

SIMPLY BEING THERAPY · A REFLECTION WORKBOOK

How We Learn to Love

Understanding the patterns you bring into relationships—
and creating space for something different.

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Before You Begin

Most of us didn't learn how to love by being taught—we learned by watching, adapting, and figuring out what it took to stay connected to the people we needed. That means the way you show up in relationships today, the parts of you that reach and the parts that pull back, the parts that go quiet when things get hard, all of it made sense once. It was smart. It kept you close to someone you depended on.

This workbook is an invitation to get curious about those patterns instead of judging them. Attachment work isn't about fixing something broken in you. It's about noticing what you learned, understanding why it made sense at the time, and deciding—with a little more choice this time—what you actually want your relationships to look like now.

How to use this workbook

Move through the pages in order, or skip around—whatever suits how you process. There's no right pace and no right way to answer. Some prompts will land easily. Others might stir something up, and that's normal. This workbook is meant to build self-understanding; it isn't a substitute for working with a therapist, especially if what surfaces feels like more than you want to hold alone.

A gentle reminder

Attachment patterns aren't a verdict on your character, and they aren't permanent. They're strategies your nervous system built to keep you safe and connected. With enough awareness and enough safety, they can shift. That's the work ahead.

Dr. Barbie Hessel, LCSW

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Attachment Is About Adaptation, Not Labels

Attachment is a survival system—organized around proximity, safety, connection, and responsiveness. It develops not from one defining moment in childhood, but from thousands of small, repeated relational experiences: what happened when you reached out, what happened when you needed comfort, what happened when you had a need at all.

KEY IDEA

Instead of asking, “What’s wrong with the way I attach?” we can begin by asking, “What did I learn I needed to do to stay connected?”

Reflect

Growing up, what helped you feel close to the people you depended on?

What tended to create distance?

What happened when you needed comfort?

What did you learn about having needs?

The Four Attachment Patterns

These are patterns, not identities. You may recognize yourself in more than one, and you may respond differently depending on the relationship. Attachment patterns can also change over time—especially with awareness and new relational experiences.

Secure

Connection generally feels safe. Both closeness and autonomy are possible.

Anxious / Preoccupied

Connection may feel uncertain, creating heightened attention to signs of distance, rejection, or abandonment.

Avoidant / Dismissive

Independence may feel safer than dependence. Needs and vulnerability may be minimized or managed privately.

Fearful-Avoidant / Disorganized

There may be a simultaneous longing for connection and fear of what closeness could bring.

REFLECT

Which descriptions feel familiar to you? Which don't?

What Did Connection Require?

Let's move away from categories and toward developmental learning. Complete these sentences with whatever comes up first—there's no need to overthink it.

In my early relationships, I learned that...

To receive attention, I needed to _____

When someone was upset with me, I _____

When I was upset, I learned to _____

Being independent meant _____

Needing someone meant _____

Conflict meant _____

Love felt most available when _____

GO DEEPER

What version of yourself seemed easiest for other people to love?

Your Attachment Alarm System

Think of a relationship that matters to you. What tends to activate your attachment system?

This might look like...

- Someone becoming distant · Delayed responses · Criticism
- Conflict · Feeling misunderstood · Someone needing too much from you
- Depending on another person · Feeling controlled · Uncertainty about where you stand

My Attachment Sequence

TRIGGER	BODY SENSATION	THOUGHT / STORY	URGE	BEHAVIOR
<i>Example: Someone seems distant → tightness in chest → "They're pulling away" → urge to get reassurance → repeated checking/texting.</i>				

Your turn:

Trigger: _____

Body: _____

Story: _____

Urge: _____

What I usually do: _____

The Strategies That Protect Us

Attachment behaviors are protective strategies—not flaws. Each one is trying to keep something safe.

When I fear losing connection, I tend to...

- Seek reassurance
- Over-explain
- Monitor the other person's mood
- People-please
- Pursue
- Become hypervigilant
- Abandon my own needs

When connection feels too close, I tend to...

- Withdraw
- Intellectualize
- Become irritated
- Minimize my feelings
- Focus on the other person's flaws
- Distract myself
- Become intensely self-reliant

REFLECT

What is this strategy trying to prevent?

What does it believe would happen if it stopped doing its job?

The Relationship Cycle

Two people's attachment strategies often reinforce one another, creating a cycle that repeats.

I feel threatened → I protect myself → my protection activates you → you protect yourself → your protection confirms my original fear.

Map a recurring relationship dynamic

When I feel: _____

I tend to: _____

The other person responds by: _____

Which makes me feel: _____

So I: _____

UNDERNEATH IT ALL

What are each of us actually longing for underneath this cycle?

What Happens Inside You?

Attachment doesn't only happen in our thoughts—our bodies participate in our relationships too. Bring to mind a recent moment of relational activation, and notice.

What happens to your...

Breathing? _____

Jaw? _____

Chest? _____

Shoulders? _____

Stomach? _____

Energy level? _____

Do you feel an impulse to...

Move toward · Move away · Freeze · Fix · Appease · Shut down

PRACTICE

Spend 30–60 seconds noticing the sensations without immediately acting on them.

What changes when you notice the activation before responding to it?

The Need Beneath the Strategy

Choose one attachment behavior you'd like to understand differently. Instead of criticizing it, get curious about it.

The behavior: _____

Instead of criticizing it, ask

- What is this behavior trying to accomplish for me?
- What is it afraid might happen?
- What do I actually need in this moment?

Possibilities

Reassurance · Space · Consistency · Autonomy · Comfort · Clarity · Respect · Repair · To feel chosen · To feel heard

The strategy I use is:

The need underneath it may be:

Practicing Something Different

Move from insight into new relational behavior with this five-step pause.

1. Notice

Something in me feels threatened.

4. Identify the Need

What am I actually needing right now?

2. Name

What am I feeling? What am I afraid is happening?

5. Choose

What response reflects who I want to be, rather than what fear is urging me to do?

3. Separate

What do I know versus what am I predicting?

Rewrite the Pattern

My automatic response: _____

What I'm protecting: _____

What I actually need: _____

A different response I could practice: _____

Moving Toward Earned Security

Security doesn't mean never becoming activated. It means having enough safety and awareness that an old protective pattern no longer has to make every relational decision for you.

Security can look like...

- Allowing yourself to have needs
- Tolerating temporary uncertainty
- Asking directly instead of testing
- Setting boundaries without automatically withdrawing
- Staying connected to yourself while connected to another person
- Allowing others to disappoint you without assuming the relationship is unsafe
- Repairing after conflict
- Recognizing when a relationship genuinely cannot meet your needs
- Choosing relationships where reciprocity and emotional availability are possible

Final Reflection

The relationship pattern I understand differently now is:

When this pattern appears, I want to remember:

Something I want to practice is: _____

Something I no longer need to do to earn connection is:

In relationships, I want to give myself permission to:

CLOSING THOUGHT

Healing attachment isn't about never needing anyone,
never becoming anxious, or always responding perfectly.

*It is about developing enough safety and awareness that an
old protective pattern no longer has to make every
relational decision for you.*

YOU DON'T HAVE TO UNTANGLE THIS ALONE

Ready to Go a Little Deeper?

Reading about attachment is one thing—actually shifting these patterns, the ones that show up in your closest relationships, usually happens best in relationship with someone else. That's where therapy comes in.

At Simply Being Therapy, our clinicians work somatically and relationally, which means we're not just talking about your patterns—we're helping you notice them as they happen, in your body, in real time, so something can actually shift.

If any of what you read here felt familiar, we'd love to hear from you.

INQUIRE ABOUT AN APPOINTMENT

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