

Abstract

This work is an exploration of avoidant attachment styles in both therapist and client and how to form a therapeutic relationship when avoidance is present. I look at attachment theory and specifically avoidant attachment and then use a case study to show the challenges of working with avoidant processes on both sides.

Introduction

Attachment theory is one of the areas of training that I connected with most. I recognised avoidance in myself and my process looked at how and why that has occurred. In my client work I am very aware of signs of an avoidant process. For me it is a challenge not to collude with avoidance (particularly avoidance of affect and emotional expression) and not to intellectualise and use humour to build relationship while steering away from “difficult” or uncomfortable feelings both in the client and myself.

My growing edge in training has been becoming more affectively attuned (Erskine 2015, describes it as emotional response to and understanding of the client, more than just empathising or listening)and communicating that. I work cognitively with clients very naturally and am comfortable with narrative, the test for me is how to go beneath that into more “relational depth” (Mearns, Cooper 2005) and deeper contact. A journey into the heart of the avoidance.

Attachment theory is a development of my Humanistic practice, it is the next level I build on top of person centred foundations. Integrating attachment theory is a large part of my assessment of a client and identifying their relational needs.