

Cycles of Trust-Bowlby

“Attachment interruptions are dangerous...like a scratched cornea, relationship ruptures deliver agony.”

Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*

In this article, we explore the idea of love as a mirror, look at different attachment patterns, and revisit John Bowlby's 1944 study of the 44 juvenile thieves to see how it has shaped psychotherapy and society. By examining these topics, readers can gain a deeper understanding of how early attachment experiences affect their own relationships. This insight can improve emotional well-being, foster healthier relationship patterns, and empower individuals to break negative cycles.

Earlier, we talked about John Bowlby's attachment theory. In this article, we share more details about his key work and how his ideas have shaped psychotherapy, mental health, and society.

We also include a worksheet to help you understand and break cycles of blame, frustration, numbing, shutting down, and lashing out, which are patterns that can turn loving relationships into sources of conflict. This worksheet can be used in moments of reflection or after a disagreement, providing practical exercises to identify and modify these patterns. By engaging with these exercises, you can expect to gain clarity on your emotional responses and step towards building more constructive communication skills.

Bowlby's 1944 study of juvenile delinquents laid the groundwork for Attachment theory, which explains how we form and keep relationships.

The study looked at 44 juvenile delinquents and compared them to 44 emotionally troubled children who did not steal. Bowlby interviewed the mothers and talked about their challenges with a social worker.

He found that problems with forming relationships can increase the risk of offending. While these findings support the idea that early childhood experiences shape later behavior, it's important to remember that correlation does not always mean causation. Other factors may also play a role, but Bowlby believed that broken early attachments could lead to future delinquency. Later studies have backed up his ideas, showing that insecure attachments in early life are strong predictors of later behavioral problems. This highlights the need for early support to help children who have difficult experiences, in line with Bowlby's original insights. However, it is crucial to emphasize that change and healing are possible. With the right support systems and self-awareness, individuals can overcome these early challenges and develop healthier relationship patterns. By fostering hope and empowerment, people can transform their emotional responses and establish stronger, more positive connections.

Juvenile crime is not just caused by psychological factors. Social and economic issues, like poverty, few recreational activities, and poor housing, are also important. To truly understand juvenile delinquency, we need to look at all these factors together.

Core Theoretical Ideas

- Attachment is a natural system that helps us seek safety and comfort from caregivers. Simply put, it's like how a child feels safe in a parent's arms, able to explore but always able to come back for security.
- Internal Working Models are mental pictures of ourselves and others that we form in early relationships. These guide our expectations, emotions, and future relationships. Think of your mind as a library filled with stories from childhood about how people treat you and how you see yourself. These stories shape how you relate to others as you grow.
- Continuity and Change: Early patterns shape our development, but new experiences and therapy can help us change and grow.

The Mirroring Worksheet can help you notice your patterns, build healthier relationships, and pause when old habits return. To start, spend a few minutes reflecting on a recent interaction and note what patterns you see. The worksheet provides prompts to guide this reflection. The ABCDE sheet is another tool to help you slow down and reflect, beginning with identifying an activating event, then exploring your beliefs, consequences, disputations, and new effects. For instance, if you find yourself

frustrated after a disagreement, use these tools to dissect the situation, aiming to uncover underlying beliefs and modify them for healthier responses.

Ghosts in Family: Adapting John Bowlby

Family of origin: Looking back at my parents' childhood patterns helped me understand some lasting truths. My father's mother died in the early 1940s, when he was under five years old.

Bowlby's attachment theory can be used with Time and Truth tools. By looking at a family's timeline, we can see how our earliest moments and our first caregivers become our first mirrors.

This theme took me back to the oft-repeated remark of my father, who lost his mother when he was less than five years old. "I never had a mother," he would say. He was born in British India and lived in a collectivist Joint family arrangement, brought up with his extended family, cousins, and other family elders. His father started in the fire department of Shimla, British India, in the 1930s and then worked in the Ministry of External Affairs from 1947 to 1969.

DEVELOPING DEEPER RELATIONS: WALKS AND LOCAL HISTORIES



Etienne Brule -Old Mills area

Mindsight means developing an observer's mind to find meaning and gain insight. To practice this, spend 30 seconds just watching your own thoughts. It's common to feel uncomfortable or uneasy when noticing your thoughts, especially those that are challenging or difficult. Remember that these feelings are normal and a part of the process. This simple exercise can help you turn the idea of mindsight into real experience, building self-awareness and a better understanding of your relationships.

Doing the exercise of noticing how someone relates to me, what they reflect back, and how I see myself through that relationship made me think about some of my mentors.

One of my mentors is my spiritual guide. We try to meet once a month and walk by the Humber River in the Old Mills area, at Etienne Brule Park. We often sit and meditate around 2 pm, wishing for peace and harmony for the earth, all people, and all living beings. There is a memorial stone in Etienne Brule where we reflect on the words of Robert Burns. This memorial honors David Dryburgh Birrell (1942-1998).

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<https://youtu.be/SV8luRg4ItQ>

Whatever mitigates the woes or increases the happiness of others

That is my criterion of goodness.

Whatever injures society as a whole or any person in it

That is my measure of iniquity.

Robert Burns

Over the past decade, my family and I, immigrants from India who lived in Libya and Malta before coming to Toronto, have built personal connections and memories in some of these parks.

These spiritual connections have helped us feel more at home in this community. Last summer (2025), while my mentor and I sat by the memorial stone, someone praying nearby came over and asked, "Did you know David?" We replied, "We did not know him in his physical life, but we feel his spiritual presence." He told us he knows the family and spoke about David's peaceful nature. Connections like these can be healing. As we walk a spiritual path, we meet fellow travelers.

RESOURCES FOR REFLECTION- You can download the original report of John Bowlby (1944); Worksheets on Emotional Mirroring and ABCDE sheets

ADDITIONAL READING

https://resource.download.wjec.co.uk/vtc/2020-21/el20-21_25-3a/wjec/classic_evidence_bowlby.pdf

<https://mantraofhopecounsellingservices.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Mapping-Your-Emotional-Mirrors.pdf>

<https://mantraofhopecounsellingservices.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ABCDE-Sheet-v-2026-1-1.docx>

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v-2026-Jan