

Parental Attunement Questionnaire

Our relationship with our parents had the most profound influence on how we learned to regulate our own emotions and how we think about ourselves, others, and the world. We carry these influences throughout our lifetime, and they strongly shape how we behave towards others, including our own children. Knowing how attuned our parents were to us can shed light on what we are ultimately seeking from others.

Instructions:

Answer the questions below to the best of your ability using the 5-point scale. Because the pain of accepting the truth is sometimes too great, many of us want to believe that our parents must not have been in-tune with our needs because, if they had been, they would have responded more favorably than they did. Think hard in terms of how your parents responded to you most of the time. Be as honest with yourself as you can.

If you were brought up by only one parent, answer the relevant questions pertaining to the parent who was present in your life and leave the answer blank for the parent who was absent.

If necessary, substitute the terms ‘mother’ and ‘father’ with whoever was your primary caregiver (e.g., grandmother, uncle, nanny, etc.).

If you are unsure about which answer to circle because the descriptions seem similar to you, base your response on the numerical value [e.g., not sure of the difference between Fairly well (3) and Pretty well (4), choose Fairly well (3) if your specific experience of your parent felt LESS THAN Pretty well (4)].

Please circle your answers and attempt every question. Good luck!

1. How well was your mother able to “READ” you or TELL when you were sad?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
2. How well was your father able to “READ” you or TELL when you were sad?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
3. How well was your mother able to RESPOND to you (take you aside, ask you what was wrong, comfort you, hug you) when you were sad?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well

4. How well was your father able to RESPOND to you (take you aside, ask you what was wrong, comfort you, hug you) when you were sad?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
5. How curious was your mother to REALLY KNOW why you were sad (i.e., how much of a genuine desire did she have to know what was really going on with you)?
[1] Not at all [2] Somewhat Curious [3] Fairly Curious [4] Pretty Curious [5] Very Curious
6. How curious was your father to REALLY KNOW why you were sad (i.e., how much of a genuine desire did he have to know what was really going on with you)?
[1] Not at all [2] Somewhat Curious [3] Fairly Curious [4] Pretty Curious [5] Very Curious
7. How well was your mother able to ACCEPT and HANDLE your sadness (without getting impatient, being unkind, making you feel guilty, belittling or denying your feelings)?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
8. How well was your father able to ACCEPT and HANDLE your sadness (without getting impatient, being unkind, making you feel guilty, belittling or denying your feelings)?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
9. How well was your mother able to REPAIR (apologize, 'own' or rectify) not being there for you when you were sad?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
10. How well was your father able to REPAIR (apologize, 'own' or rectify) not being there for you when you were sad?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
11. How well was your mother able to "READ" you or TELL when you were frightened?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
12. How well was your father able to "READ" you or TELL when you were frightened?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
13. How well was your mother able to RESPOND to you (take you aside, ask you what was wrong, comfort you, hug you) when you were frightened?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well

14. How well was your father able to RESPOND to you (take you aside, ask you what was wrong, comfort you, hug you) when you were frightened?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
15. How much comfort did your mother show you when you were frightened (for whatever reason)?
[1] None [2] Very Little [3] Some [4] A Good Amount [5] A lot
16. How much comfort did your father show you when you were frightened (for whatever reason)?
[1] None [2] Very Little [3] Some [4] A Good Amount [5] A lot
17. How well was your mother able to ACCEPT and HANDLE your fear (without getting impatient, being unkind, making you feel guilty, belittling or denying your feelings)?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
18. How well was your father able to ACCEPT and HANDLE your fear (without getting impatient, being unkind, making you feel guilty, belittling or denying your feelings)?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
19. How well was your mother able to REPAIR (apologize, 'own' or rectify) not being there for you when you were frightened?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
20. How well was your father able to REPAIR (apologize, 'own' or rectify) not being there for you when you were frightened?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
21. How well was your mother able to "READ" you or TELL when you were angry?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
22. How well was your father able to "READ" you or TELL when you were angry?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
23. How well was your mother able to RESPOND to you (take you aside, ask you what was wrong, comfort you, hug you) when you were angry?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
24. How well was your father able to RESPOND to you (take you aside, ask you what was wrong, comfort you, hug you) when you were angry?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well

25. How curious was your mother to REALLY KNOW why you were angry (i.e., how much of a genuine desire did she have to know what was really going on with you)?
[1] Not at all [2] Somewhat curious [3] Fairly curious [4] Pretty curious [5] Very curious
26. How curious was your father to REALLY KNOW why you were angry (i.e., how much of a genuine desire did he have to know what was really going on with you)?
[1] Not at all [2] Somewhat curious [3] Fairly curious [4] Pretty curious [5] Very curious
27. How well was your mother able to ACCEPT and HANDLE your anger (without getting impatient, being unkind, making you feel guilty, belittling or denying your feelings)?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
28. How well was your father able to ACCEPT and HANDLE your anger (without getting impatient, being unkind, making you feel guilty, belittling or denying your feelings)?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
29. How well was your mother able to REPAIR (apologize, 'own' or rectify) not being there for you when you were angry?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
30. How well was your father able to REPAIR (apologize, 'own' or rectify) not being there for you when you were angry?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
31. How well was your mother able to notice when you were quieter than usual or more withdrawn than normal?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
32. How well was your father able to notice when you were quieter than usual or more withdrawn than normal?
[1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
33. If your mother knew you were distressed, did she respond to you?
[1] Never [2] Seldom [3] Fairly often [4] Pretty often [5] Always/Very often
34. If your father knew you were distressed, did he respond to you?
[1] Never [2] Seldom [3] Fairly often [4] Pretty often [5] Always/Very often

35. If your mother knew you were distressed, how well did she respond/satisfy to your needs?
 [1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
36. If your father knew you were distressed, how well did he respond/satisfy to your needs?
 [1] Not at all well [2] Somewhat well [3] Fairly well [4] Pretty well [5] Very well
37. How attentive was your mother (how much of a genuine desire did she have) to truly know your heart, your mind, your belief system?
 [1] Not at all attentive [2] Somewhat attentive [3] Fairly attentive
 [4] Pretty attentive [5] Very attentive
38. How attentive was your father (how much of a genuine desire did he have) to truly know your heart, your mind, your belief system?
 [1] Not at all attentive [2] Somewhat attentive [3] Fairly attentive
 [4] Pretty attentive [5] Very attentive

ALERT! Be careful how you answer the remaining questions because the rating scale values have been reversed!!

39. How much did your mother's distractedness (preoccupation with her own emotional issues/personal pain/addictions) keep her from attending to your needs?
 [1] A lot of the time [2] A good amount of the time
 [3] Some of the time [4] Very little of the time [5] Not at all
40. How much did your father's distractedness (preoccupation with his own emotional issues/personal pain/addictions) keep him from attending to your needs?
 [1] A lot of the time [2] A good amount of the time
 [3] Some of the time [4] Very little of the time [5] Not at all
41. How often did you feel 'unseen' by your mother (that you were not very important)?
 [1] Very often [2] Pretty often
 [3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never
42. How often did you feel 'unseen' by your father (that you were not very important)?
 [1] Very often [2] Pretty often
 [3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never

43. How often did you feel 'unheard' by your mother (that you were not a priority)?
[1] Very often [2] Pretty often
[3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never
44. How often did you feel 'unheard' by your father (that you were not a priority)?
[1] Very often [2] Pretty often
[3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never
45. How often did you feel that your mother dismissed how/what you were feeling (you expressed an emotion but it didn't have the impact on her you desired and so she didn't respond in a meaningful or tender way to you)?
[1] Very often [2] Pretty often
[3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never
46. How often did you feel that your father dismissed how/what you were feeling (you expressed an emotion but it didn't have the impact on him you desired and so he didn't respond in a meaningful or tender way to you)?
[1] Very often [2] Pretty often
[3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never
47. How often did you feel that it was easier to try to handle/regulate your own distress (for whatever reason) than to seek comfort from your mother who may have been physically present but emotionally unresponsive?
[1] Very often [2] Pretty often
[3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never
48. How often did you feel that it was easier to try to handle/regulate your own distress (for whatever reason) than to seek comfort from your father who may have been physically present but emotionally unresponsive?
[1] Very often [2] Pretty often
[3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never
49. How often do/did you feel that you stop/stopped expressing your needs and wants (in other words, you tell/told yourself "I'm on my own and must handle this alone" rather than risk telling your mother for fear of being misunderstood or dismissed by her)?
[1] Very often [2] Pretty often
[3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never

50. How often do/did you feel that you stop/stopped expressing your needs and wants (in other words, you tell/told yourself “I’m on my own and must handle this alone” rather than risk telling your father for fear of being misunderstood or dismissed by him)?

[1] Very often [2] Pretty often [3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never

51. How often do/did you find yourself meeting your mother’s needs rather than her meeting yours (in other words that you were being the parent to her)?

[1] Very often [2] Pretty often
[3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never

52. How often do/did you find yourself meeting your father’s needs rather than his meeting yours (in other words that you were being the parent to him)?

[1] Very often [2] Pretty often
[3] Fairly often [4] Seldom [5] Never

.....

Now, total your score and determine which level best categorizes your experience of parental attunement:

Scores < 104 - **Low Parental Attunement** – Scores in this range denote a low level of parental responsiveness to your needs. You may have grown up with an absent parent leaving the other solely in charge of meeting your needs, and that parent may not have been able to step up in a satisfying manner. Or you may have grown up with both parents, but neither could respond to you in a way that was as nurturing as you needed. Either way this experience left you feeling that you were never truly seen or heard by those most important to you. Consequently, you may carry with you a deep desire or yearning to develop true connectedness with (even over-dependence on) your life partner (and eventual children). Any over-dependence on another that stems from past unmet needs is by nature maladaptive and unrealistic and can translate to more than your life partner (even children) can handle. Alternatively, you may also have felt that it was not safe to share your feelings and you needed to navigate the world of your feelings alone because others never loved you enough to discover and accept the authentic ‘you’. As such, you became someone who finds it hard to open up to loved ones, even when they are safe to do so. You believe that deep sharing makes you vulnerable and dependent. If this is the case and you have a life partner who needs a great deal of connectedness through the attunement process, being somewhat ‘shutdown’ can put your relationship in peril over the long-term.

Scores 105-208 - **Moderate Parental Attunement** – Scores in this range reveal a moderate (not too low but not too high) level of parental awareness and responsiveness to your needs. You may have had one parent who loved you deeply and nurtured you well while the other parent was unable to give you what you yearned for. This is common in families where there is separation and divorce, and absence and estrangement on the part of one parent characterize the relationship with the children. On the other hand, you may have lived with both your parents, but they were only

moderately able to meet your needs. That's not to mean that they were only available some of the time, but rather that the quality of the interactions with you when they occurred were not deep enough to emotionally nourish you fully. Despite receiving some level of nurturance from both, it may still have left you with a deep sense of lacking. This can translate to needing (even expecting) a lot emotionally from your life partner that is based in your past. Often, this desire is felt but awareness of its origins is unconscious. This type of attunement experience is less than optimal and can leave you feeling dissatisfied when your life partner falls short of meeting your unrealistic expectations.

Scores >209 - High Parental Attunement – Scores in this range reflect a high level of parental attentiveness to your needs. You are very fortunate - sadly, this is not most people's experience. Consider yourself in a strong position in terms of having had your basic needs for connection met most of the time. This experience makes you a stable and consistent partner to your loved ones because you have felt mostly heard and seen by those who mattered most in your life. Feeling that we truly matter to those we love is one of humanity's greatest and deepest yearnings. You have received a true gift that makes you stronger than you will ever know. The theory is that if you have been nurtured with love, kindness, and acceptance you are more able to gift that to another. That does not mean that you do not have needs of your own that you bring to your loved ones, but it does imply that what you yourself have received you are more able to give to others. Beware as your life partner may not have been so lucky and that will create interesting complications. Nonetheless, you have an amazing foundation on which to build a healthy, loving, and enduring relationship.

Last revised 9/10/22

Questionnaire created by
Angie Willson-Quayle, PhD, LCPC
www.TemperamentCounseling.com
571-490-1795

Based on Adam Young's
"The Big Six:
What Every Child Needs from Their Parents"
www.adamyoungcounseling.com