



Attachment , Emotion, and Trauma

“treating the music behind the words”

What will be Covered

- A basic understanding of attachment & emotional dysregulation.
- Early Attachment and it's impact on the soldier.
- The military experience and it's impact on the soldier's attachment style.
- Using Emotion Focused Couples Therapy to work with affect dysregulation and attachment trauma.
- Trying it out/role play

Questions

- What made it so difficult for the soldier to respond to and engage with his son?
- What are the consequences to the son and the soldier?

Attachment Questions

- Do early attachment experiences impact stress responses of soldiers while in the military?
- How does the military experience impact a soldier attachment style and their recover from traumatic stress?



Trauma and PTSD

- **60%** of men and **50%** of women experience a traumatic event at some point in their lives (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson, 1995)
- Roughly **50%** of those exposed to a traumatic event experience PTSD (Zlotnick et Al, 1999)





Early Attachment Experiences

Their Impact on Stress Responses

Soldiers and Relational Trauma

- Soldiers that experience relational trauma as children develop **complex self dysregulation** do to insecure attachment bonds.
- **Insecure attachment bonds are** predictive of a poor prognosis in posttraumatic stress disorder treatment (Ford & Kidd, 1998)



Emotional Dysregulation in Combat

- Those soldiers who had childhood experiences in which **threat/negative emotions were regulated** by “the good enough parent” learn how to self regulate their emotions when faced with threat.
- Those soldiers who had childhood experiences in which **threat/negative emotions were not responded** to form a right hemispheric adjustment of **over or under regulation of emotion**. This makes them more vulnerable to traumatic events.
- When faced with real or perceived threat in combat these soldiers are most likely to return to **familiar coping strategies formed to regulate emotions** from early attachment experiences
 - denial, dissociation, displacement, addictive behaviors, etc.



“Secure attachment creates resilience in the face of terror and helplessness and a natural arena for healing. Isolation and lack of secure attachment, on the other hand, add to our vulnerability, exacerbate traumatic events, and are actually wounding in themselves. (Sue Johnson)



comfort Break

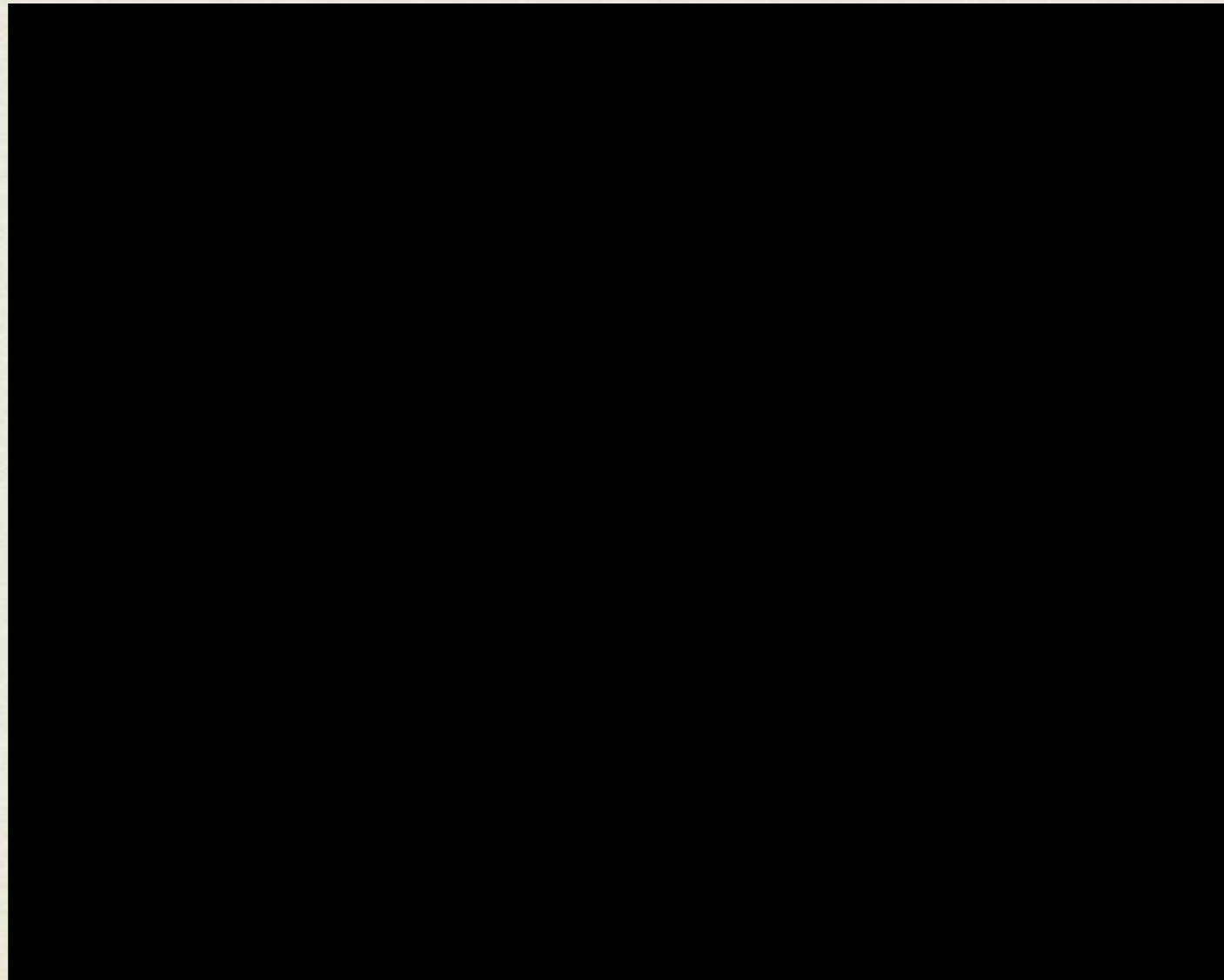


Let's Talk about Attachment

John Bowlby on Attachment

- Attachment is the result of innate, interrelated human predispositions for infants/adults to seek the attention of attachment figures.
- Attachment is an “anchor” that allows child/adult to explore world and return for safety.
- Disturbance/disruption of initial attachment bond between child and primary care giver renders person insecure and vulnerable as an adult.

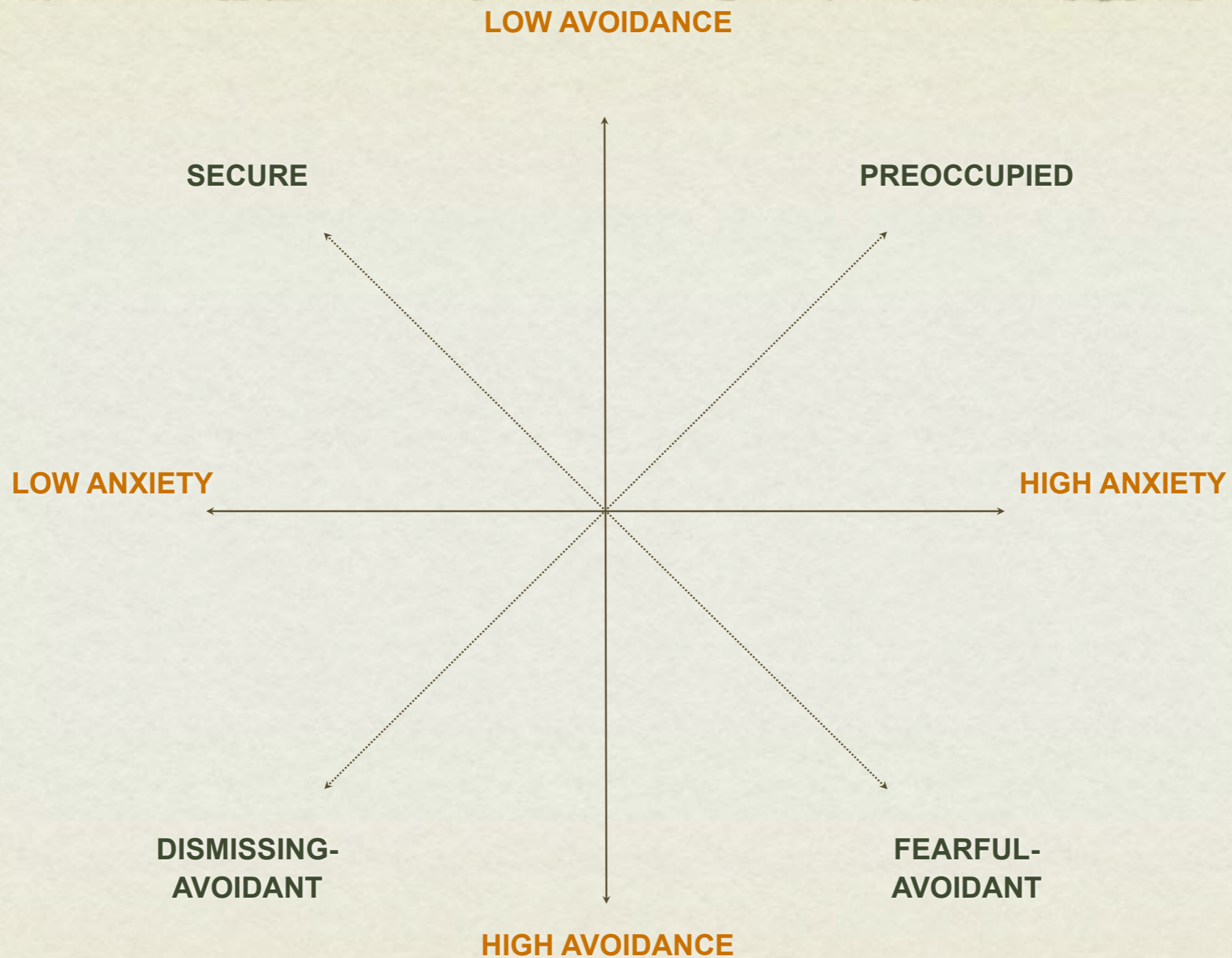
What happens when we fail to
Attach?



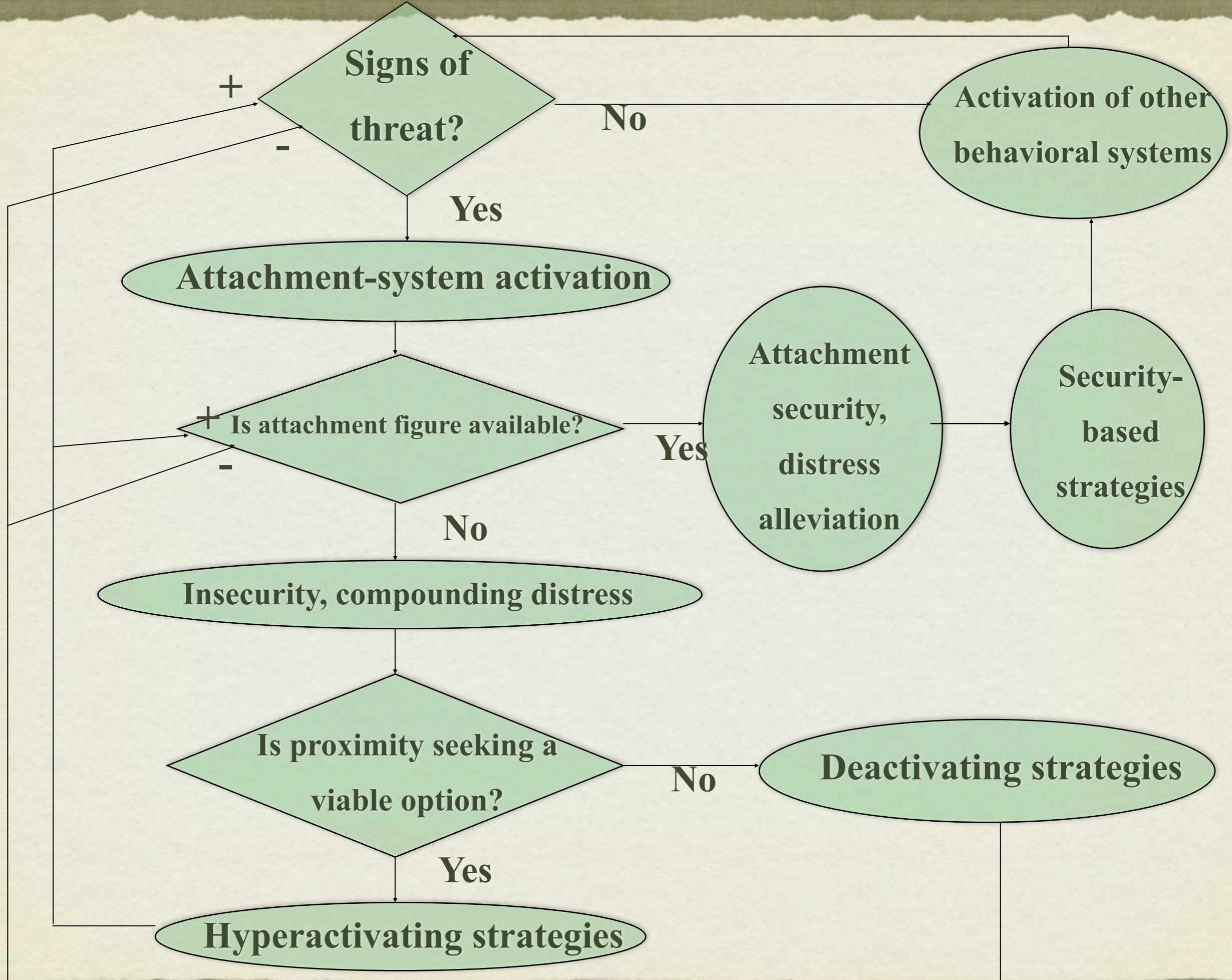
Basic assessment of a soldier's attachment is based on....

- degrees of **avoidance** and **anxiety** in relationships when there is a perceived threat (internal or external).

Relationship AVOIDANCE and ANXIETY



Adapted from Fraley & Shaver (RGP, 2000)



Avoidance and Deactivation

- Avoidance/Deactivation of the attachment system occur when errors of “omission” and “commission” are consistently present within the attachment relationship.





Comfort Break



The Military Experience

Potential Impact to Attachment Styles

4 Questions

Can attachment styles be changed as a result of the military experience?

If so, in what way?

What impact does it have on the soldiers return to civilian life?

What impact does it have on therapy?

Military Skills and Attachment

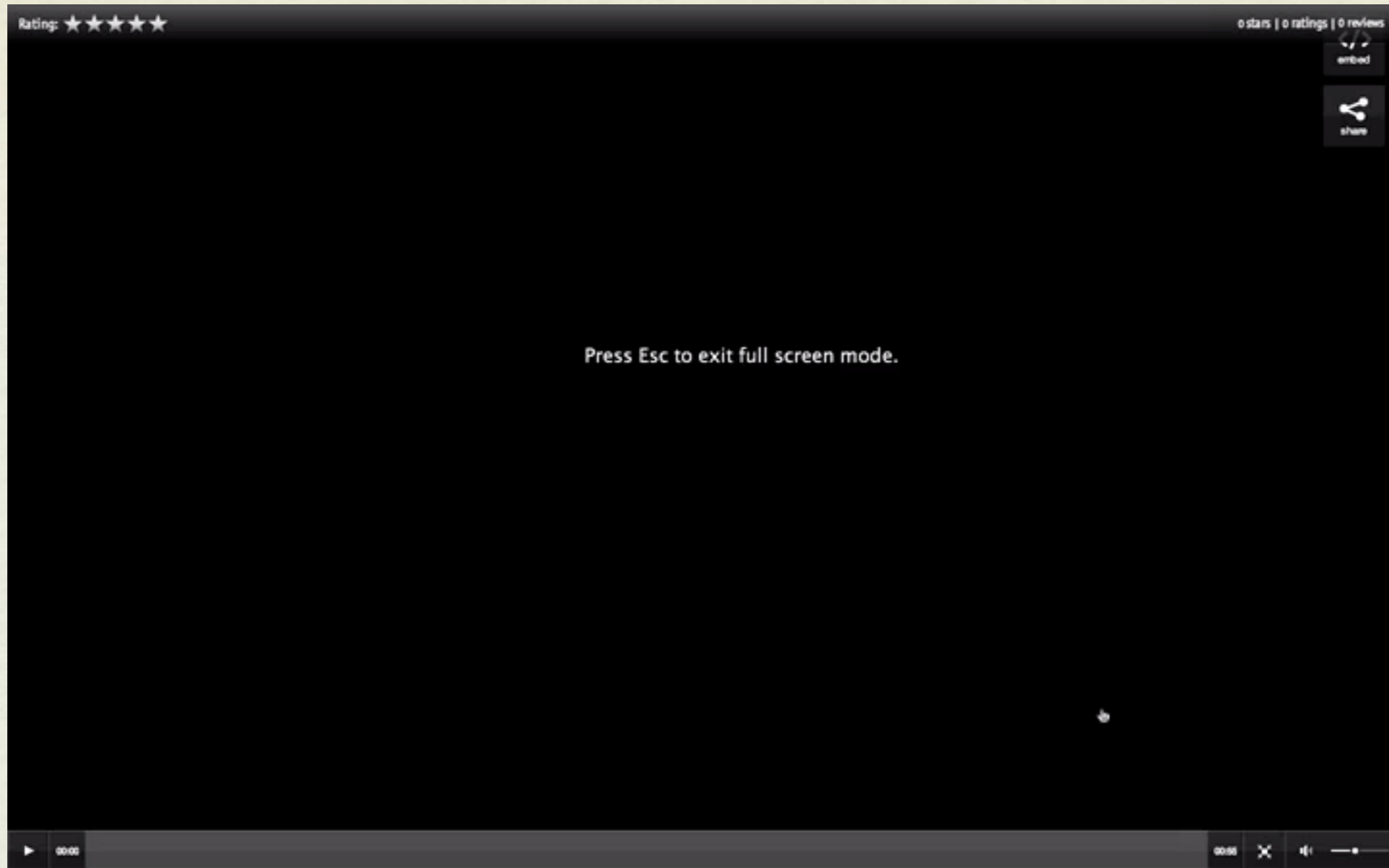
Skills for Combat	Skills for Attachment
control fears	Express Fears
suppress emotions	Identify Emotions
master art of deception while devising ways to survive	Be Authentic and Honest
parse information while restricting communication	Communicate Thoughts and Feelings
develop capacity to respond immediately and instantly with violent lethal force	Reflect and Respond with Previously unacknowledged Content

Military Experience and Attachment

- **Securely Attached**
- When the degree of perceived or real emotional threat exceeds our psychological resources then even securely attached individuals will reach for strategies that have never been used before.
 - The emotional event is **to great in intensity to use existing self or relational regulatory resources**, so alternative mechanisms are acquired just to survive.
 - Deactivation/Avoidance/Over-regulation Strategies are the most common.
 - Quote from Dr. Frank Ochberg
 - “You feel like a shadow of your form self, you could be restored to life with people you love, and you describe, ah, “I know I love; I just don’t feel it”. And, you sometimes see this in a persons face, a constricted affect.”

Military Experience and Attachment

- **Insecurely Attached**
- These individuals are **more vulnerable to lower levels of threat**. They may not have the psychological resources to manage every day stressors of being in the military.
- Under perceived threat they may move into behaviors of:
 - deactivating withdrawal (addictions)
 - hyperactivating attack (fighting, defensiveness, etc.)



The skills gained in combat can alter or further entrench insecure attachment styles
The result is affect dysregulation and acquisition of a skill set that is not conducive to developing secure attachments with others upon return.



Comfort Break



WORKING WITH “AFFECT DYSREGULATION”

Through the use of EFT Couples Therapy

Emotions

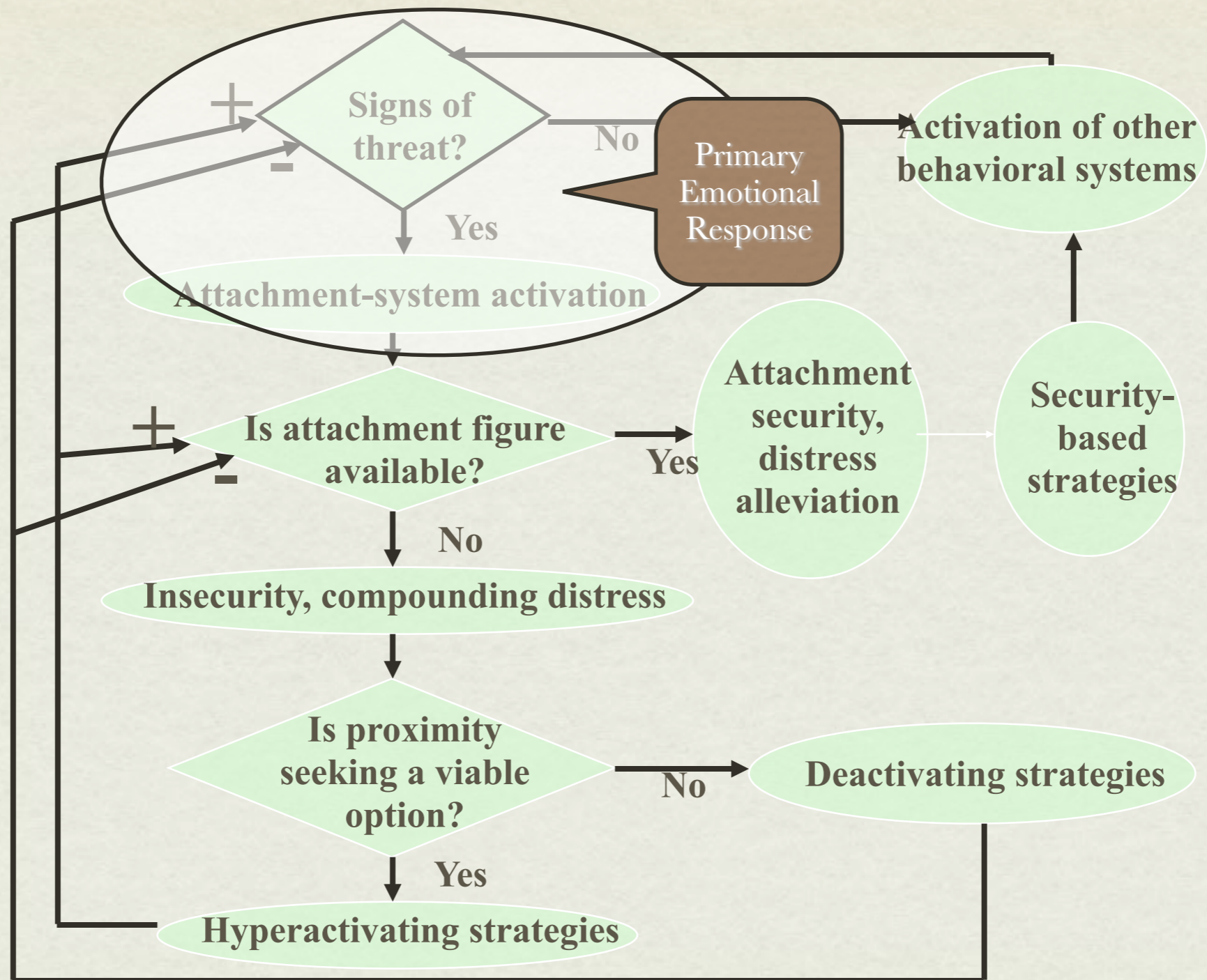
Emotions are the target and agent of change.

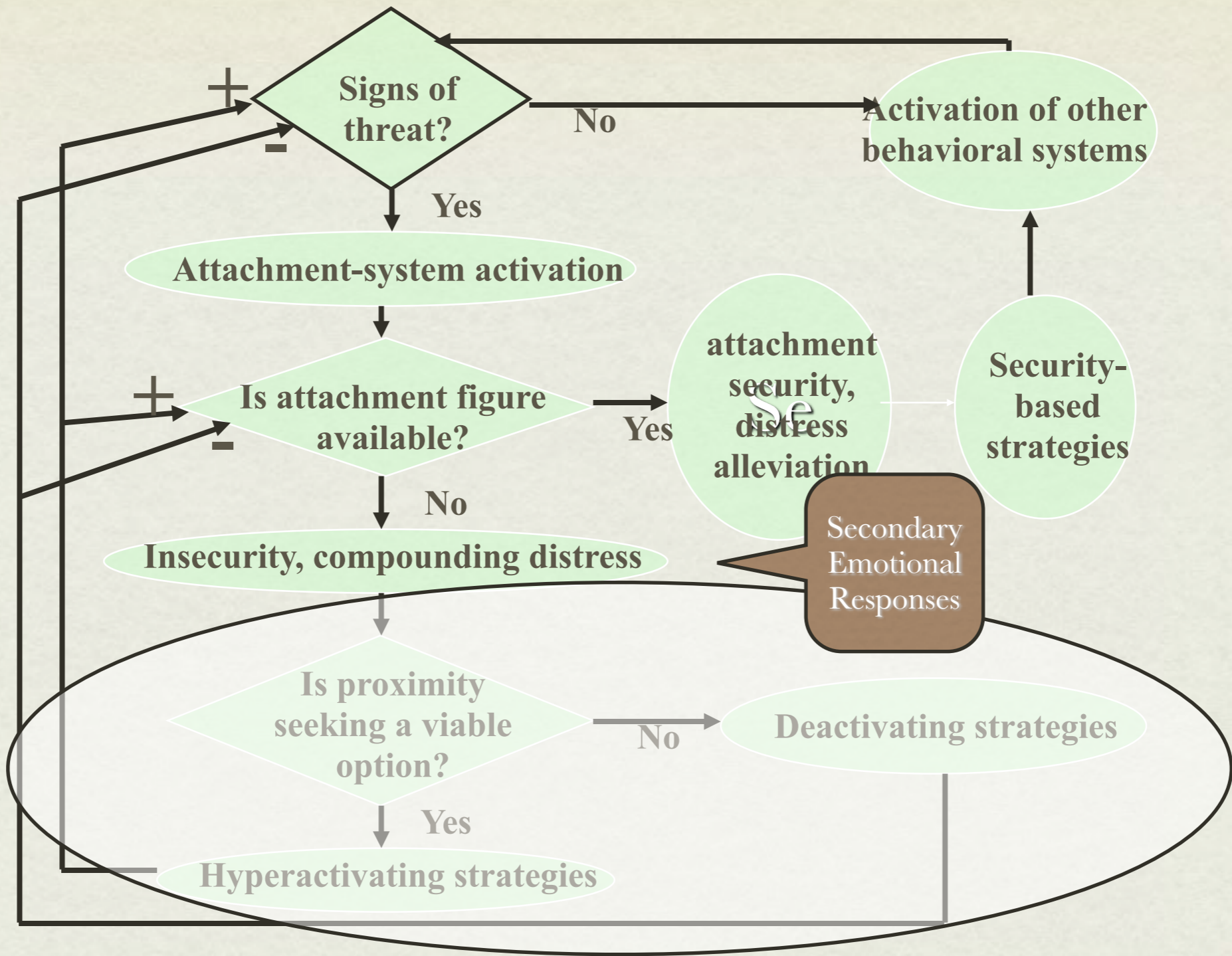
- Emotions are initiated in the amygdala but are acknowledged and managed in the right prefrontal cortex of the brain.
- Acknowledged emotions can point us to things of importance.
- Dysregulated emotions can blind us to things of importance or magnify things of unimportance.
- Behavioral responses/actions can be tied closely to emotions
- Heightened emotions are more permanently changed with equally competing emotions than cognitions.

Emotion

Negative emotions occur at two levels: **Primary and Secondary.**

- Primary Emotions are the deeper, more vulnerable emotions such as sadness, hurt, fear, shame, and loneliness.
- Secondary Emotions are the more reactive emotions such as anger, jealousy, resentment, and frustration. They occur as a reaction to the primary emotions.
- Primary emotions generally draw partners closer. Secondary emotions tend to push partners away.





Relationships Power in Emotions

- Attachment relationships (including that of therapist) have the ability to heighten emotions.
- Many would argue that the primary function of emotions is to regulate “proximity” between the attachment figure and self.
- Emotionally focused couples therapy can access the emotions hidden in the experiences and provide competing emotional events to help heal the dysregulated responses.

Identifying Negative Relational Patterns that Interfere with Healing Responses

Husband

Wife

Action Tendency

Action Tendency

Perceptions/Attributions

Perceptions/Attributions

Secondary Emotion

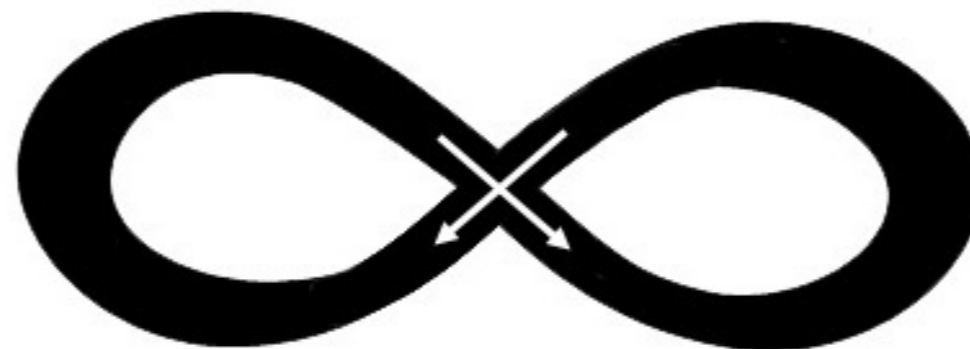
Secondary Emotion

Primary Emotion

Primary Emotion

Unmet Attachment Needs

Unmet Attachment Needs



Getting to the Emotions/Patterns through the 4 Ps

- 1. Primary emotions – validating and moving from secondary to primary emotions.
- 2. Present experience – focus on the past and FOO only as much as needed. Focus on what is going on right now.
- 3. Process patterns – look individually how each person is processing in the moment. What happens....then what happens.....then what happens. Then the Counselor is able to go back to “what would you have liked to have done?” “do it right now.” Creating detours to reengage and move on to more positive.
- 4. Positions – what position each person is taking in the relationship. The Counselor works to create a new position.

Role of Counselor

Allow the couple to tell their relational story including the military experiences impact on their relationship.

Assess and encourage exploration of secondary and primary emotions while listening to the story.

Assess their history of attachment in relationships.

Identify current and past relational cycles/patterns that keep the couple and individual stuck. These are influenced by their history of attachment.

Identify the core emotional and relational threats that have influenced the patterns (attachment threats)

Role of Counselor

Identify the primary relationship cycle that exists outside of the couples awareness

Soften both members of the couple to help them accept the reasons for the relationship behaviors and align them against the cycle.

Encourage experimentation of primary emotions (asking couple to talk to each other rather than through you)

Encourage reflection on experience (what was that like for you?). This provides acceptance and meaning to the experience.

Assist in consolidation of new patterns of relational experience

Role Played Session

Allow the couple to tell their relational story including the military experiences impact on their relationship.

Assess and encourage exploration of secondary and primary emotions while listening to the story.

Assess their history of attachment in relationships.

Identify current and past relational cycles/patterns that keep the couple and individual stuck.

Identify the core emotional and relational threats that have influenced the patterns (attachment threats)



comfort Break



EFT Interventions & Techniques

EFT Interventions

- Monitoring collaborative alliance
 - “I sense this process is difficult for you. Is there some way I can be more supportive?”
- Reflecting secondary emotions
 - “You get very angry when this happens because it feels like such a no-win situation.”
- Validating
 - “You feel so alarmed that you can’t even focus. When you’re that afraid, you can’t even concentrate. Is that it?”

EFT Interventions

- Reflecting underlying emotions
 - “So, I hear you saying that your angry, but I am wondering if your afraid, afraid you won’t ever be able to respond to her in the way you did before deployment?”
- Evocative responding (Latin “to call”)
 - Expanding the couple responses to include bodily response, associated desires, and meanings or action tendency
 - Expand clients awareness of present experience
 - “What happens inside when you begin to talk about your experiences in combat? What do you see in your partners response?” “

EFT Interventions

- Heightening

- Using repetition, images, metaphors, or enactments to intensify particular responses and interactions.
- These are often interactions that play a crucial role in negative interactions or new positive ones.
 - “Can you say that again? I am scared to feel my emotions because I don’t want to hurt you?”

- Reframing

- Reframing occurs to connect strategies to attachment needs.
 - “You withdraw because you don’t want to hurt her and you withdraw because the feelings you have inside of you are so powerful. You don’t withdraw because you don’t care”

EFT Interventions

- Empathic conjectures/interpretation
 - Counselor interprets the client's current state and experience to help give color, shape and form.
 - The goal is to facilitate more intense experiences from which new meanings spontaneously arise.
 - “So you could never let her know how what you experienced pushed you to withdraw. You were afraid that she would see you as a monster and not want to be close to you again.”

Role Played Session

Identify the primary relationship cycle that exists outside of the couples awareness

Soften both members of the couple to help them accept the reasons for the relationship behaviors and align them against the cycle.

Encourage experimentation of primary emotions (asking couple to talk to each other rather than through you)

Encourage reflection on experience (what was that like for you?). This provides acceptance and meaning to the

experience. Assist in consolidation of new patterns of relational experience

Questions