WORKSHEET 151 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

When my attachment system is activated

Recognising my reactions of moving closer or pulling away

AIM

Observe in real situations the triggers of the attachment system (silence, distance, conflict, separation) and the strategies used (hyperactivation: protesting, monitoring; deactivation: withdrawing, minimising), with their effects.

WHO IT IS FOR

Repetitive couple conflicts, jealousy, an intense need for reassurance, difficulty expressing needs, emotional withdrawal.

DURATION

5 min after each situation, for 1 or 2 weeks

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Introduce the two secondary strategies (Mikulincer and Shaver) as learnt protections, not as flaws.
2. The person notes situations in which they felt worried, hurt or intruded upon in a relationship.
3. For each one: what they felt, what they did (moved closer, protested, withdrew…) and the effect on the relationship.
4. Look together for what they needed to receive, and another way of asking for it (worksheet 154).

POINTS TO WATCH

> These worksheets are not attachment tests: none of them replaces a clinical interview or a validated questionnaire. Avoid locking the person into a “style”. If there is current violence in a relationship, safety comes first, not attachment work.

REFERENCES

Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. R. & Pereg, D. (2003). Attachment theory and affect regulation: The dynamics, development, and cognitive consequences of attachment-related strategies. Motivation and Emotion, 27(2), 77-102.

Mikulincer, M. & Shaver, P. R. (2016). Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics, and Change (2nd ed.). Guilford.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 151 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

When my attachment system is activated

When an important relationship seems threatened (an unanswered message, an argument, a goodbye), an alarm goes off. Some people tend to move closer, check, protest; others close up and pull away. These are ways of protecting yourself that were learnt long ago.

1. Note a situation in which you felt worried, hurt or intruded upon in a relationship.
2. Write what you felt.
3. Write what you did: moved closer, checked, protested, closed up, left…
4. Write what you needed, deep down.

The situation	What I felt	What I did	What I needed

My most frequent reaction, and what it does to my relationships:

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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