
CBT

Psychoeducation

Guide: Anxious

Attachment Style

UNDERSTANDING ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT

Anxious attachment style

Is characterised by:

- Preoccupation with relationships
- Fear of abandonment or rejection
- Difficulty trusting stability in others
- Attraction to partners who are inconsistent or emotionally unavailable

This style often develops from early relational experiences, where love and connection were associated with uncertainty or the need to prove worth.

Over time, the nervous system learns a pattern:

Anxiety ↝ Relief
= Connection

As a result:

- Chaotic relationships feel magnetic
- Stability and predictability may feel unremarkable

Imagine someone who repeatedly finds themselves anxious when a partner doesn't immediately respond to texts.

They may feel a sudden urge to check repeatedly or seek reassurance.

Paradoxically, they feel drawn to partners who are unpredictable or emotionally unavailable, while stable, reliable partners can feel less exciting.

This pattern reflects a learned association between:

Uncertainty and Emotional intensity.

The CBT Perspective

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) helps us understand the connection between:

- **Thoughts** – automatic beliefs about love, safety, and self-worth
- **Emotions** – anxiety, fear, or longing
- **Behaviors** – checking, chasing, or reassurance-seeking

CBT interventions aim to interrupt maladaptive cycles and build healthier responses to relationship stressors.

CBT Interventions for Anxious Attachment

Step 1. Notice Automatic Thoughts

- Track feelings and urges when anxiety arises
- Identify unhelpful beliefs and cognitive distortions (e.g., catastrophizing, mind-reading)
- Write down the thoughts to gain awareness and distance from them

Step 2. Pause Before Acting

- Interrupt automatic behaviors like texting or seeking reassurance
- Use this pause to respond intentionally, not reactively
- Take a few deep breaths or count to ten before deciding on a response

Step 3. Tolerate Discomfort

- Accept that anxiety can exist without immediate action
- Practice grounding exercises, deep breathing, or journaling
- Remind yourself that discomfort is temporary and does not always indicate danger

Step 4. Recondition the Nervous System

- Gradually learn that stability and predictability signal connection
- Reinforce healthy patterns consistently through repeated practice
- Over time, anxiety loses its payoff, and safety feels desirable

Step 5. Cognitive Restructuring

- Identify unhelpful beliefs about love, rejection, or abandonment
- Replace them with balanced, realistic thoughts (e.g., “Delayed response doesn’t mean lack of care”)
- Repeat and reflect on these new thoughts daily to strengthen them

Step 6. Behavioral Experiments

- Test anxious assumptions through small, intentional behavioral changes
- Observe outcomes to challenge unhelpful predictions
- Gradually increase the complexity of experiments as confidence grows

Step 7. Mindfulness & Self- Compassion

- Practice being present without judgment
- Notice urges and anxious thoughts without acting on them
- Use supportive self-talk and affirmations to reinforce self-worth

Step 8. Reward Healthy Choices

- Reinforce behaviors that support stability and emotional safety
- Celebrate small wins to strengthen new patterns
- Track progress to increase motivation and self-efficacy