

Disorganised Attachment: A Six-Stage Workbook

By the time you notice, you are already somewhere. Either everything is loud and fast and you cannot sit still, or everything has gone flat and far away and you are watching yourself from somewhere behind your own eyes. Both arrive quicker than thinking, which is why advice that begins with what to say to someone rarely lands. Thinking is the last thing back. So this workbook starts at the other end, with sleep and daylight and what your body does, and it does not mention another person until stage six.

Who this is for: You came to this through trauma language rather than dating language, and every attachment worksheet you have opened starts with a conversation you are nowhere near ready to have.

The six stages

Stage 1. Stabilise the day

Sleep, food, movement and daylight, before anything psychological.

Hours of sleep on a typical night this week:

Which two of sleep, food, movement and daylight are worst right now?

The smallest change I will make to one of them, starting tomorrow:

Two weeks on: has the background load shifted at all?

Stage 2. Name the two states

Tell keyed-up from shut-down while it is happening.

Keyed-up, in my body, in the order it arrives:

Shut-down, in my body, in the order it arrives:

The one-word name I will use for each, short enough to say aloud:

Stage 3. Map what tips you

Two weeks of short entries about the ten minutes before.

Date, time, and which of the two states:

What happened in the ten minutes before:

Where I was, and who was there:

Tired, hungry, in pain, or none of those?

After two weeks: what appears more than twice in each direction?

Stage 4. Build one exit from each state

Two physical routines, chosen while calm, that need no decision.

Keyed-up exit, in three physical steps:

Shut-down exit, in three physical steps:

What makes each one hard to reach, and how I remove that:

Where I have written them so I can reach them without deciding:

Stage 5. Shrink the recovery time

Measure the return by what you can do again, not by feeling.

My return marker, the first ordinary thing I can do again:

This week, from the state starting to that marker:

What shortened it?

What lengthened it?

Stage 6. Practise contact in doses

Short planned time with another person, ended on time.

This week: who, how long, and where?

Which state was I in fifteen minutes after it ended?

Next dose: same length, shorter, or longer?

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.