

Disorganised Attachment in Teens: A Two-Seat Worksheet

Some patterns pull one way. This one pulls both: wanting someone close and needing them gone, sometimes inside the same hour, with each switch feeling completely justified while it is happening. In the research literature this is called disorganised attachment, and in adolescence it usually is not subtle -- blowups followed by shutdowns, closeness followed by sabotage, and adults who keep asking what is wrong as if there were one answer. This worksheet has two kinds of pages: ones a teenager does alone, and ones built to be done next to one chosen adult. Both kinds work; the pair works best.

Who this is for: Teenagers who swing hard between needing people and needing them gone -- and the parents, carers, foster carers and school staff trying to stay steady next to them.

The five exercises

1. The both-directions log (teen only)

Track the swings without judging them, for one week.

Pull moments this week -- when, toward whom, and what happened in the hour before:

Push moments -- when, away from whom, and the hour before:

Any switch that happened fast (pull to push or back inside an hour)? What flipped it?

The kind of moment that shows up most in my "hour before" notes:

2. Which state am I in? (teen only)

Learn your two alarms apart, in your body, before choosing anything.

The leaving-alarm, in my body:

What the leaving-alarm wants me to do:

The too-close-alarm, in my body:

What the too-close-alarm wants me to do:

My two-line reference card, written out:

3. The steady-things list (teen only)

Inventory what is already predictable in your life, and dose it deliberately.

My steady things (aim for six or more, however small):

Which one is available fastest on a bad day?

Which one involves my body moving? (Keep at least one that does.)

The rule, written in my own words: after a switch, steady thing first, decision after.

4. The predictability page (teen + adult)

Each of you names what the other can count on -- in writing, in advance.

Teen column -- three things that hold even on my worst day:

Adult column -- three things that hold regardless of mood:

One thing each of us asks the other to add next month:

Where this page gets posted, and the date we re-read it:

5. The repair drill (teen + adult)

Agree, in a calm hour, exactly how the two of you come back from a blowup.

Our pause signal, and what it obliges the other person to do:

Minimum cool-down time, agreed by both:

The re-entry script, word for word, boring on purpose:

Date and result of the daylight rehearsal:

After the first real use: what worked, what needs changing?

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.