



## WEEK 4 | YOUR TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTAL JOURNEY

### *Making Sense of Attachment Science*

The foundation beneath all Ten Empowered Parenting Pillars is a willingness, capacity, and capability to **Show Up!**

Showing up means we are:

- 1) **As present** as we possibly can be in our body, heart, and mind, able to meet our child where they are without judgement, resentment, or blame.
- 2) **As persevering** as we can be in our ability to remain patient, resilient, and flexible.
- 3) **As dedicated** as we possibly can be, knowing that no one does it “perfectly” all the time. When these three components are actualized, we nurture what is known as a Secure Attachment between ourselves and our children. When there is a Secure Attachment, parent and child THRIVE. The Ten Pillars of Empowered Parenting allow everyone in the family system to FLOURISH.

According to Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson in their book, “The Power of Showing Up,” a Secure Attachment is the “ultimate goal” for parents. Let’s discuss what gets in our way of showing up for ourselves and our children: the three expressions of insecure attachment in the adult who is parenting. Your Attachment Orientation is your system’s way of organizing behavior to meet your need for security and safety (connection).

## **Attachment is our brain's understanding of whether:**

- Connection and intimacy are safe and dependable; **or** dangerous and/or unpredictable.
- Our emotions are manageable, and our bodies are to be trusted, **or** emotions are dangerous, and our bodies cannot survive intense stress.
- Our inner world makes sense, and we are worthy of being known, seen, heard, and understood, **or** who we are does not make sense and we do not deserve to be understood, seen, heard, and accepted.

Remember, the quality of attachment we received in OUR childhoods, has created our head, heart, and body's belief system to the above 3 components of attachment. To SHOW UP for our children and ourselves, we must begin the process of "earning a secure attachment" and mending the patterns of disconnection, distrust, and fear.

We will explore your Inner Child's Attachment Style. We invite you to embrace this exercise as an opportunity to self awareness, not diagnosis.

As human beings, we are still on the precipice of understanding how complex and nuanced attachment presents itself within our everyday experiences. It is very common that you, and your child/ren, experience insecure and secure attachment on a spectrum; flowing fluidly up and down the "scale of security." **This exercise is not meant to box you in, or create fear and urgency within you. With self awareness, and naming, comes reassurance and an opportunity for self-responsibility.**

# **Secure Attachment: The Consequence of Empowered Parenting**

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## **As a Child, Your Primary Care Giver:**

- Was self-connected and felt trusted to be your caretaker.
- Mirrored your facial expressions.
- Gave you verbal empathy like: "You feel a bit down today?" or "Do you need a hand? I am wondering if you're needing support with that?"
- Offered you grounded care: "Come here, hon, I've got a hug for you."
- Understood your behaviors while trying to meet your needs and was not threatened or afraid of the behaviors.

- Encouraged you to discuss your feelings, hopes, dreams, wishes, and was able to “hold space” for you and actively listen, versus fix, problem solve, or shut down.
- Apologized to you when a mistake was made, without being self-deprecating.
- Soothed you whenever you needed it, day, or night.
- Met their own needs and was proactive in requesting support.
- Guessed what you were thinking to better understand your actions.
- Communicated with you to understand and connect, instead of needing to be right or make a point.

### **As a Parent, with Yourself:**

- You pay attention to your body and what it is communicating to you.
- You pay attention to your feelings and embrace all feelings as “communicators with messages.”
- You remember your childhood with compassion and understanding. You have made a coherent narrative.
- When you make a mistake, you can forgive yourself easily and access self-accountability to make sure it does not happen again.
- You are actively engaged in friendships and community and understand this as a CORE component of health and well-being; you have the ability to emotionally regulate.
- You know what you need and believe you’re inherently worthy of getting those needs met.
- You feel confident in your communication and have a strong “window of tolerance” when negotiating contrasting needs/wants/desires.

### **As a Parent, with Your Child:**

- You feel confident providing a haven and a secure base for your child.
- You can see beneath the child’s behavior into their feelings and needs.
- You turn toward your child with grounded awareness when they seek closeness and connection.
- You can understand and differentiate the experiences, thoughts, and feelings between yourself and your child.
- If your child is upset or grumpy, you can remain grounded and connected to joy anyway.
- You can model regulation and soothe your child (no matter their age!) when needed.
- You can communicate feelings and needs directly without passive-aggressiveness, making your child guess what is going on, or giving the child the silent treatment.

- You can prioritize emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual bonds with children despite criticism from others.
- You can actively decondition your parenting from harsh punishments, covert punishments, or power over or under parenting tactics.

### **Your Child:**

- Believes that they are worthy of love.
- Accepts the parent's bid for connection.
- Can verbalize boundaries in a clear way (7 and older). "Mom, please shut my door, I want space."
- Is willing to work as a team and has empathy for actions.
- Can regulate their own emotions and self-soothe some of the time, knowing that even adults need co-regulation, rather than self-regulation, some of the time (7 and older).
- Welcomes the parents longing to support the child to be soothed (infant-7).
- Is drawn to friendship circles that enhance their self-esteem and mirrors a healthy lifestyle (7-teens).
- Can focus on academics and maintain concentration (7 and older).
- Is independent, with a healthy relationship, self-agency, and self-awareness (12 and older).
- Believes that life is good, that they are worthy, and that no matter the difficulties, they will find a way to work through them.

**Recall a time/experience with your child where you stood in Secure Attachment. Make a commitment with yourself as a parent, right now, about practicing more Securely Attached responses with your child.**

## **Insecure Avoidant Attachment: The Consequence of Power Parenting**

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### **As a Child, Your Primary Care Giver:**

- May have ignored you and your attempts to meet your needs for connection. They were not present in their bodies.
- May have become angry at you often for small things and had limited capacity for feeling and or witnessing emotions.

- May have expressed, verbally or nonverbally, that you were a burden or a “handful,” perhaps having this belief about themselves, as well.
- May have struggled with vulnerability and avoided close connection with you.

### **As a Parent, To Yourself, You May:**

- May Feel numb to your feelings.
- Not remember your childhood.
- Dismiss your childhood as “yeah, I was mistreated, but now I’m fine!”
- Not feel your body.
- Not take time to self-reflect and be curious about your inner experiences.
- Want to run away, literally, when you are experiencing stress.
- Avoid conflict and “sweeping things under the rug.”
- Not communicate your needs, because you do not know what they are and assume they will not get met anyway.
- Really want to do better for your child but have trouble connecting in meaningful ways.

### **As a Parent, To Your Child, You May:**

- Sense a “dismissive” attachment with your child.
- See your child as “needy” and feel resentful about how much they depend on you.
- Want your child to be self-sufficient at an incredibly young age.
- Need a lot of space from your child and view your child as “clingy.”
- Want your child to self-soothe at an incredibly young age.
- Place extreme emphasis on science and material evidence, and feel that emotions are uncomfortable and inconvenient.
- Struggle to hold space for your child’s feelings and think they are “over dramatic.”

### **Your Child:**

- Avoids connection with you.
- Does not communicate how they feel or what they think.
- May struggle with empathy for siblings or others, but the adult should know that the anterior insular cortex, which drives empathy, takes many years to develop fully. As a result, empathy should not always be expected.
- Seems withdrawn, “spacey,” and has trouble focusing or concentrating.
- Struggles with memory and may appear irresponsible.
- Struggles with emotional regulation, erupts and won’t allow you to soothe them.

**\*Note: If you notice these tendencies in your child, it is OKAY. This is not bad or wrong. It just is. You are here to learn how to support your child to feel more safe, secure, and self-connected! There is hope.**

## **Insecure Ambivalent Attachment: The Consequence of Power Parenting**

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### **As a Child, You Primary Care Giver:**

- May have given help when you did not need it, and withheld help when you did.
- May have believed they needed to save you from your feelings, with constant reassurance or distracting you from upsets.
- Was not emotionally reliable; sometimes very present & warm, sometimes distant & cold.
- May have expressed with body language and/or verbal cues that you were stupid, incompetent, not able to do anything right, or “will never learn!” Or, they may have had these unconscious beliefs about themselves, which radiated as unspoken and “normalized” truths within the family system.

### **As a Parent, with Yourself, You May:**

- Experience an anxious disposition: “Feeling anxious about feeling anxious.”
- Get lost in “worst case scenarios.”
- Feel emotionally unstable and go through a “roller coaster” of feelings quickly.
- Start projects and not follow through.
- Have chronic self-doubt as a parent.
- Struggle with shame and beliefs of worthlessness.

### **As a Parent, with Your Child, You May:**

- Sense a “preoccupied attachment” to your child. (Review this important description in *The Power of Showing Up*, if necessary.)
- Not set limits or expectations, fearing that your child is going to be mad at you.
- Have difficulty giving your child space when requested, or allowing anyone else to help; constantly worry that your child needs you to rescue them.
- Feel the need for your child to be calm and regulated, so YOU can be calm and regulated.

- Worry about the child's well-being and obsess over illness or worst-case scenarios.

### **Your Child:**

- Struggles with anxiety.
- Is fearful of uncertainty.
- Struggles to connect with friends.
- Doesn't want to leave the house, and wants to be with their caregiver at all times.
- Struggles to self-regulate and has many "episodes" of emotional eruption a day.
- Struggles with focus; experiences a mind that is "constantly spinning".

**\*Note: If you notice these tendencies in your child, it is OKAY.**

**This is not bad or wrong. It just is. You are here to learn how to support your child to feel more safe, secure, and self-connected! There is hope.**

## **Insecure Disorganized Attachment: The Consequence of Power Parenting**

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### **As a Child, Your Primary Care Giver:**

- May have acted in ways that scared you, with no repair process in place after scary events.
- May have feared your feelings, especially your cries. Your emotions were "too much."
- May have been emotionally distraught much of the time (whether outward presenting, or something that you sensed).
- Practiced authoritarian parenting; was not able to create a safe environment or protect you from harm.

### **As a Parent, with Yourself, You May:**

- Have difficulty staying focused and on task.
- Be unable to cope with stress and feel very disoriented about your thoughts/feelings.
- Have exceptionally low tolerance for loud noise, or conflict between siblings.
- Feel very confused and not understand why you feel the way you do.

### **As A Parent, with Your Child, You May:**

- Become enraged very easily, suddenly snapping nearly every day.
- Scream, hit, threaten with violence, or use derogatory language to get your children to obey.
- Struggle with chronic reactivity and be unable to stand your child's big feelings.
- Take your child's behaviors and words very personally.
- Feel that any kind of feedback from your child is harsh criticism of you.
- Become angry easily and direct your anger onto your child, making your child fear you.
- Struggle to have any kind of connection with your child other than "command and obey."

### **Your Child:**

- May be consistently eruptive and can become angry very easily and seem to "snap" over little things.
- May not trust authority figures and not like to listen to anyone in a "power over" position.
- May use violence and aggression in order to meet their needs for connection, to be seen, and heard.
- Does not compromise and talks back.
- Uses hate speech to parents or siblings and seems defiant or out of control.

**\*Note: If you notice these tendencies in your child, it is OKAY.**

**This is not bad or wrong. It just is. You are here to learn how to support your child to feel more safe, secure, and self-connected! There is hope.**

## **Insecure Disorganized Attachment: The Consequence of Power Parenting**

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*"I am not to blame for what happened to me, and I AM responsible for what I do now."*

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One way of earning a secure attachment is to make sense of, and begin making peace with, your attachment history. This way, you can consciously choose how you wish to move forward into the destiny of your attachment style.

You are here to learn who YOU are, so you can see your child clearly, beneath their behaviors and the hardship for maturation. You are here to know YOU, so you can be the leader of the WE between you and your child.

If you're feeling doubtful about dredging up your past, please trust that we will do this slowly. And, in the words of Daniel Seigel:

*“Thinking of painful childhood experiences like a dog bite...”we can understand how our natural impulse is to pull away from it. so if a dog bites you on the hand, and you pull your hand away, he digs his teeth in even more strongly and your struggle worsens the injury of the bite. But if instead you shove your hand down the dog's throat, he'll gag and actually release his grip on your hand-minimizing the damage and optimizing the healing.*

*Trauma (described here as a lack of security in childhood attachment) is just like that. we naturally pull away from reflecting on trauma, not wanting to be flooded by the painful memories or thinking, “it's the past, what's the point of dwelling on something you can't change? But, memory retrieval when combined with narrative reflection can be a memory modifier.”*

— Daniel Siegel & Tiny Payne Bryson, “The Power of Showing Up”

## Your Writing Exercises

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### **Exercise 1: Write A Letter To Your Parent/S Or Primary Caregiver/s.**

They will not read this. No filter. Let your truth flow. It is NOT a betrayal. It is not actually about them. This is about YOU being able to begin the process of creating coherency. But if we have all of that emotion blocked inside of our body, we will face barrier after barrier on our growth journey and continue to struggle with the same obstacles in our parenting, and in our life!

You can express your gratitude for ways in which they showed up in security for you. You can express your heartbreak and agony in the ways they did not. You can express

your anger. NO FILTER. You can express your apathy and discomfort that you can't remember whether or not they showed up in security or insecurity. Don't overthink this!

**CRUCIAL.** Do not stop writing until you've let it all out. Let yourself write until you feel a release. It may take more than one time to find that release. Trust your process.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

## **Exercise 2: Write Yourself A Letter.**

Describe the ways you show up for yourself. Describe the ways you do not. Share your pain, your longing, your regret. Share your willingness to show up with more unconditional love, acceptance, and grace for yourself. Do not stop writing until you feel a release.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

### **Exercise 3: Write A Letter To Your Child/Children.**

They do not need to read this, it is for you. Share how you show up for them with security. Own up about the times you fall into insecure attachment responses. Validate how that might make them feel! Share how you do not show up with security. Express your feelings, whatever they are. Commit to them, from your heart, how you long to show up for them moving forward.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

## **Exercise 4: Write Your Future Self A Letter.**

This is your self after going through this transformation, weaving a more coherent narrative, gaining skills, and self awareness. How does your future self show up? What kind of capabilities, skills, and qualities does your future self have? How is your connection with yourself, in the future, going to be more secure? How is your connection in the future with your children going to be more secure? Express your feelings, and do not stop until you are complete!

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,