

Attachment Theory Glossary

The vocabulary is a mess, and not because readers have been careless with it. Three separate bodies of work are using overlapping words: the developmental research that began with children, the adult tradition that measures two dimensions with questionnaires, and the internet, which has invented terms of its own and borrowed several from clinical language where they meant something narrower. So dismissive, dismissing and avoidant appear as three words for one thing, disorganised and fearful-avoidant turn out to be neighbours, and trauma bond means whatever the last video said it meant.

Who this is for: You have read a fortnight of articles and still cannot say whether dismissive-avoidant and avoidant are the same thing, or where disorganised is supposed to fit.

The terms, in six groups

1. The four styles and their aliases

Six names for four things, plus two that are not aliases.

Which of these did I think were two different things?

The name I use for my own pattern, and the alias I now know it has:

Where I first picked up the version I had:

2. What the theory says a relationship is for

Secure base, safe haven, internal working model.

Base or haven: which does my main relationship do well?

What I expect people to do when I need them, before I think about it:

Where that expectation came from, if I can name it:

3. Activation and deactivation

The two directions the system moves, and their strategies.

What my own activation looks like from the outside:

The deactivating move I recognise, in one line:

Something I read as not caring that may have been deactivation:

4. Protest behaviour, and what it is not

The behaviours that get named worst and understood least.

My own version of protest, honestly described:

What I was actually asking for underneath it:

A time I read protest as manipulation, or the other way round:

5. How it gets measured

Why two sources can give you two different answers.

Which kind of measure gave me my result?

Where I would put myself on anxiety, and on avoidance, high or low:

What changes if my style is a position rather than a type:

6. The borrowed words

Clinical terms doing work they were never built for.

A term I have applied to myself that belongs to something else:

Where I picked it up:

The plainer word for what I was actually describing:

7. What you had wrong

Three lines, and the most useful part of the sheet.

The term I had wrong:

The conclusion I had built on top of it:

Which term describes me, and which describes what I assumed my partner was doing:

One thing I now want to look up properly:

This worksheet is free to print, photocopy and share, including with clients. It is self-reflection material, not a diagnosis, an assessment or a substitute for professional support. If a relationship involves fear, control or coercion, or if working through this raises more than feels manageable, please speak to a doctor, a therapist or a domestic abuse service.