COLLECTION

The Essentials of Applied Psychology

The Closer You Get, the More I Pull Away

Avoidant attachment, emotional distance, and anxious–avoidant relationships

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psychologieetserenite.com

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The avoidant man or woman -- what psychology reveals about those who flee intimacy

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The Essentials of Applied Psychology — Volume 2

Legal Notice

Avoidant Attachment: Understanding, Loving, and Breaking Free

Crisis resources

If you are going through a crisis and suicidal ideation comes to you, please do not face it alone.

- 988 — 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Call or text, 24/7, free and confidential (US and Canada).
- 741741 — Crisis Text Line. Text HOME to 741741 to reach a trained crisis counselor.
- 116 123 — Samaritans, free, 24/7 (UK and Ireland).
- 911 — in case of immediate danger (US and Canada).

These numbers apply to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland. Wherever you are, findahelpline.com lists helplines country by country.

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The clinical cases presented in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to existing or deceased persons is purely coincidental. Names, circumstances, and details have been altered to ensure confidentiality.

This book is not a substitute for professional therapeutic care. If you are experiencing a psychological crisis, please consult a mental health professional.

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About the Author

Gildas Garrec is a CBT Practitioner. Trained in integrative approaches including Young's Schema Therapy and Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), he works with individuals and couples facing relationship difficulties linked to insecure attachment styles.

His clinical work has led him to observe, over the course of hundreds of consultations, the recurrence of avoidant dynamics in romantic relationships. This observation motivated the writing of this book, which aims to be both scientifically rigorous and practically accessible.

Website: psychologieetserenite.com

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Introduction -- Why This Book, Why Now

There is a relational pattern that millions of people experience without ever being able to name it. This pattern manifests through a series of contradictory signals: a partner who seems deeply committed one day, then distant and unreachable the next. Someone who says "I love you" but pulls back as soon as intimacy gets too close. A man who disappears after a weekend of perfect connection. A woman who pushes away every attempt at emotional conversation while insisting that the relationship matters to her.

This pattern has a name in clinical psychology: avoidant attachment.

Since the foundational work of John Bowlby in the 1960s and Mary Ainsworth's experimental taxonomy in the 1970s, attachment theory has evolved considerably. It has moved beyond the strictly developmental field to become one of the most robust theoretical frameworks for understanding adult romantic relationships. Research by Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver (1987) showed that the same attachment patterns observed in infants -- secure, anxious, avoidant -- reproduce themselves in romantic relationships with sometimes striking fidelity.

Avoidant attachment affects approximately 25% of the general population according to the most cited epidemiological studies. One quarter of the population. This means that the probability of encountering an avoidant partner, or of being avoidant oneself without knowing it, is statistically high. Yet this attachment style remains poorly understood, often confused with narcissism, selfishness, or simple disinterest.

Why Now

The question of avoidant attachment has become more urgent than ever for three reasons.

First, the digital revolution has changed the conditions for forming and maintaining romantic relationships. Dating apps, instant messaging, and social media have created a relational environment characterized by an apparent abundance of choice and ease of exit. For the avoidant, this environment is both a refuge (it is easy to maintain distance when the next relationship is just a swipe away) and a trap (the abundance of choice reinforces the strategy of unfavorable comparison

with the current partner).

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic forced millions of couples to live in uninterrupted proximity for months -- an involuntary stress test for the attachment system. For couples involving an avoidant partner, this forced proximity often precipitated crises that had been simmering for years. Couples therapy consultations increased significantly in the post-pandemic years, and insecure attachment dynamics are at the heart of this demand.

Third, attachment psychology is experiencing a resurgence of interest in popular culture. Books like Attached by Levine and Heller have made the theory accessible to the general public. Social media is brimming with content about "attachment styles." This renewed interest is broadly positive, but it sometimes comes with excessive simplifications that deserve to be corrected by a rigorous work.

What This Book Is -- and What It Is Not

This book is not a self-help book in the worn-out sense of the term. It contains no magic formulas, no "5 steps to change your life," and no promises of instant transformation. It is grounded in the scientific literature on attachment psychology, cognitive behavioral therapy, schema therapy, and affective neuroscience.

This book is intended for three distinct audiences:

Partners of avoidant individuals. You are probably anxious in terms of attachment, and you experience the relationship as an exhausting cycle of closeness and rejection. You need to understand what is happening in your partner's mind -- not to excuse their behaviors, but to make an informed decision about whether this relationship can evolve or whether it is destroying you.

Avoidant individuals themselves. You may have identified this pattern in yourself, or a therapist may have pointed it out to you. You know that something is not working in the way you relate, but you do not know how to change. This book will provide you with a structured protocol, drawn from CBT and schema therapy, to gradually modify your relational strategies.

Mental health professionals. Therapists, psychologists, coaches: this book can serve as a complementary clinical resource. The cases presented, the exercises, and the 8-week protocol are directly usable in session.

The Structure of the Book

The first part (chapters 1 to 4) lays the theoretical and clinical framework. What is avoidant attachment? How is it constructed in childhood? How does it manifest differently in men and women?

The second part (chapters 5 to 8) examines the avoidant in a romantic relationship. The anxious-avoidant trap, the signs of recognition, the inner experience of the avoidant -- this section dissects the relational mechanics with the precision the subject demands.

The third part (chapters 9 to 12) is resolutely oriented toward change. CBT protocol, partner's guide, couples therapy, the path to secure attachment: this section provides concrete tools for breaking out of the deadlock.

The appendices supplement the book with a validated attachment test, exercise worksheets, and a tracking journal.

How to Use This Book

This book can be read linearly (from beginning to end) or selectively, depending on your situation:

- If you are avoidant and you know it: start with chapters 1-2 to validate your understanding, then go directly to chapter 9 (CBT protocol) and chapter 12 (path to secure attachment).
- If you are the partner of an avoidant: chapters 5 (the anxious-avoidant trap), 7 (what the avoidant experiences), and 10 (survival guide) are your priorities.
- If you are unsure of your attachment style: start with the quick test in chapter 1 and the ECR-R test in Appendix A.
- If you are a therapist: chapter 9 (CBT protocol) and chapter 11 (couples therapy) contain tools directly usable in session.

Whatever your reading path, I recommend keeping a notebook close at hand. The exercises offered are not decorative -- they are the heart of the work of change.

An Ethical Note

The clinical cases presented in this book are entirely fictitious. They are constructed from recurring patterns observed in clinical practice, but none