let people have possible negative opinions of him. Thus, he is motivated and guided by a strong shame focus. He is defensive when problems occur and afraid he may be found ‘wanting’. This inhibits his capability to learn. Due to his need to keep life seemingly in control, he is not able to enter fully into a difficult situation. To do this, he must dismiss or minimize the full significance of what he or others are experiencing.

## **Description of Upbringing:**

Danny quickly learned the rule that 'children are to be seen and not heard'. Of course, he was just a child, so what did he know? He did not experience the faces of his parent's lighting up in the delight of who he was. His emotions were dismissed as being unimportant and 'incorrect'. The significance of his needs was not recognized and often went unmet. At times, he learned that his need presented an inconvenience to his parents and if he wanted to avoid the pain of being ignored or shamed, he must not let it be known. Although he did want to be loved and given attention, he learned not to expect it or seek it. He knew that his needs, opinions, feelings and desires were unimportant.

In order to navigate in his world he focused on being a good child. He appeared to be well adjusted since he did not voice complaints or appear to be a clingy child. This 'getting it right' added to the cycle of not receiving focused attention. There was no need to be met and no behavioral problems to be disciplined. This inflexible and non-spontaneous pattern led him into the path of a rigid relational style.

## **Developmental Outcome:**

Danny grew up in an environment in which his needs, emotions, opinions and ideas were disregarded. His mind internalized the belief of being unimportant and later, he is not able to easily recognize his own value. Memories are 'recorded' through a process that includes emotional 'wiring'. Not getting the message that who he is and what he thinks is of any importance, laid the groundwork for life's events not to be 'logged' well in his memory.

Thus, he has a limited view of himself. His life awareness is limited to 'non-emotional' domains. Spontaneous and creative thinking has been discouraged, resulting in his interpersonal relationships being stilted. His view of life is inflexible as he takes a restrictive approach to living in the world.

### **Relational Connection with God:**

Danny has little awareness that God cares about how he is doing. He is certain that what matters to God is obedience and having a 'right attitude'. He experiences God as distant, mostly uninvolved and a task master. While knowing the theological truth of God's love being unconditional, his experience with God is characterized by a dryness and dissatisfaction.

Danny mistakes 'rules' for relationship and thus pursues obedience as a way to secure his standing with God.

### **Snapshot : Distracted / Anxious Attachment**

**(Pre-Occupied or Entangled Parents)**

***"Distracted David"***

David has a strong desire to relate well and care about those in his life. Whichever person or event is the most demanding is the one that grabs his attention. He lives with 'the squeaky wheel gets the oil' syndrome. People do know they are important to him when a crisis occurs, but if nothing urgent is being presented to David, they may not know his true response. Due to the crises of the moment, responsibilities often are not taken care of, which results in frustration with him by others.

When David has a need in his own life, he is distracted from his life responsibilities as he seeks someone to meet his need. When he has found someone, he tends to become overly dependent for a period of time, being paralyzed and not functioning as he wishes. These adults often have a secret. Although David feels guilty and has tried repeatedly to stop, he continues to be drawn to pornography (or food, TV, alcohol, compulsive reading, drugs, nicotine....) He tries to remind himself that he will hate himself later, but the urge for the personal excitement, both physically and emotionally, is stronger than his self-discipline. The day's most barren of personal affirmation and tenderness are the ones that most often he gives in to his addiction. His life is governed by chaos more than by his values and goals.

### **Description of Upbringing:**

David's parents truly desired to give their child the attention and love needed; yet they were often distracted from doing so by other issues in life that riveted their emotional attention. Whatever situation had the most emotional intensity determined their focus. This inconsistency in availability, sensitivity, perceptivity and effectiveness left David with a sense of uncertainty, giving him an urgent and constant need for comfort from external interactions. At times, his parents remembered their desire to love their child without tuning in to his specific needs at the time. This lack of sensitivity resulted in emotionally engulfing David. He felt overwhelmed and anxious regarding future interactions. Internally David was consumed with and driven by emotional doubts of one form or another. (Am I loved? Will the person leave me?)

Am I going to be rejected? Will their need to love me drown my needs for timely synchronization?) Along with this undercurrent, David was a very caring child who gravitated to the 'underdogs' and he received great appreciation from those he helped. He learned this was a great way to receive the attention he craved.

### **Developmental Outcome:**

David recognized the importance of love and giving care and he was driven to be a 'caregiver.'

He had been conditioned as he grew to focus on the emotionally demanding situations in life, and thus his mind tracked these types of situations. He learned to attach to emotional crises more than to people. This resulted in his being 'off' and 'on' in relationships, depending on the emotional intensity of the moment. His preoccupation and demanding situations resulted in his being unreliable relationally as well as with day-to-day responsibilities. David's insecurity played out with demands to be respected, appreciated and in the spotlight. Even though he desired to gain security from his relationships, he gravitated toward relationship with people who were demanding or frustrated with him.

### **Relational Connection with God:**

David lives with an undercurrent of anxiety and drivenness in pursuing emotional highs and circumstances being 'fixed' as evidence of God's love. David is more familiar with 'excitement' and 'joy' than with internal shalom, inner calm and peace.



## Snapshot: Disorganized / Disoriented Attachment

### *“Disorganized Debbie”*

At first, Debbie appears to be a stable, reliable and responsible colleague. This is the case until difficult situations arise and she emotionally disintegrates. As time goes on, Debbie’s life is increasingly characterized by emotional outbursts and chaos. It seems like she has an internal magnet to fearful situations, as she is constantly in the middle of whatever crisis is at hand. In situations that are threatening to her, she is unable to gain realistic perspective, bringing herself to a sense of calm. Instead, she is quite reactive. She is not easily able to receive the help she needs, and cannot relate in a way that is helpful to others. Verbal reassurance does her no good. She loses focus of her personal preferences and values during the times she is disoriented and internally disorganized.

### **Description of Upbringing:**

Disorganized Debbie grew up in a home fraught with fear. The parents to whom she needed to go for security were the very ones who bought her fear. Her mother was a very anxious lady whose emotions flowed out to her children when she related to them. She was constantly certain that danger was lurking, their house would be broken into, Dad was hurt in an accident if he was late getting home from work, and the children would get hurt when they played and climbed.

Debbie learned from her mother that the world is not a safe place to live. Debbie also lived in the terror of her father coming home at the end of each day. Would he fly into a rage? Was tonight the night that he would enter

her bedroom and violate her? Would he again smash mom against the wall? Yes, it is certain to Debbie that the world is unsafe, not organized or reliable, and will not offer her love and protection.

### **Developmental Outcome:**

Debbie, who grew up in a very chaotic and fearful environment, has internalized the chaos and fear. From her mother, who lived with a constant sense of dread and anxiety, Debbie learned the world is not a safe place and something 'bad' is going to happen. Due to mother functioning in a disoriented manner, Debbie has no constancy to build a secure view of her world. Dad was 'scary' due to his outbursts of rage and abusiveness, which added to Debbie's internalized belief that the world is unsafe and unreliable. Her parents, a source of comfort, were also a source of danger and fear for her. This left Debbie frozen in a stance between avoidance and tracking all fear inducing situations. As life progressed, Debbie struggled with emotional, social and cognitive difficulties.

Her internal disorganization will impair her future interactions with others and inhibit her ability to function well. She will have a poor coping capacity and a marked inability to regulate emotional responses, stay focused, and 'on track' in life.

### **Relational Connection with God:**

Debbie experiences her relationship with God as tumultuous and confusing. Internally, she lives with fear and certainty that God is scrutinizing and tracking her. She has a disorganized relational stance with God, wanting His love and care while simultaneously afraid of going close.



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