

# Confused About LOVE?



## Why You're Confused About Love – and What You Can Do About It

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**Most of us are somewhat confused about love.**

We yearn for love, and we need love. But what does healthy love look like? And how can we create it?

Our confusion stems from our parents' confusion (and their parents before them) about *how* to love. This misunderstanding – about what love *is* and what love *does* – leads to unconscious and irrational behaviors, uncomfortable feelings, and reactivity in our relationships. It can impact our ability to make or keep our commitments. It can result in anxiety, withdrawal, abandonment or betrayal. It creates unhappiness in marriages and partnerships.

What we yearn for is very real, yet it's often missing in our closest relationships. We've longed for the same thing since we were born: ***the feeling of secure, dependable love.***

Through decades of research and thousands of studies with both children and adults, it has become clear that **we never outgrow the need to feel safe and secure in our relationships.** We are designed

to be deeply connected to someone we trust. All of us, whether infant, child, or adult, want to have our needs and feelings cared for by someone who makes us a priority. It's what love *is* and it's what love *does*.

As adults, we've learned how to self-regulate and manage our feelings. However, relationships require *co-regulation*, which is a different skill altogether. Living alone is one solution – no one is around to need you, or to trigger you. However, in couples and families, you're forced into close quarters with other people. And other people can easily threaten our vulnerable, primitive brain. Suddenly, and without warning, we feel triggered by that "other" person. The neuroscience of relationship points to the *fight or flight* reactions that can instantly light up and take over your conscious brain – regardless of how much you love your partner.

Once you've been hijacked by your protective, primitive brain, it's not easy to find your way back to a loving space. By combining research from attachment theory, the psychology of selves, trauma healing, and the neuroscience of relationship, we've developed a comprehensive program that teaches couples how to return to secure functioning quickly, and how to maintain a positive connection, even during personality storms.

## **The First Building Block of Love**

It's impossible to build a solid relationship on a shaky foundation of mistrust. We define *secure functioning* as a relationship in which both individuals feel that they are *in each other's care*, and that their feelings and needs are a priority for the other person. When one or both partners are filled with anxiety, or withdraw into avoidance when the going gets tough, secure functioning isn't an option.

Couples need to learn (and practice) the building blocks of love to create that solid foundation. When you build a solid base of core understandings and positive behaviors, you can create a healthy, happy, and sustainable relationship. In this environment, both people feel safe, open, and loving.

Here is the first Building Block of Love: **Get to know your *LoveStyle*<sup>™</sup>, and your partner's *LoveStyle*.** Your childhood attachment style, or bonding pattern, was formed out of your early experience with your parents (or primary caregivers). You developed behavioral strategies to deal with the presence – or absence – of love and care. Those strategies were later reinforced or modified through other relationships with family members, friends, lovers, and others. The synthesis of your resulting relationship bonding patterns is what we call your *LoveStyle*.

Your *LoveStyle* determines how you function in relationship to another (especially those closest to you), and how you react when you feel stressed, strained, or attacked by the other person. By learning how the *LoveStyles* work, you can grow beyond your automatic reactions, clear them one by one, and deepen your loving nature.

People with different *LoveStyles* have particular ways they prefer to be loved and cared for. When you learn what *you* need, and what your *partner* needs, you can soothe your partner when they get triggered, and they can soothe you when it happens to you. This is the single best way we've found to get couples back on track quickly, and help them gain the ability to sustain their love bond. When it's applied as a practice, it can prevent those vicious processing cycles that take relationships down the dark path into anger, withdrawal, and mutual punishment.

### **This is what each *LoveStyle* needs from their partner:**

**Secure types**, who are confident in their love, feel at ease with giving and receiving love in real time. Like everyone, they need positive interactions that remind them that they are loved and appreciated, but they have the ability to sustain positive feelings even when their partner isn't available to source them. When they are triggered, they are usually able to contain their reactions, and they can offer non-threatening responses, because they focus on keeping things positive as their deepest concern.

**Insecure-Anxious types** often feel fearful and uncertain, as if they're standing on shaky ground. They feel anxious when their partner's

behavior is threatening in any way. When they don't get the connection and care that they need, a typical defense strategy is to escalate into judgment or anger. They're afraid of being abandoned, so they need consistent reassurance of love and security from their partner. If their partner gets overwhelmed, or needs space, the Anxious Type needs to know when they will get the connection they need. Their caring partner informs them, *"I'm going to take a walk so I can re-center myself. I'll be back in 15 minutes."*

**Insecure-Avoidant types** are often afraid of being flooded or invaded. They need space, understanding, and patience from their partner. They withdraw when threatened, and rely on auto-regulation rather than connection or co-regulation. They may feel hopeless when they're caught up in arguments or processing cycles with their partner. They feel that their feelings aren't valued, so why bother to connect? If their caring partner sees them getting overwhelmed, they can say, *"I care about your feelings. You look like you're getting overloaded, so why don't you take some space and settle yourself. How much time do you think you need before we can re-connect?"*

**Insecure-Traumatized types** are like war veterans with PTSD. Their high-conflict battle was a psychological one – with a parent or primary caregiver during their childhood. They trigger easily whenever something reminds them of their past trauma. They need a lot of reassurance that they are safe, and they need reminding that this moment is not the same as their past experience. Their caring partner has to learn to avoid behaviors that put them into a reactive state. They might say, *"I'm here with you now, and I'm not going away. You're safe, and I love you. This is now. It's not the past. I've got you, and I'm here for you, no matter what."*

When you understand the specific "love requirements" of your partner, you can offer them what they need (rather than focusing on what you need, and being disappointed when you don't get it). This focus on the other creates a foundation of security you can both count on. When you know you will be cared for, and feel comfortable communicating your needs to each other, your brain's limbic system quiets, and your heart can open.

You may see your LoveStyle expressing itself in other relationships, such as with your children, friends, parents, or professional colleagues. If you find that another person makes you very reactive, it's likely that your LoveStyle clashes with their LoveStyle.

With all of these factors operating at the subconscious level, we have a perfect formula for chaos and unhappiness in our primary relationships. No wonder we're so confused about love!

Remember this: you are a part of a very large club that shares this confusion. It's called the human race.

### **How We Can Heal Each Other**

All of us have subconscious, unhealed patterns that hijack us unexpectedly from time to time. We can't expect perfection from ourselves or from each other. Over time, our brains can rewire toward healthy, secure bonding. It requires both people in a relationship to want to heal from the past and establish secure functioning. Through learning and practice, we can shift our patterns from "mostly insecure" to "mostly secure." The brain is a plastic medium, and it can change over time. No matter where you're starting, you can create a secure, passionate relationship. The rewards are more than worth the effort.



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We provide counseling sessions for individuals and couples by phone, Skype, or in person. We also offer customized multi-day Relationship Revitalization Intensives. Contact us for more information.