FIXING MARRIAGE ACADEMY, INC.

— A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING —

The Love You Learned *and How to Heal It*

How Childhood Attachment Shapes Every Relationship You Have

UNDERSTAND IT · HEAL IT · CHANGE IT

"You were loved before you learned to be afraid. You can be loved back to wholeness."

Lloyd D. Allen, MSc.

MARRIAGE EDUCATOR · THERAPIST · COACH · SPEAKER

FIXINGMARRIAGEACADEMY,INC.

The Love You Learned

How Childhood Attachment Shapes Every Relationship You Have

A Practical Guide to Understanding and Healing Your Attachment Style

Marriage Educator • Therapist • Coach • Speaker

Introduction

The Love That Formed You

Before you understood what love was, you were already learning it. Long before your first relationship, your first marriage, your first conflict — your nervous system was being trained by the people who cared for you in your earliest years. How responsive they were. How consistent. How safe. Or how unpredictable, absent, or frightening.

That training became your attachment style — your internal working model of what love is, what it does, and whether it can be trusted. And it did not stay in childhood. It traveled with you into every significant relationship you have ever had — your marriage, your friendships, your parenting, your relationship with your siblings, and your relationship with God.

This ebook is not about blame. Your parents did what they knew how to do with what they had. And you adapted brilliantly to whatever environment you grew up in. The problem is that adaptations designed for childhood often become liabilities in adult relationships. What kept you safe then is costing you connection now.

The good news — and it is genuinely good — is that attachment patterns are not permanent. They are learned. And what was learned can be unlearned, revised, and replaced — through awareness, through intentional relationship, and through the kind of safe love that teaches a nervous system, for the first time, that it does not have to be afraid.

That is what this guide is for.

"We love because He first loved us."

1 John 4:19 — The original attachment framework.

— Lloyd D. Allen, MSc.

Marriage Educator • Therapist • Coach • Speaker

CHAPTER 1

What Is Attachment?

The Science Behind the Love You Learned

THE THEORY

Attachment theory was developed by British psychiatrist John Bowlby in the 1950s and later expanded by Mary Ainsworth through her landmark Strange Situation experiments. Their research demonstrated that the quality of the bond between an infant and their primary caregiver produces a lasting internal template — a blueprint — for how that child will relate to others for the rest of their life.

That template shapes how you experience closeness, how you handle conflict, how you respond to perceived rejection, how much you trust, and how freely you love. It operates largely below conscious awareness — which is why so many people repeat the same relational patterns in marriage after marriage, relationship after relationship, without understanding why.

THE FOUR STYLES

Research identifies four primary attachment styles. Three are insecure — anxious, avoidant, and disorganized. One is secure. Every person leans toward one of these patterns, and most carry elements of more than one. None of them are fixed. All of them are workable.

THE CRITICAL INSIGHT

Most people in difficult relationships are not dealing with a character problem. They are dealing with a nervous system that learned the wrong lesson about love at an age when they had no choice in the matter. Understanding this replaces contempt with curiosity — and curiosity is where healing actually begins.

> ***"What was formed in relationship must be reformed in relationship. There is no purely cognitive path out of attachment wounds."***

CHAPTER 2

Secure Attachment

The Baseline — And How to Protect It

HOW IT FORMS

Secure attachment forms when a child experiences consistent, responsive, attuned caregiving. The caregiver does not need to be perfect — research suggests that being attuned approximately 30 percent of the time is sufficient for secure attachment to develop, provided repair happens when attunement breaks down. It is the repair, as much as the connection, that teaches the child that love is reliable.

HOW IT SHOWS UP

Securely attached individuals communicate needs directly, handle conflict without catastrophizing, offer genuine intimacy without fear of engulfment, and recover from relational ruptures relatively quickly. In marriage they provide a stabilizing presence. In sibling and family relationships they tend toward cooperation, generosity, and mutual support. They are not conflict-free — they are conflict-capable.

THE EXAMPLE

Tension arises over finances. Both partners feel the stress but neither withdraws or escalates. One says — I am worried about this. Can we sit down tonight and figure it out together? They disagree on the approach but reach a workable solution. Neither questions whether the marriage is safe. Repair happens naturally.

THE SOLUTION

Maintain it. Schedule regular emotional check-ins. Never let busyness substitute for attunement. Security erodes through neglect more than through conflict — protect it deliberately. A securely attached spouse can create what researchers call earned secure attachment in an insecurely attached partner — simply by remaining consistently present, warm, and responsive over time. That is a profound gift and a serious responsibility.

CHAPTER 3

Anxious Attachment

The Pursuer — And the Fear Beneath the Chase

HOW IT FORMS

Anxious attachment forms when caregiving is inconsistent — sometimes warm and responsive, sometimes absent or distracted. The child cannot predict when love will be available, so they learn to pursue it relentlessly, amplify their distress to ensure a response, and remain hypervigilant to any sign that connection might be withdrawing. The strategy works in childhood. In adult relationships it is exhausting for everyone involved.

HOW IT SHOWS UP

In marriage — hypervigilance to the partner's mood, fear of abandonment, emotional intensity that feels disproportionate to the trigger, and a need for reassurance that never quite satisfies. In sibling relationships — rivalry, jealousy, or a chronic sense of not being enough compared to the other. The anxious person is not dramatic. They are terrified. And the terror is older than the relationship they are in.

THE EXAMPLE

A spouse does not respond to a text for two hours. The anxious partner sends three follow-up messages, interprets the silence as rejection, and is in emotional distress by the time their spouse responds — having simply been in a meeting. The conflict that follows is not about the text. It is about a child who never knew when a parent was coming back.

THE SOLUTION

Name the trigger, not just the feeling. Practice a 20-minute self-soothing pause before responding to perceived withdrawal. Learn to ask for connection directly rather than through protest behavior. Journal the gap between what the anxious mind predicts and what actually happens — this rewires the threat response over time. Emotionally Focused Therapy is the most evidence-based clinical approach. Partners of anxious individuals: provide consistent — not constant — reassurance, and respond to bids for connection reliably.

CHAPTER 4

Avoidant Attachment

The Withdrawer — And the Wall That Was Built to Survive

HOW IT FORMS

Avoidant attachment forms when emotional needs were consistently ignored, dismissed, or penalized by caregivers. The child learns that expressing needs produces rejection — so they stop expressing them. They adapt by becoming self-sufficient, suppressing emotional awareness, and treating closeness as a threat rather than a resource. The wall is not coldness. It is armor. It was built to survive.

HOW IT SHOWS UP

In marriage — emotional unavailability, dismissiveness of the partner's emotional needs, discomfort with intimacy, and withdrawal when the relationship becomes too close or too demanding. They appear self-sufficient but are actually disconnected and often lonely in ways they cannot name. In sibling relationships — emotional distance and independence that reads to others as indifference, even when it is not.

THE EXAMPLE

A spouse shares that they feel lonely in the marriage. The avoidant partner says — I do not know what you want from me — and leaves the room. It feels like rejection to the pursuer. It feels like suffocation to the avoider. Neither is wrong about what they experienced. Both are stuck in a cycle neither chose.

THE SOLUTION

Commit to one rule — no leaving without a return time. Practice naming one internal feeling per day without qualifying or minimizing it. Identify what closeness actually feels threatening about — usually loss of self or anticipated rejection. EMDR therapy is particularly effective for the underlying fear driving avoidance. Partners of avoidant individuals: approach with warmth rather than pursuit, make bids for connection low-stakes, and resist interpreting distance as rejection. It is almost never about you.

CHAPTER 5

Disorganized Attachment

The Push-Pull — And the Wound That Drives It

HOW IT FORMS

Disorganized attachment — the most complex of the four styles — forms when the primary caregiver was simultaneously the source of comfort and the source of fear. This places the child in an irresolvable dilemma: the person they need to run toward for safety is the same person they need to run from. The resulting attachment pattern is one of profound disorganization — craving closeness and fearing it simultaneously.

HOW IT SHOWS UP

In marriage — a push-pull dynamic that confuses both partners. Intense closeness followed by sudden withdrawal. Vulnerability that is immediately sabotaged. Love expressed through conflict. In sibling relationships — volatile loyalty, deeply bonded one moment and explosively conflicted the next. The disorganized person does not want the chaos. They are trying to protect themselves from a love they learned to be afraid of.

THE EXAMPLE

A spouse finally opens up about something painful. Their partner responds with tenderness. The disclosing spouse immediately deflects with a joke, picks a fight twenty minutes later, then apologizes intensely the next morning. The partner is confused. The disorganized spouse is more confused. The closeness felt genuinely terrifying — and the nervous system sabotaged it before it could hurt them.

THE SOLUTION

This requires trauma-informed professional support — it cannot be self-managed reliably. EMDR, somatic therapy, and trauma-informed Emotionally Focused Therapy are the most evidence-based approaches. In the meantime, develop a shared relational language for what is happening in real time — I got scared when you got close. That is not about you. Predictability and low-stakes bids for connection from the partner are the most stabilizing daily interventions available while deeper healing is in process.

CHAPTER 6

The Path Forward

What Healing Actually Requires

PSYCHOLOGICAL

The nervous system learns love before the mind can reason about it. What was formed in relationship must be reformed in relationship — there is no purely cognitive path out of attachment wounds. The most powerful therapeutic interventions work not through insight alone but through corrective emotional experience — being treated consistently differently than the wound predicted, until the nervous system updates its belief about what love does. That takes time, safety, and repetition. But it works.

THEOLOGICAL

Scripture understood attachment long before psychology named it. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19) is not merely devotional language — it is an attachment framework. The consistent, pursuing, covenant-keeping love of God is the original corrective emotional experience — available to every person whose early caregiving left them with a distorted picture of what love looks like. Hosea. The prodigal's father. Ruth and Naomi. The entire biblical narrative is the story of a God who remains present, responsive, and safe — precisely what insecure attachment never had.

THE THREE UNIVERSAL INTERVENTIONS

• **Name the pattern.**

Naming it out loud — in therapy, between partners, or in honest self-reflection — removes its unconscious power. You cannot change what you cannot see.

• **Build a culture of appreciation.**

Actively counteracts the threat-scanning that insecure attachment produces. What gets noticed and named shapes what the nervous system begins to expect.

• **Choose repair over winning.**

Teaches the nervous system that the relationship is safe even when it is stressed. That is the core lesson every insecurely attached person needs to learn and relearn until it becomes belief.

Conclusion

The Love You Can Still Choose

You did not choose the love you first learned. It was given to you — or withheld from you — before you had the language to name it or the agency to change it. The patterns it formed in you are real, and they have cost you something in every significant relationship you have ever had.

But you are reading this. Which means you are not simply repeating the pattern — you are looking at it. And the moment you look at it honestly, you have already begun to change it.

Change is genuinely possible. Not easy. Not quick. Not guaranteed without real work. But the research is unambiguous — attachment patterns formed in childhood can be revised in adulthood through consistent, safe, attuned relationship. A good marriage can do what a difficult childhood did not. A good therapist can accelerate what a good marriage begins. And a God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever offers the one attachment that no human failure can permanently disrupt.

You were loved before you learned to be afraid. And you can be loved back to wholeness.

That is not wishful thinking. That is the promise.

— Lloyd D. Allen, MSc.

Marriage Educator • Therapist • Coach • Speaker

lloydallen.org • MrMarriage.com • Fixing Marriage Academy, Inc.