



The Influence of Upbringing on Relationships

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Someone's upbringing can significantly affect how they form close relationships by shaping their trust and communication with others. I chose this topic because I want to learn more about how childhood experiences affect trust, communication, and, more generally, one's ability to build and maintain close connections. In The Psychology of Social Connection: From Strangers to Deep Friendships course, we've touched on the four main attachment styles: secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized, and how they influence the way many navigate close relationships. We've also mentioned how these four main attachment styles stem from childhood experiences. For example, a more supportive environment is likely to foster a more secure attachment style, while negative or inconsistent caregiving can significantly contribute to anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment styles. According to United Community Solutions, secure attachment develops from consistent, responsive caregiving; anxious attachment may form when care is unpredictable; avoidant attachment often results from emotional neglect; and disorganized attachment can stem from fear-based or traumatic environments.

These attachment styles influence how we handle closeness, conflict, and independence in adulthood, but they aren't fixed; they can evolve with awareness and support. Anxious, avoidant, and disorganized attachment styles are often considered insecure because they may pose unique challenges in future relationships (PsychCentral). PsychCentral also notes that communication styles reflect what was modeled for one as a child; the three main styles are passive, passive-aggressive, and aggressive. Passive consists of being indirect, self-denying, or apologetic; passive-aggressive is being emotionally dishonest, self-enhancing at the expense of others. Lastly, characteristics of being aggressive include blaming, insisting on control, and being direct or attacking others in certain situations. It's also important to note that these styles depend on personality types.

In parent-child interactions, children receive answers and reactions, either recognizing or ignoring their wishes and needs. When the caregiver responds sensitively to a child's needs and wishes, the child can integrate negative feelings such as anger, grief, sadness, and helplessness into goal-oriented ideas. Based on this integration, the child also obtains a communicative strategy to handle and cope with negative feelings. If, however, the caregiver ignores or rejects a child's needs and wishes, the child's anger may manifest in a dysfunctional way (Grossmann, 2004). Children who grow up in a supportive and nurturing household often find it easier to build and maintain close relationships because they observe healthy interactions. These positive examples and role models provide behaviors and communication skills that children can learn and apply to their own relationships. In contrast, individuals who have experienced childhood trauma or lack the supportive relationships necessary for healthy emotional development may struggle with trust, communication, or trauma-bonded relationship patterns later in adulthood. According to Harmony United Psychiatric Care, children who experience trauma may also not have the opportunity to express their emotions healthily; as a result, they may struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and communicating their own emotional needs in adulthood, leading to misunderstanding and conflict. Fear of intimacy is also a really common effect amongst those who experienced childhood trauma because



intimacy requires vulnerability and trust, and it can be hard for some to let their guard down and open up to others.

These patterns aren't flaws; they're adaptations shaped by early childhood experiences that once served a protective purpose (United Community Solutions). Research from the American Psychological Association suggests that positive parenting helps children develop the social and emotional skills needed to form strong interpersonal connections. At the same time, people who had difficult childhoods are still capable of building close connections through positive experiences, supportive environments, and the development of effective communication and coping skills. While upbringing significantly influences a person's ability to form close connections, it does not fully determine their future. According to Psychology Today, psychodynamic therapy can help us examine our early experiences and identify the patterns that may be impacting our current relationships. Many people have found family therapy or individual therapy extremely helpful because they're able to identify and confront issues that have stayed from their childhood. Many people learn new relationship skills and create meaningful, healthy connections throughout their lives to heal from past experiences.



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