

## **Building Secure Attachment Over a Lifetime**

When I was young, I longed for secure attachment, though I did not have that language at the time. What I felt instead was a hole somewhere deep inside me, a kind of neediness, a longing to be held in someone's steady attention and care. I wanted someone to listen, to understand, to stay. Like many people, I entered adulthood with both a hunger for closeness and a fear of not being fully met.

Years later, when I became a psychotherapist, I learned the language of secure and insecure attachment. The descriptions struck me deeply. People with secure attachment are described as emotionally balanced, calm, and comfortable with intimacy without becoming overly needy or backing away from closeness. I wanted that though was uncertain I felt about how to develop it.

Looking back now, I can see that one of my first steady secure attachments was not to a person, but to my journals.

My journals were companions. They were something outside of me, but also a place where I could meet myself. I wrote in thick notebooks that held months of my life — angst, longing, confusion, hope, heartbreak, growth, questions, and attempts to understand myself and the world. Those journals listened to everything. They did not interrupt, judge, abandon, or correct me. They simply received me.

Recently, I began audio dictating the journals I wrote in my twenties. Each journal is a thick book, filled with several months of grappling and growing. Sometimes it is hard to revisit them. I can hear the pain and confusion in my younger voice. I can hear how hard I was trying to understand my life, my relationships, and myself.

But now, reading them feels like an act of self-compassion — both backward and forward in time. Back then, it was an act of compassion to pour everything out and to develop a caring part of myself that was listening. And now, it feels like an act of kindness to honor my younger self by reading these journals and trying to understand the conditions in my early adult life that formed me. I feel tenderness toward that younger person who was trying so hard to find her way.

In my late twenties, I found meditation. Meditation became another way to be with myself, though it was not easy at first. Sitting still meant I could hear my own inner voice more clearly, and that voice was often critical, impatient, and demanding.

My first meditation teacher had lived through enormous trauma. At times she was very loving and compassionate, warm and attentive. Then she would become very harsh. This dynamic affected me deeply because it mirrored my inner world at the time. Inside of me was a harsh, critical voice, but also a caring voice, a curious voice, a part of me genuinely interested in my inner life. My inner world was marbled — harshness and care woven together.

So meditation, in those early years, was both helpful and difficult. It gave me a way to be with myself, but I often reproduced the harshness internally.

Then, several decades later, I found Reflective Meditation, and this changed something important.

In Reflective Meditation, I found a gentle container that could hold my hurt, anger, pain, obsession, and upset with kindness and curiosity. Instead of trying to discipline my mind or get rid of thoughts and feelings, I learned to listen to them, reflect on them, and understand them. My inner world became less like a battleground and more like a place where different voices and feelings could be heard.

Over time, I developed greater self-awareness and the capacity to mirror and reflect back to myself my internal experiences with more calm and resilience. I began to develop, internally, something that felt like a caring observer, a compassionate witness, a steady presence. In some ways, I was slowly building the secure attachment I had longed for as a child, but this time inside myself.

I discovered greater contentment, meaning, and satisfaction. Not all at once, and not permanently, but gradually and reliably. The shift didn't come quickly, and it didn't come from one breakthrough moment. It came from years of journaling, meditating, reflecting, making mistakes, repairing relationships, and continuing to try to understand my own mind and heart.

Looking back, I see that some part of me knew I needed a more secure attachment and kept following a sense of where I might develop it. First in journals, then in meditation, then in Reflective Meditation, and also in relationships with people who were kind, thoughtful, and willing to be real with me. It wasn't a straight path. Much of it was confusing while I was living it. But looking backward, I can see a thread running through my life: a movement toward understanding, toward kindness, toward steadiness.

Most of the time now, I feel an inner warmth and ease that I did not feel when I was young. I am nurtured by deep relationships, but also by something internal — an inner companionship, an inner listening, an inner steadiness. The hole that I felt when I was young does not feel like a hole anymore. It feels more like a space — a space that can hold experience, relationships, thoughts, feelings, and a life.

This is what secure attachment has come to mean for me: not that I will never feel needy, afraid, hurt, or alone, but that there is now a part of me that can stay, listen, and care when those feelings arise.

I didn't find secure attachment all at once. I built it slowly, over a lifetime — one journal page, one meditation, one reflection, and one relationship at a time.