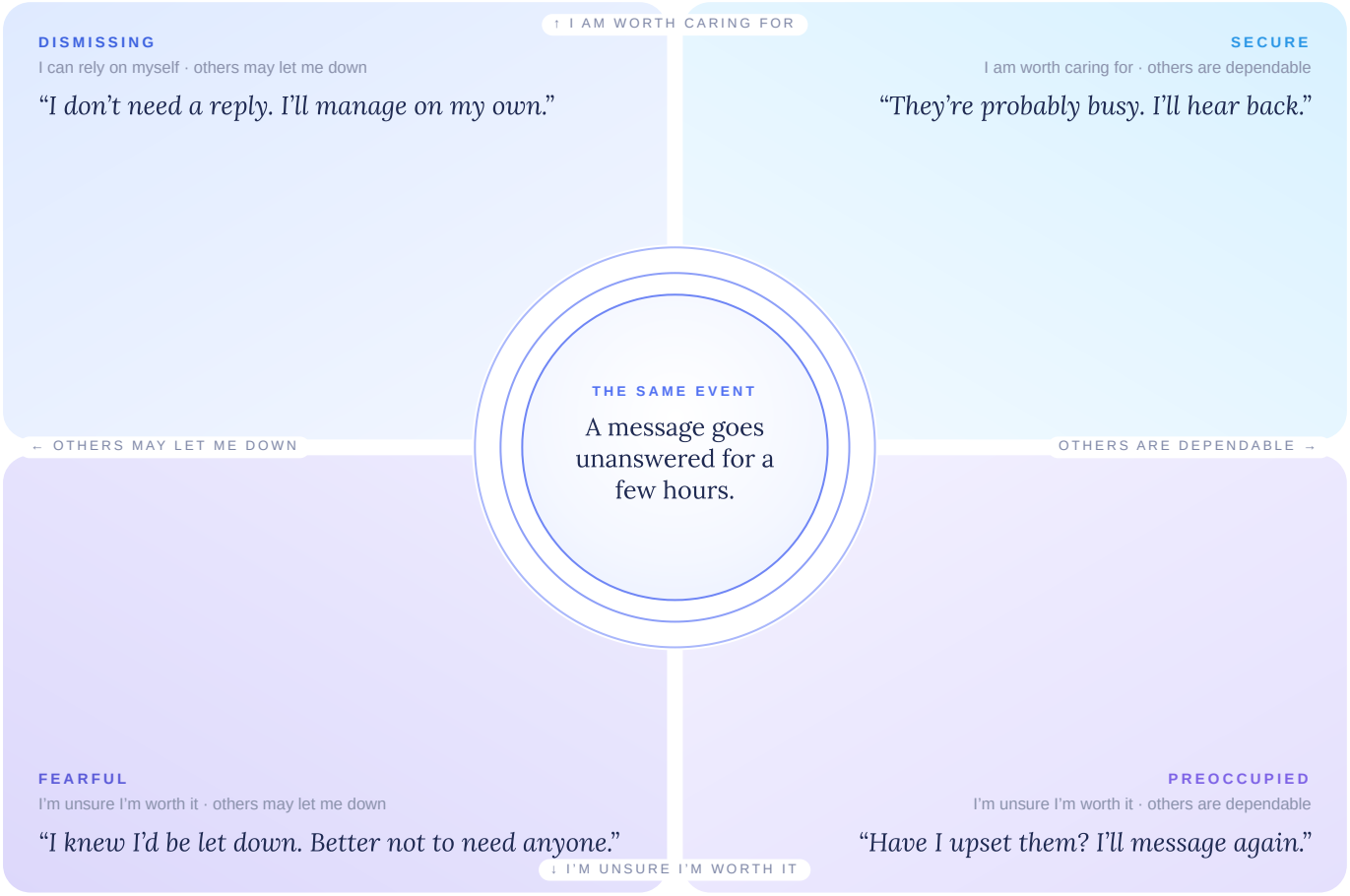
Internal Working Models

ATTACHMENT · HOW WE EXPECT RELATIONSHIPS TO GO

The inner map of self and others that we carry into every relationship

From our earliest relationships, we build mental models of what to expect: whether we are worth caring for, and whether others will be there when we need them (Bowlby, 1973). These models work quietly in the background, shaping how we read situations, what we feel and how we respond. They are not fixed, and new experiences can update them.



One event, four different readings. Based on the model of self and others described by Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991).

01 How a working model forms and holds

a self-reinforcing loop

Early care — how others responded when I needed them → **A working model** — beliefs about myself and others → **Expectations** — what I predict will happen → **How I act** — reaching out, holding back, or keeping distance → **How others respond** — which can seem to confirm the model

↺ and the loop begins again, unless something new interrupts it

02 Worth knowing

what the four readings are, and are not

Patterns, not labels

Most people show a mix, and research treats these as dimensions rather than fixed types.

They vary by relationship

The same person may feel secure with a friend and less so with a partner or parent.

They made sense once

Each model is an understandable adaptation to the care that was available at the time.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS

Bowlby described working models as representations of self and others that guide expectations in close relationships (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) showed that combining views of self and others produces four distinct patterns in adults. Working models are relatively stable but can change through new relationships and therapy.

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03 Where my model may have come from

at your own pace

When I was upset as a child, what usually happened?
who came, how they responded

What did I learn about asking for help?
whether it was welcome, or not

04 My working model now

mark where I usually sit

View of myself — *unsure I'm worth caring for* ○—○—○—○—○—○—○ *worth caring for*

View of others — *may let me down* ○—○—○—○—○—○—○ *dependable*

I am _____

Others are _____

Relationships are _____

05 Same event, a different lens

moments my model was switched on

WHAT HAPPENED *just the facts*	WHAT MY MODEL TOLD ME *about me, and about them*	WHAT I DID *or felt pulled to do*	ANOTHER POSSIBLE READING *through a more secure lens*

06 Updating the model

new experiences, gradually

1

Evidence that doesn't fit

People who have been reliable, or times I was cared for well.

2

A small risk to take

Sharing a need, or letting someone help.

3

What actually happened

And what it suggests about me and others.

SOURCES

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