



Life in English Podcast

Transcript

&

Key Vocabulary

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Life in English #118 - Attachment Theory

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Life in English #118 - Attachment Theory

Dec 1, 2021

[00:00:00] What's up, everybody? You are listening to another episode of Life in English. I'm your host, Tony Kaizen. And in this episode, I'm talking about attachment theory.

[00:00:14] The Life English Podcast is designed to teach you the real American English that you won't learn in school, and it's made possible by our VIP community. By becoming a VIP member of the Life and English community, you'll get access to our private conversation group, bonus podcast episodes, interactive transcripts and vocabulary and grammar guides. If you'd like to join the community, you can visit lifeinenglish.net/vip.

[00:00:37] Many of us have a deep desire to have stable, fulfilling relationships. But the sad reality is that most relationships are full of problems and misunderstandings.

[00:00:49] Maybe you've noticed repeating patterns in your romantic relationships. Maybe you've noticed that you keep ending up in the same situations, even with different people. Or perhaps you keep attracting the same type of person. Maybe you've found yourself wondering, why is it so hard to cultivate and maintain a healthy, fulfilling relationship?

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[00:01:08] Well, the bad news is that there isn't really a **black and white**¹ answer to that question. However, the good news is that a psychologist named John Bowlby and his theory of attachment have helped us to understand that almost all of the challenges of relationships start when we're children, and they're directly connected to the quality of **maternal**² care that we received growing up. But before I tell you about the attachment theory, let me tell you a little bit about John Bowlby.

[00:01:32] John Bobby was born in 1907 to an upper middle class family in London, England. His parents, like many other upper class parents at the time, believed that too much parental affection and attention would **spoil**³ a child, so they typically only spent about an hour with him each day. Bowlby and his five **siblings**⁴ were in fact **raised**⁵ by a **nanny**⁶ named Minnie, who acted as their mother figure and primary **caregiver**⁷.

[00:01:54] Unfortunately, when John was almost four, Minnie **ended up**⁸ leaving the family. John would later describe the loss of his nanny as tragic as losing his actual

¹ right or wrong answer

² the way a mother behaves toward her child

³ to give the kid everything they want, this is considered to have a bad effect on a child's character

⁴ brothers or sisters

⁵ to take care of a person until they are completely grown

⁶ someone whose job is taking care of a family's children

⁷ a person who gives care to people who need help taking care of themselves

⁸ to reach or come to a place or situation that was not planned

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mother. At the age of seven, Bowlby was **sent off**⁹ to a **boarding school**¹⁰ which was common for boys of his social status at the time. John described the experience as a terrible and **traumatic**¹¹ time for him. He was even **quoted**¹² saying that he wouldn't send a dog away to boarding school at age seven. These experiences had a major influence on the man he became and the path his life took.

[00:02:26] Bobby went on to study medicine, but after just two years decided that psychology was what truly interested him. He began to work with **maladjusted**¹³ and **delinquent**¹⁴ children, which **piqued**¹⁵ his interest in developmental psychology.

[00:02:38] In 1951, while working as a consultant to the World Health Organization, John Bowlby wrote a report titled Maternal Care and Mental Health. In the report, he argued that lots of affection and attention don't spoil a child. In fact, these things are as necessary for the development of a child's personality as vitamin D is for the development of bones.

⁹ to order someone to leave in order to do something

¹⁰ residential private schools, where students live during the academic year

¹¹ severe and lasting emotional shock and pain

¹² to repeat the words that someone else has said or written

¹³ unable to cope with the demands of a normal social environment

¹⁴ a person who behaves in a way that is illegal or not acceptable

¹⁵ stimulate interest or curiosity

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[00:02:59] He wrote, "...The infant and the young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment."

[00:03:10] In his book Separation Anxiety, published in 1959, Bowlby talks about what happens when a child doesn't receive enough of this kind of parental care and his observations of the behavior of children who had been separated from their parents.

[00:03:23] If the parents aren't available and **attentive**¹⁶ enough, or if the child is separated from their parents for too long, they still want their parents' love, attention, and interest, but they feel that anything good could disappear at any moment.

[00:03:35] They need lots of **reassurance**¹⁷ from their parents, and if they don't get it, they get upset. They become emotionally unstable. They're filled with hope, and then **despair**¹⁸, and then hope again. The child feels that they cannot depend on their primary caregiver to be there when they need them most. This is the pattern of what Bowlby called anxious attachment.

¹⁶ paying close attention to something

¹⁷ the action of removing someone's doubts or fears

¹⁸ a feeling of being without hope

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[00:03:56] But separation or **lack of**¹⁹ attention from the parents may **lead to**²⁰ another kind of problem. If a child is **neglected**²¹ or **abused**²² by the caregiver or even punished for relying on their caregiver, it's possible that the child could feel so alone and helpless that they become what Bowlby called 'detached'.

[00:04:12] They enter their own little world to protect themselves from everyone and everything around them, and they become cold and distant. They see things like love, affection, tenderness, and closeness as dangerous. Even if they're desperate for a hug or some reassuring words, their fear of being vulnerable **outweighs**²³ their desire for affection. This is what Bowlby called avoidant attachment.

[00:04:35] Another possibility is that the child's primary caregiver is emotionally inconsistent and unpredictable, and this creates a major problem because the caregiver becomes both a source of comfort and fear. When in the presence of their caregiver, the child feels afraid and wants **to flee**²⁴ to safety, but their protector is the very person that scares them. The child constantly feels confused by his or her instinctive desires to feel loved and to protect his or herself.

¹⁹ not having enough of something

²⁰ to make something happen or exist

²¹ not receiving enough care or attention

²² cruel, violent, or unfair treatment of someone

²³ to be heavier or have more influence than something else

²⁴ to run away or escape from someone or something

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[00:05:00] This results in a display of confusing behavior. The child may seem **disoriented**²⁵ or **dazed**²⁶ or mentally **absent**²⁷ at times. They may avoid or resist their parents. They may avoid all social interaction in order to protect themselves from the same fear they feel when interacting with their parents. This pattern of behavior is what eventually became known as disorganized attachment.

[00:05:23] And the final possibility is that the child's primary caregiver is both emotionally and physically available to them. By fulfilling their child's needs, being close and nurturing, and also allowing their child to explore the world, the parents instill a sense of self-confidence and trust in the child. The child knows that they're safe to do their own thing, and at the same time, they'll always have a safe place to return and seek reassurance if something goes wrong. This is what Bowlby called secure attachment.

[00:05:51] The main focus of Bowlby's research was on what happens to a child if there are too many difficulties in forming secure attachments.

[00:05:59] So in summary, attachment is defined as a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings. A human being's first attachment is often established during infancy with the primary caregiver. And because caregivers vary in their levels of sensitivity and responsiveness, not all infants attach to their

²⁵ someone who lost sense of time, place, or identity

²⁶ confused and unable to think clearly

²⁷ not present in a place

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caregivers in the same way. Attachment styles are expectations people develop about relationships with others based on the relationship they had with their primary caregiver when they were infants.

[00:06:28] Now, there are four distinct ways we attach to other adults. So let's understand each of them better by looking at some real-world examples.

[00:06:36] Number one, the anxious attachment, also referred to as preoccupied.

[00:06:42] Let's imagine a little girl named Olivia. Olivia's parents were loving, supportive people, and they were always there for her. But when Olivia was three years old, her parents got divorced. Olivia stayed with her mother, who had to work two jobs just **to make ends meet**²⁸ and keep **a roof over their heads**²⁹. She had to work day and night and had little time to attend to her daughter's needs.

[00:07:03] Olivia had a really hard time coping with this new lack of love and attention. She felt that her mother started to act unpredictably and she became anxious about their relationship. This anxiety led Olivia to become very **clingy**³⁰.

²⁸ to earn enough income to provide for basic needs

²⁹ a place to live

³⁰ to be very attached and dependent of someone

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[00:07:17] To get her mother's attention, she had to raise her emotional state and **make a scene**³¹. She would scream and cry until she got a reaction out of her mother. When Olivia's mother would finally react in a more predictable way and give her the attention she wanted, Olivia would become **ambivalent**³² and she wouldn't show her true feelings.

[00:07:34] Now, as an adult, Olivia has formed the habit of **romanticizing**³³ love and connection. It's easier for her to form a **fantasy bond**³⁴ with someone instead of something based on reality. She's often attracted to people she feels she can save or people that can save her. She tends to think very highly of others, but she **struggles**³⁵ with **insecurities**³⁶, a low **self-esteem**³⁷, and establishing a strong sense of self. Olivia is afraid of and in some cases, **incapable**³⁸ of being alone.

[00:08:01] Her strong fear of being **abandoned**³⁹ by her lover leads her to be very demanding, obsessive, clingy, and jealous. She's prone to overanalyzing situations,

³¹ to behave in a loud and angry way, especially in public

³² being uncertain about how you feel

³³ to believe that something is better than it really is

³⁴ an illusion of connection between a couple

³⁵ to experience difficulty

³⁶ uncertainty about oneself; lack of confidence

³⁷ belief and confidence in your own ability and value

³⁸ unable to do something

³⁹ left behind, or left without care and protection

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intense **mood swings**⁴⁰, and she often mistakes **turbulent**⁴¹ relationships for passionate ones.

[00:08:17] Olivia is very sensitive to her partner's needs, but she feels very anxious and insecure about her own worth and position in her relationship. When her lover **rejects**⁴² her or fails to attend to her needs, she blames herself, and she feels that she isn't worthy of love.

[00:08:32] Olivia is a highly emotional woman and is heavily dependent on others. She needs constant reassurance that she's loved, **worthy**⁴³ and good enough, and the presence of a lover feels like the **remedy**⁴⁴ for her strong emotional needs.

[00:08:47] Number two, avoidant attachment, also referred to as **dismissive**⁴⁵.

[00:08:54] Let's imagine a little boy named Tyler. Tyler's mother died when he was very young, so he grew up with his father. Tyler's father loved him very much, but

⁴⁰ a sudden or intense change in emotional state

⁴¹ full of confusion; lack of order

⁴² to refuse to accept someone or something

⁴³ to be considered important

⁴⁴ a way of dealing with a difficult situation or solving a problem

⁴⁵ indifference or disregard, suggesting that something isn't worth attention or consideration

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he believed that being a good father meant being **strict**⁴⁶. So Tyler's father **tended**⁴⁷ to avoid showing emotion and intimacy.

[00:09:09] Whenever Tyler would express the need for closeness and affection, his dad would tell him to **man up**⁴⁸. Tyler's dad expected him to be independent, serious and reserved. If Tyler showed too much emotion or he was too loud, his dad got angry and sometimes **punitive**⁴⁹. This scared Tyler. He learned that to avoid fear, he must avoid showing his feelings and expressing himself.

[00:09:33] Now, as an adult, Tyler is emotionally distant in his relationships. He's **easygoing**⁵⁰ and fun to be around, but all of his social interactions and connections remain on a surface level. Tyler comes across as self-sufficient and independent. He doesn't rely on others for reassurance or emotional support. He feels he's in control.

[00:09:54] Although space is essential for two people to breathe and be themselves in any relationship, Tyler tends to seek space more frequently in order to avoid being vulnerable with his partner.

⁴⁶ demanding total obedience; strongly enforcing rules

⁴⁷ to be likely to behave in a particular way

⁴⁸ be brave or tough enough to deal with difficult situations

⁴⁹ to punish; to treat someone badly or violently

⁵⁰ calm and not easily upset or worried

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[00:10:05] If things in this relationship start to get serious, **he closes himself off**⁵¹. He starts looking for a reason to end the relationship. He might start getting annoyed by his partner's behavior, habits, or even physical appearance. And this only makes it easier to distance himself from his partner and focus on other things. If at any point his partner threatens to leave him, he has the ability to **shut down**⁵² and pretend that he doesn't care.

[00:10:28] However, that extreme independence is an **illusion**⁵³. Tyler desperately wants to feel love, affection, and connection just like everyone else, but he refuses **to open himself up**⁵⁴ because it's just too scary.

[00:10:43] Number three, disorganized attachment, also referred to as fearful-avoidant.

[00:10:50] Let's imagine a girl named Lisa. Both of Lisa's parents were overworked and always stressed. Her father had a **narcissistic**⁵⁵ personality and her mother had **bipolar depression**⁵⁶. They were emotionally inconsistent, extremely

⁵¹ to avoid emotional connection with others; to isolate

⁵² stop being involved with someone

⁵³ an idea or belief that is not true

⁵⁴ to talk about your personal thoughts or feelings

⁵⁵ someone who has too much admiration for himself

⁵⁶ a mental illness that results in mood swings from "highs" to "lows"

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aggressive, and sometimes even abusive. This caused Lisa to become afraid of **the very⁵⁷** people that were supposed to protect her.

[00:11:11] This problem completely disorganized her ideas about love and safety. She never knew what to expect from her parents, so she was always anxious and afraid around them. She didn't know how to behave or interact with anybody, so she learned to avoid social interactions **altogether⁵⁸** in order to avoid feeling that anxiety and fear.

[00:11:30] Now, as an adult, she experiences a problematic mixture of both anxious and avoidant attachment styles.

[00:11:36] Lisa lacks a **coherent⁵⁹** approach to forming relationships. She has a strong fear that the people closest to her are going to hurt her. She fears intimacy and avoids proximity even though she desperately wants it in her life. She fears being abandoned, but often lacks the ability to trust and rely on her partner. She deals with an internal conflict of wanting intimacy while **simultaneously⁶⁰** resisting it. And as a result, she usually experiences many emotional **highs and lows⁶¹** in her relationships.

⁵⁷ used to emphasize the significance or relevance of something

⁵⁸ completely or in total

⁵⁹ logical and consistent

⁶⁰ at the same time

⁶¹ the good parts and bad parts

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[00:12:06] She doesn't reject emotional intimacy. She's simply afraid of it. She tends to see her partner as unpredictable, and that unpredictability makes her extremely anxious and uncomfortable.

[00:12:17] She doesn't believe that her partners will love and support her the way she is. Lisa has a very poor self-image and a negative view of others. She naturally expects and waits for rejection, disappointment, and pain to come. She thinks these things are **inevitable**⁶², and this mindset often leads to a form of self-sabotage. She anticipates the worst-case scenario and then behaves in a way that turns her imagination into her reality and ends relationships **prematurely**⁶³.

[00:12:45] She also tends to **consciously**⁶⁴ choose partners that scare her, which only confirms her belief that people are unpredictable and they can't be trusted. No matter what.

[00:12:55] Much like the dismissive-avoidant type, Lisa has very few close relationships.

[00:13:02] Number four, secure attachment.

⁶² certain to happen; unable to be avoided

⁶³ earlier than usual

⁶⁴ intentionally do something

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[00:13:06] Let's imagine a little boy named Thomas. Thomas grew up in a loving family with his mom and dad, his two sisters, and his little brother.

[00:13:14] Thomas's mother was a very **affectionate**⁶⁵ and **nurturing**⁶⁶ woman. She was very protective of Thomas, but she wasn't **overwhelming**⁶⁷ or intrusive. She gave Thomas the space and freedom to explore the world but stayed close enough so that he felt a sense of safety. Thomas felt confident knowing that he could always run back to his mom for security, warmth, and affection.

[00:13:34] Thomas's mother was very attentive to his needs. She fed him when he was hungry, and rocked him to sleep when he was tired, and she was there to comfort, soothe and reassure him when he was in distress. This taught Thomas that he would never be ignored in his time of need.

[00:13:50] Thomas's mother routinely expressed her joy and satisfaction with who he was. She made a point to recognize and mention all of the positive qualities he possessed. But she never tried to make him feel as if he were perfect, and whenever she would criticize him, she would do it constructively. This made Thomas feel valued and gave him a healthy self-esteem.

⁶⁵ showing feelings of love

⁶⁶ someone who provides food, protection, comfort, and support

⁶⁷ Too much to deal with

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[00:14:10] **Above all**⁶⁸, Thomas's mother wasn't just loving and supportive, she was also consistent. Thomas was able to develop great trust in his mother because she showed him that she would always be there for him, no matter what.

[00:14:23] Now, as an adult, Thomas is a confident and optimistic man. He's **grounded**⁶⁹ and **goal-oriented**⁷⁰. He's able to regulate his emotions and feelings in a relationship, and he has no problem opening up to and trusting others.

[00:14:36] He's aware of his emotional needs and isn't afraid to experience or express them to his partner. Thomas is level-headed and doesn't feel the need to exaggerate or go to extremes when expressing himself.

[00:14:48] He's capable of and tries to build and maintain long-lasting relationships, and at the same time, he has no problem being alone.

[00:14:56] Thomas neither demands intimacy and affection nor rejects them. He's a very understanding man, and he gives his partner the benefit of the doubt when interpreting their behavior.

⁶⁸ most importantly

⁶⁹ mentally and emotionally stable

⁷⁰ focused on reaching a specific objective

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[00:15:05] If there's a problem, he finds a way to **work it out**⁷¹. If his lover is feeling sad or confused or just being annoying, he doesn't **overreact**⁷². And at moments when his partner is unavailable, he can take care of himself.

[00:15:19] Thomas's childhood wasn't perfect, but he looks back on it **fondly**⁷³. By being raised in a healthy environment with loving, supportive and consistent parents. Thomas learned to appreciate the good and to understand and **move on**⁷⁴ from the bad.

[00:15:34] So tell me which one of these people sounds like you? By **diving deeper into**⁷⁵ your past or **that of**⁷⁶ your partner, you can begin to understand and appreciate the fact that the motives for your behavior aren't always what they seem. And that although it might be difficult, there is a way to **cultivate**⁷⁷ and maintain healthier, happier, more fulfilling relationships.

[00:15:56] This is Life in English. I'm your host, Tony Kaizen, and I'll talk to you later.
Peace.

⁷¹ to make something work

⁷² to react or respond more strongly than necessary

⁷³ with affection or liking

⁷⁴ to accept the past and start something new

⁷⁵ searching for a better understanding of

⁷⁶ a formal way of comparing two things of the same type

⁷⁷ to care and develop something

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[END OF EPISODE]

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Key vocabulary

Black and white: Right or wrong answer

Maternal: The way a mother behaves toward her child

Spoil: To give the kid everything they want, this is considered to have a bad effect on a child's character

Siblings: Brothers or sisters

Raised: To take care of a person until they are completely grown

Nanny: Someone whose job is taking care of a family's children

Caregiver: A person who gives care to people who need help taking care of themselves

Ended up: To reach or come to a place or situation that was not planned

Sent off: To order someone to leave in order to do something

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Boarding school: Residential private schools, where students live during the academic year

Traumatic: Severe and lasting emotional shock and pain

Quoted: To repeat the words that someone else has said or written

Maladjusted: Unable to cope with the demands of a normal social environment

Delinquent: A person who behaves in a way that is illegal or not acceptable

Piqued: Stimulate interest or curiosity

Attentive: Paying close attention to something

Reassurance: The action of removing someone's doubts or fears

Despair: A feeling of being without hope

Lack of: Not having enough of something

Lead to: To make something happen or exist

Neglected: Not receiving enough care or attention

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Abused: Cruel, violent, or unfair treatment of someone

Outweighs: To be heavier or have more influence than something else

To flee: To run away or escape from someone or something

Disoriented: Someone who lost sense of time, place, or identity

Dazed: Confused and unable to think clearly

Absent: Not present in a place

To make ends meet: To earn enough income to provide for basic needs

A roof over their heads: A place to live

Clingy: To be very attached and dependent of someone

Make a scene: To behave in a loud and angry way, especially in public

Ambivalent: Being uncertain about how you feel

Romanticizing: To believe that something is better than it really is

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Fantasy bond: An illusion of connection between a couple

Struggles: To experience difficulty

Insecurities: Uncertainty about oneself; lack of confidence

Self-esteem: Belief and confidence in your own ability and value

Incapable: Unable to do something

Abandoned: Left behind, or left without care and protection

Mood swings: A sudden or intense change in emotional state

Turbulent: Full of confusion; lack of order

Rejects: To refuse to accept someone or something

Worthy: To be considered important

Remedy: A way of dealing with a difficult situation or solving a problem

Dismissive: Indifference or disregard, suggesting that something isn't worth attention or consideration

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Strict: Demanding total obedience; strongly enforcing rules

Tended: To be likely to behave in a particular way

Man up: Be brave or tough enough to deal with difficult situations

Punitive: To punish; to treat someone badly or violently

Easygoing: Calm and not easily upset or worried

He closes himself off: To avoid emotional connection with others; to isolate

Shut down: Stop being involved with someone

Illusion: An idea or belief that is not true

To open himself up: To talk about your personal thoughts or feelings

Narcissistic: Someone who has too much admiration for himself

Bipolar depression: A mental illness that results in mood swings from "highs" to "lows"

The very: Used to emphasize the significance or relevance of something

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Altogether: Completely or in total

Coherent: Logical and consistent

Simultaneously: At the same time

Highs and lows: The good parts and bad parts

Inevitable: Certain to happen; unable to be avoided

Prematurely: Earlier than usual

Consciously: Intentionally do something

Affectionate: Showing feelings of love

Nurturing: Someone who provides food, protection, comfort, and support

Overwhelming: Too much to deal with

Above all: Most importantly

Grounded: Mentally and emotionally stable

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Goal-oriented: Focused on reaching a specific objective

Work it out: To make something work

Overreact: To react or respond more strongly than necessary

Fondly: With affection or liking

Move on: To accept the past and start something new

Diving deeper into: Searching for a better understanding of

That of: A formal way of comparing two things of the same type

Cultivate: To care and develop something