

# THE BIG SIX EXERCISE

**Attunement | Responsiveness | Engagement | Able To Regulate Your Affect  
Strong Enough To Handle Your Big Emotions | Willing To Repair**

Instructions. Think back to your growing up years, ages 4 to 18. Rate the items below on a scale of 1 to 5.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always

**Attunement** refers to your parents' ability to read you, to seek to know what are feeling and experiencing on the inside.

\_\_\_\_\_ My mother was attuned to my emotional state. She knew when I was feeling big emotions—like anger, sadness, or fear. When I was upset about something, she knew it. She was able to read my face and my tone of voice. She knew when I needed or wanted something.

\_\_\_\_\_ My father was attuned to my emotional state. He knew when I was feeling big emotions—like anger, sadness, or fear. When I was upset about something, he knew it. He was able to read my face and my tone of voice. He knew when I needed or wanted something.

How consistent was your parents' level of attunement during elementary school, middle school, and high school? Was there a time period during which one or both parents were especially attuned or especially misattuned?

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your mother's attunement to you (or lack thereof).

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your father's attunement to you (or lack thereof).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always

**Responsiveness** refers to your parents' willingness to respond to you when you were distressed (mad, sad, afraid).

My mother

\_\_\_\_\_ was responsive to me when I was mad. She was curious about why I was mad and invited me to talk about it.

\_\_\_\_\_ was responsive to me when I was sad. She was curious and offered comfort, care, and kindness.

\_\_\_\_\_ was responsive to me when I was afraid. She was curious and offered comfort, care, and kindness.

My father

\_\_\_\_\_ was responsive to me when I was mad. He was curious about why I was mad and invited me to talk about it.

\_\_\_\_\_ was responsive to me when I was sad. He was curious and offered comfort, care, and kindness.

\_\_\_\_\_ was responsive to me when I was afraid. He was curious and offered comfort, care, and kindness.

How consistent was your parents' responsiveness during elementary school, middle school, and high school? Was there a time period during which one or both parents were especially responsive or unresponsive?

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your mother's responsiveness to you when you were mad, sad, or afraid (or an example of a time when she was not responsive to you).

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your father's responsiveness to you when you were mad, sad, or afraid (or an example of a time when he was not responsive to you).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always

**Engagement** refers to your parents' desire to truly know you, to know your heart.

\_\_\_\_\_ My mother had a genuine desire to really know me and especially to know my heart. I felt pursued by her. I felt like she invited me to share my hopes, fears, dreams, and desires—but didn't require me to do this. There was space to share what I wanted to, but her pursuit did not feel invasive.

\_\_\_\_\_ My father had a genuine desire to really know me and especially to know my heart. I felt pursued by him. I felt like he invited me to share my hopes, fears, dreams, and desires—but didn't require me to do this. There was space to share what I wanted to, but his pursuit did not feel invasive.

How consistent was your parents' engagement during elementary school, middle school, and high school? Was there a time period during which one or both parents were especially engaged or disengaged?

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your mother's engagement of you (or lack thereof).

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your father's engagement of you (or lack thereof).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always

**Affect regulation** refers to your parents' ability and willingness to soothe you when you were anxious or scared and stimulate you when you were shut down.

\_\_\_\_\_ My mother was able to help me calm down when I was distressed or dysregulated (afraid, mad, upset, ashamed, sad).

\_\_\_\_\_ My father was able to help me calm down when I was distressed or dysregulated (afraid, mad, upset, ashamed, sad).

How consistent was your parents' ability and willingness to regulate your affect during elementary school, middle school, and high school? Was there a time period during which one or both parents were especially helpful or unhelpful at this?

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your mother's ability to soothe you when you were anxious or scared or stimulate you when you were shut down (or a time when she was not able to do this).

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your father's ability to soothe you when you were anxious or scared or stimulate you when you were shut down (or a time when he was not able to do this).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always

“**Strong enough to handle your big emotions**” refers to the degree to which your parents welcomed your anger, sadness, and fear.

My mother

\_\_\_\_\_ welcomed my anger. It was okay for me to be mad at Mom. I could say things like, “I hate you” or “you’re mean” or “you don’t love me.”

\_\_\_\_\_ welcomed my sadness. It was okay for me to cry and be sorrowful.

\_\_\_\_\_ welcomed my fear. It was okay for me to be afraid.

My father

\_\_\_\_\_ welcomed my anger. It was okay for me to be mad at Dad. I could say things like, “I hate you” or “you’re mean” or “you don’t love me.”

\_\_\_\_\_ welcomed my sadness. It was okay for me to cry and be sorrowful.

\_\_\_\_\_ welcomed my fear. It was okay for me to be afraid.

Another component of a parent being strong enough to handle the child’s big emotions is being able to regulate their own emotions without the child’s assistance.

\_\_\_\_\_ Mom was able to regulate her own emotions. She did not need me to soothe her.

\_\_\_\_\_ Dad was able to regulate her own emotions. He did not need me to soothe him.

How consistent was your parents' willingness to welcome your big emotions during elementary school, middle school, and high school? Was there a time period during which one or both parents were especially able or unable to handle your big emotions?

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your mother welcoming your anger, sadness, and/or fear (or a time when she did not do this).

Give an example of a time when you were especially aware of your father welcoming your anger, sadness, and/or fear (or a time when he did not do this).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always

**Willingness to repair** refers to your parents' willingness to own and rectify harm.

\_\_\_\_\_ My mother was aware when she said or did something that hurt me. She sought me out, acknowledged what she had done, apologized with a genuine "I'm sorry," reconnected with me, and attempted to repair the relational damage.

\_\_\_\_\_ My father was aware when he said or did something that hurt me. He sought me out, acknowledged what he had done, apologized with a genuine "I'm sorry," reconnected with me, and attempted to repair the relational damage.

How consistent was your parents' willingness to repair harm during elementary school, middle school, and high school? Was there a time period during which one or both parents were especially willing or unwilling to repair?

Give an example of a time when your mother owned and rectified harm that she did to you.

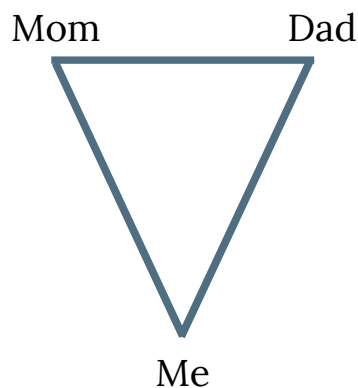
Give an example of a time when your father owned and rectified harm that he did to you.

Look back on your responses. Securely attached people will score mostly 4's (with an occasional 3). If you scored lower than that, it means that your needs were not met as a child and you likely developed an insecure attachment.

# WHAT SHAPE IS YOUR TRIANGLE?

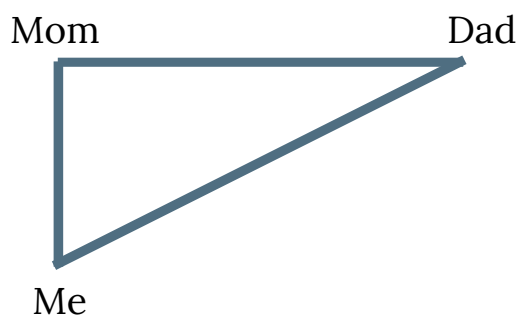
If your parents did not have a passionate, healthy marriage—and a deep emotional connection with each other—then it is likely that either you or one of your siblings were more connected to a parent than the parent's spouse was, a set up for subtle sexual abuse.

The emotional closeness of the relationship in your family can be drawn as actual triangles with the points of the triangle representing the closeness of the relationship.

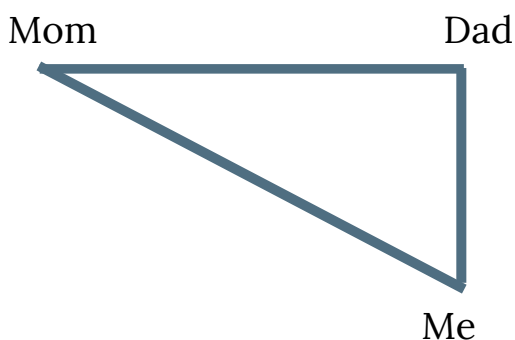


Mom and Dad are emotionally closer to one another than either of them are to you.

Triangulation occurs when a child becomes emotionally closer to Mom or Dad than Mom and Dad are to each other. In time, the parent may look to the child as a surrogate spouse.



You are emotionally closer to Mom than Mom is to Dad.



You are emotionally closer to Dad than Dad is to Mom.

In the space below, draw your triangle. Note: you may have to draw multiple triangles to account for situations of divorce and remarriage, or parental death and remarriage. Alternatively, you may have been raised by a single parent (in this case, try to depict the emotional closeness of the relationship with your single parent).

The questions that follow are designed to help you think about the relational triangles in your family of origin.

### **Mom and Dad's Marital Relationship**

Rate the items below on a scale of 1 to 5.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always

- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom and Dad were close friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom and Dad enjoyed each other and spent time doing things just the two of them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom and Dad were attuned to each other.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom and Dad were honest with each other about their feelings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom and Dad showed physical affection for one another (hugging, hand holding, etc)
- \_\_\_\_\_ When Mom was mad/sad/afraid, Dad responded to her with comfort and care.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When Dad was mad/sad/afraid, Mom responded to him with comfort and care.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When Mom and Dad disagreed or experienced conflict, they talked things through and reconnected with each other.

Based on your responses above, how close would you say your parents were to each other?



1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always

### **Your Relationship with Mom and Dad**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom talked to me about her marriage problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dad talked to me about his marriage problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom was contemptuous of my dad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dad was contemptuous of my mom.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom and I were emotionally closer than she was with my Dad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dad and I were emotionally closer than he was with my Mom.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I was Mom's favorite.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I was Dad's favorite.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My opposite sex parent was critical of me. It felt like there was something between us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom made sexually suggestive comments (sexual jokes, comments about my or others' appearance, weight, body parts, etc.).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dad made sexually suggestive comments (sexual jokes, comments about my or others' appearance, weight, body parts, etc.).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mom confided in me about her emotional problems and difficulties, and turned to me for help. I felt like her confidante. We had a special relationship.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dad confided in me about his emotional problems and difficulties, and turned to me for help. I felt like her confidante. We had a special relationship.
- \_\_\_\_\_ One of my parents attended most of my special events (games, concerts, recitals, etc) while the other parent stayed home.

Based on your responses, would you say that you were emotionally closer to your mother or your father?

## Quotes For Men To Reflect On

The following quotes are taken from *Silently Seduced* by Kenneth Adams. As you read through each one, underline any phrases that are particularly resonant for you, paying special attention to the sensations you feel in your body. Use the space below the quote to make note of *what you feel in your body*.

“There was mostly distance between my father and me. He never seemed to have much time for me and spent a great deal of time away from the house. I never could figure out why my parents stayed together. They didn’t talk to each other much. I see now why my mother invested so much energy in me.”

“I decided early on I was going to show my dad that I could be a better father than he ever was. Although I didn’t know it at the time, I was also working on being a better husband than he was – a role my mother always seemed to welcome.”

“It felt so good to be able to make my mom stop crying and put a smile on her face. I was more than willing to be there for her. I felt so important and powerful. After a while it seemed that my mother actually preferred my company over my father’s.”

“I thought I had the perfect parents. I was particularly fond of my mother because she was always there for me, to comfort me and talk. We talked about everything. Often she talked about my dad... I always felt special around her because she trusted me with personal information. My father was an attorney who loved his work. He seemed more married to it than to my mother. But he made sure we had everything – the best clothes, schools and whatever we wanted. It was hard to be angry with him. Besides, as a family, we seemed fine. There was never any overt family fighting or feuds. We seemed real close. I always felt special after one of my talks with Mom. I thought including me was my mom’s way of making me feel special. I had no idea my mother was seducing me because she was lonely.”

## Quotes For Women to Reflect On

The following quotes are taken from *Silently Seduced* by Kenneth Adams. As you read through each one, underline any phrases that are particularly resonant for you, paying special attention to the sensations you feel in your body. Use the space below the quote to make note of *what you feel in your body*.

“There was mostly distance between my mother and me. She never seemed to have much time for me. I never could figure out why my parents stayed together. They didn’t talk to each other much. I see now why my father invested so much energy in me.”

“I decided early on I was going to show my mom that I could be a better mother than she ever was. Although I didn’t know it at the time, I was also working on being a better wife than she was — a role my father always seemed to welcome.”

“My father always had me by his side when I was growing up. I was his little sweetie. He and my mother didn’t have much of a relationship so I was the object he adored. When I was younger, I enjoyed all the attention and closeness.”

“I thought I had the perfect parents. I was particularly fond of my father because he was always there for me, to comfort me and talk. We talked about everything. Often he talked about my mom... I always felt special around him because he trusted me with personal information. My mother was an attorney who loved her work. She seemed more married to it than to my father. But she made sure we had everything — the best clothes, schools and whatever we wanted. It was hard to be angry with her. Besides, as a family, we seemed fine. There was never any overt family fighting or feuds. We seemed real close. I always felt special after one of my talks with Dad. I thought including me was my dad’s way of making me feel special. I had no idea my father was seducing me because he was lonely.”

Review and reflect on your answers. Are there any adjustments you would like to make to the triangle you initially drew? In the space provided, draw your revised triangle.

Review and reflect on your answers on the preceding pages. Are there any adjustments you would like to make to the triangle you initially drew? In the space below, draw your revised triangle.