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Cliff Notes from Hold Me Tight Dr. Sue Johnson

Attachment theory has revolutionized child-rearing methods in North America. Today it is widely accepted that children have an absolute requirement for safe, ongoing physical and emotional closeness and that we ignore this only at great cost. The interesting thing is the need for such physical and emotional closeness does not end with childhood. It is critical in adult love relationships.

Throughout history we have come to the stance that maturity means being independent and self-sufficient. The notion of the invulnerable warrior who faces life and danger alone is long ingrained in our culture. Psychologists use words like undifferentiated, codependent, symbiotic or even fused to describe people who seem unable to be self-sufficient or assert themselves with others.

Dr. John Bowlby, the father of attachment theory, talked about “effective dependency” and how being able from the cradle to the grave to turn to others for emotional support. Such he states is a sign and source of strength. Research documenting adult attachment shows that adults need emotional closeness from their lover, want assurance that their lover would respond when they were upset, felt distressed when they felt separate and distant from their loved one and felt more confident about exploring the world when they knew that their lover had their back. When they felt secure with their lover, they could reach out and connect easily; when they felt insecure, they either became anxious, angry and controlling or they avoided contact altogether and stayed distant. This is just what past researchers had found with mothers and children. Hundreds of studies now validate Bowlby’s predictions about adult attachment. The overall conclusion: a sense of secure connection between romantic partners is key in positive loving relationships and a huge source of strength for individuals in those relationship

Research findings indicate:

- When we feel generally secure, that is, when we are comfortable with closeness and confident about depending on loved ones, we are better at seeking support and better at giving it

- When we feel safely linked to our partners, we more easily roll with the hurts they inevitably inflict and we are less likely to be aggressively hostile when we get mad at them
- Secure connection to a loved one is empowering
- Securely bonded adults are more curious and more open to new information. Openness to new experience and flexibility of belief seem to be easier when we feel safe and connected to others. Curiosity comes out of a sense of safety; not rigidity. The more we can reach out to our partners, the more separate and dependent we can be. Those who feel that their needs are accepted by their partners, are more confident about solving problems on their own and are more likely to successfully achieve their own goals. Having close ties to others is vital to every aspect of our health – mental, emotional and physical.. Distress in a relationship adversely affects our immune and hormonal systems and even our ability to heal.
- Emotional isolation is a more dangerous health risk than smoking or high blood pressure.
- Negative relationships undermine our health. It is not just whether or not we have close relationships in our lives – the quality of these relationships matter too and is a big factor in how mentally and emotionally healthy we are.
- Conflict and hostile criticism from loved ones increase our self doubts and create a sense of helplessness which are classic triggers for depression. We need validation from our loved ones. Researchers say that marital distress raises the risk for depression tenfold
- Positive loving connections with others protect us from stress and help us cope better with life's challenges and traumas.
- Simply holding the hand of a loving partner can affect us profoundly literally calming jittery neurons in the brain. Contact with a loving partner acts as a buffer against shock, stress and pain.
- The people we love are the hidden regulators of our bodily processes and our emotional lives. When love doesn't work, we hurt. Brain imaging studies show that rejection and exclusion trigger the same circuits in the same part of the brain, the anterior cingulate, as physical pain. This part of the brain turns on anytime we are emotionally separated from those who are close to us.
- When we are close to, hold or make love with our partners, we are flooded with the "cuddle hormones" oxytocin and vasopressin. These hormones seem to turn on "reward" centers in the brain, flooding us with calm and happiness chemicals like dopamine and turning off stress hormones like cortisol.

LOVE IS NOT THE ICING ON THE CAKE OF LIFE. IT IS A BASIC PRIMARY NEED, LIKE OXYGEN OR WATER. ONCE WE UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THIS WE CAN MORE EASILY GET TO THE HEART OF RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS.

TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF YOUR DISTRESS

What do you think is the basic problem in your relationship and what is the solution to solve it? What do you need to do? What does your partner need to do? What do you need to do as a couple?

Basically couples have disconnected emotionally; they don't feel emotionally safe with each other. Most fights are really protests over emotional disconnection. Underneath all the distress partners are asking each other

- *Can I count on you, depend on you?
- *Are you there for me?
- *Will you respond to me when I need you?
- *Do I matter to you?
- *Am I valued and accepted by you?
- *Do you need me, rely on me?

The anger, the criticism, the demands are really cries to their lovers, calls to stir their hearts, to draw their mates back in emotionally and reestablish a sense of safe connection.

ATTACHMENT THEORY TEACHES US THAT OUR LOVED ONE IS OUR SHELTER IN LIFE. When a person is emotionally unavailable or unresponsive, we face being out in the cold, alone and helpless. We are assailed by emotions – anger, sadness, hurt and above all, fear. Losing connection with our loved one jeopardizes our sense of security. The alarm goes off in the brain's amygdala or fear centre which triggers an automatic response. We don't think. We feel. We act.

In secure attachments, arguments or disagreements with our partners are but a momentary blip. For those of us with weaker or fraying bonds, the fear can be overwhelming. We are swamped by "primal panic" and we generally do one of two things: We either becoming demanding and clinging in effort to draw comfort and reassurance from our partner or we withdraw and detach in an attempt to soothe and protect ourselves. These strategies for dealing with the fear of losing connection are unconscious and they work, at least in the beginning. But as distressed partners resort to them more and more, they set up vicious spirals of insecurity that only push the couple further and further apart. More and more interactions occur in which neither partner feels safe, both become defensive and each is left assuming the very worst about each other and their relationship.

If we love our partners, why do we not just hear each other's calls for attention and connection and respond with caring? Because much of the time we are not tuned in to our partners. We are distracted or caught up in our own agendas. We do not know how to speak the language of attachment. We do not give clear messages about what we need or how much we care. Some of us try to minimize our natural longings to be emotionally close and focus instead on actions that give only limited expression to our need. Disguised and distorted messages keep us from being exposed in all our naked longing

but they also make it harder for our lover to respond. When marriages fail, it is not increasing conflict that is the cause. It is decreasing affection and emotional responsiveness. The demise of marriages begins with a growing absence of responsive intimate interactions. The conflict comes later.

As lovers, we poise together delicately on a tightrope. When the winds of doubt and fear begin blowing, if we panic and clutch at each other or abruptly turn away and head for cover, the rope sways more and more and our balance becomes even more precarious. To stay on the rope we must shift with each other's moves, respond to each other's emotions. As we connect, we balance each other. We are in emotional equilibrium.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE DEMON DIALOGUES AND A.R.E.

FIND THE BAD GUY

THE PROTEST POLKA – ONE PARTNER BECOMES CRITICAL AND
AGGRESSIVE AND THE OTHER DEFENSIVE AND DISTANT

FREEZE AND FLEE

A.R.E.

ACCESSIBILITY: Can I reach you?

RESPONSIVENESS: Can I rely on you to respond to me emotionally?

ENGAGEMENT: Do I know you will value me and stay close.

ARE YOU THERE? ARE YOU WITH ME?

LEARN MORE BY READING & USING THE EXERCISES IN THE BOOK
BY CLICKING THE AMAZON.CA BUTTON AND PURCHASING THE
HOLD ME TIGHT BOOK!