

The 5 *A*'s of Attachment

*The 5 *A*'s of Attachment are the biological needs humans (as well as the other primates, other mammals, and even some birds) are born with. We strive to have these needs met in infancy and childhood because our psychological makeup demands it. If these needs are not met in our early life, we can find it difficult to achieve “wholeness” or “selfhood” later on. Our self-esteem can be in jeopardy, and we may tend to accept (and even be attracted to) dysfunctional relationships. If we do get these needs met early, then we are likely to pass them on to others and be satisfied with our available inner and outer resources when life’s stressors arise.*

Attention

If no one notices that an infant is tired, wet, cold, dirty, hungry, sick, or afraid, grave physical, mental, and psychic damage can occur. It can be fatal. If a child does not get attention one way, then other ways will be pursued.

Acceptance

If we are not given the message early and often that we are okay exactly the way we are, then “okayness” can be perceived as out of reach for us indefinitely.

Appreciation

We need to feel we are worthy of existence; that we benefit those around us simply because we are here. If someone important doesn’t overtly value us, then we may come to believe that what we do and who we are are not important.

Affection

Babies who are not smiled at, hugged, kissed, nuzzled, stared at, played with, and cooed at, have structurally different brains. We never outgrow this basic need.

Allowing

When it’s time to leave the nest (or to leave any other environment or stage of life) we need to feel supported from behind.

*Most of us did not get enough of what we really needed in childhood. It’s important to know that this early lacking can hold us back and cause many mental and physical symptoms and dysfunctions. This awareness is the first step in working through these old, traumatic losses. The second step is to summon the courage for personal exploration and to participate in interpersonal relationships that can help to overcome these deficits. The third step is persistence. We and those around us will always yearn for secure attachment. Giving and receiving the 5 *A*'s is good therapy and promotes healthy interdependence.*