**Characteristics of Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment in Adults**

Much of the dismissive-avoidant attachment pattern is fear-based – fear of rejection, fear of shame

or guilt, and fear of true intimacy. This can result in surface level relationships and/or affairs that

never deepen.

If you have a dismissive-avoidant attachment pattern, you might identify with some or all of the

following characteristics in adulthood:

• You build walls and create distance in relationships to avoid being hurt.

• You are over-focused on self; extreme self-reliance

• You could have difficulty with maintaining eye contact.

• You have difficulty expressing needs or feel it’s better to do everything yourself.

• You may search out faults in relationships or your partner.

• You may have a pattern of idealizing a past partner when in relationship with a new partner.

• You have strict, sometimes unequal, and often unrealistic boundaries.

• You might choose another insecurely attached person as a partner (most commonly a

partner with anxious attachment).

• You may have one-night stands or short-term relationships to avoid commitment.

• You may avoid intimacy in your relationships by self-sabotaging, having affairs, keeping

conversations surface-level, or deflecting/letting your partner take up more space in the

relationship (this can be emotional, verbal, or physical space).

• Your friends and lovers might tell you that you send “mixed signals.”

• You want companionship, yet also fear being hurt, so avoid emotional closeness.

• You might over-analyze your relationships “waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

• You may long for your partner but feel stressed in their presence.

• You may live in your head or have difficulty relating to others when intimacy deepens.

• You might have difficulty feeling your own emotions and thus have a tendency to reject or

dismiss others’ emotions, giving the impression that you don’t care.

• You might have an inflated sense of self, often judging others or viewing their vulnerability

as weakness

• You might struggle with perfectionism and fear of failure

• You may believe that love is something to be earned.

**Healing Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment**

“Deep down, all of us are designed for intimacy, connection, awareness, and love.”

– Dr. Diane Poole Heller

Despite attachment injury, our brains are hardwired to seek healing – this should give you hope! We

all have the capacity to move toward secure attachment because we can all rewire our brain, create

new neural pathways, and form new patterns of relating to ourselves and others.

That said, healing attachment injury isn’t easy since our relational habits and responses are deeply

ingrained in the brain throughout childhood. Breaking the cycle of behavior you learned in childhood

as a matter of survival is difficult, but not impossible. Remember that healing is always possible – at

any age! By learning and regularly practicing secure attachment skills, you can move toward more

secure attachment.

Suggested practices for this pattern:

• Practice taking calculated risks with your partner by sharing your feelings and allowing

vulnerability.

• Let your partner know that you hear them when they express their needs, and really listen

to what they express.

• Practice sharing your own needs with your partner. You can start small and slowly increase

your ask.

• Focus on the needs of your partnership rather only your own needs. “We” or “us” versus

“I” or “me” mentality.

• When confronted by your partner, practice empathy instead of defensiveness.

• Practice increasing your awareness beyond yourself and your thoughts.

• Learn to ask for help and to accept help when it’s given – without being critical.

• Find a couples’ therapist with attachment experience, enroll in an online attachment

course, or read a book on attachment.

• Allow yourself to feel your original longing to connect with others. It may be uncomfortable

at first but learn to sit with the discomfort without trying to numb, explain, or reduce the

charge.

• Engage in activities that include your partner! Or include your partner in activities that you

enjoy. This can be as simple as going on a walk or running errands together.

**Loving a Dismissive-Avoidant Partner**

Loving a dismissive-avoidant partner requires understanding how your partner is wired to receive

and express love – so you’re in the right place! Learning about their childhood experiences and

being able to identify their dismissive-avoidant patterns can help you navigate behavior that might

seem confusing at times. If your partner leans toward a dismissive-avoidant attachment pattern, it’s

easy to feel isolated and alone in your own relationship or to internalize your partner’s tendency to

close up.

When your partner shuts you out, you might press them harder, thinking they’ll respond, only to find

that the wall grows taller and become more difficult to navigate. Understanding how your partner is

wired and responding to them in a loving way that reflects their attachment pattern can help them

heal.

Don’t chase your partner – they will outrun you. Remember they are experts at excessive

independence. Rather than pressing your partner to “open up,” let them know you are available

when they are ready. They need to feel that they are in control. When your partner does begin to

engage, refrain from making judgments. Making them feel guilty or ashamed of their feelings will

only reinforce their dismissive-avoidant attachment injury. Likewise, you might find that after they

open up to you, they experience relief but quickly withdraw once more. Give them time and space

to process their conflicting emotions and remain available as the secure base to which they can

always return once they are ready for more emotional contact.

It is also important to recognize that your partner’s attachment pattern has little to do with you. Don’t

take their silence or distance personally. Remember that trust in another person is a tremendous

obstacle and point of anxiety for someone with this pattern. Being steady, reliable, and present with

your partner can help them learn that connection is safe and available to them.

It’s also vital that you don’t give up on your partner. Provide regular and consistent messages that

their needs are important to you and that they are safe with you. Follow this up with action.

Encourage communication and acknowledge the vulnerability that arises when they begin to feel

the original longing to connect.