

A Guide to Attachment Styles and Their Effects on Relationships

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Introduction

No person is an island. We are created and birthed into this world via relationship and we deeply crave for connection of an "other". Our earliest experience of what it means to be in relationship leaves an imprint on our brain and wires our future approach as we reach adulthood. Therefore, when working with couples or anyone who is struggling or looking to improve their relationship or interpersonal skills, it is helpful to glean insight from these formidable early interactions.

These interactions shape how we subconsciously feel about relationship. Is connection safe or is it dangerous? We will replay these patterns and if they do not serve us well, can create potential heartache as adults. That's why we've created this report on attachment styles. Whether a romantic relationship or work relationship, these attachment styles will help you learn how you interact with others, learn about your blind spots, and discover more successful ways to achieve your relationship goals.

It is our hope that this will be the beginning of a healing journey so that your relationships can be as safe, connected, and fulfilling as possible.

With best wishes for your relationship success, Rabbi Shlomo Slatkin, M.S., LCPC

Attachment Theory & Attachment Styles

Attachment Theory is a psychological concept that focuses on relationships and bonds between people, including those between a parent and child and between romantic partners.

According to psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby, early relationships with one's caregivers influences your ability to form healthy adult relationships.

4 Types of Attachment Styles and Characteristics

ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT

(also referred to as Preoccupied)

- · Are high sacrificing people-pleasers
- Fear rejection
- · Have a heightened fear of being abandoned
- Overcompensate in adult relationships
- Sacrifice their own needs to maintain relationships

AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

(also referred to as Dismissive)

- Appear withdrawn
- Emotionally distant in relationships
- Unlikely to connect at an intimate level
- Highly independent
- Find close involvement with their partners difficult
- Feel overwhelmed when heavily relied upon

DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT

(also referred to as Fearful-Avoidant)

- Feel unworthy
- Are ambivalent in relationships
- Regularly shift between being distant and vulnerable
- Over-analyze micro expressions, such as body language, to look for betrayal
- Fail to trust naturally
- Feel betrayal is always just around the corner

SECURE ATTACHMENT

- Feel secure in relationships
- Are supportive, open, and available in their relationships
- Have the potential to shift individuals in other attachment styles to a more secure one

Questions To Ask To Learn Your Attachment

Use this worksheet to learn about your attachment style.

| | YES | NO |
|--|------------|----|
| 1. What did you learn from your family about emotions and vulnerability? | | |
| Were emotions modeled? | | |
| Were emotions restricted and internalized? | | |
| Were emotions labeled bad or good? | | |
| Did one parent/caregiver feel more than the other? | | |
| were emotions equally modeled? | | |
| 2. What does your culture value and prioritize? | | |
| 3. What did you learn about differences growing | นท? | |
| | | |
| 4. Did you have a dependable parental or caregiver figure? | YES | NO |
| Was your parent/caregiver consistent and predicable? | | |
| Were they chaotic and uncertain? | | |
| 5. Who did you turn to for comfort and support as | s a child? | |
| | | |
| 6. Who did you turn to for comfort and support as | s a child? | |
| | | |

| 7. How did you experience comfort and support growing up? | |
|---|----|
| | |
| | |
| 8. Who do you turn to for comfort and support now? | |
| | |
| 9. What does comfort and support look like now? | |
| | |
| | |
| 10. Do you ask for what you need? | NO |
| 11. How do you ask for what you need? | |
| | |
| | |
| 12. How do you receive love? | |
| | |
| | |
| 13. How do you give love to others? | |
| | |
| 14. How do you show love to others? | |
| 14. How do you show to be to others: | |
| | |
| 15. What causes most discomfort in relationships? | |
| | |
| | |

| 16. What scares you in relationships? | |
|---|-------|
| | |
| 17. How do you temper your discomfort? | |
| | |
| How do your relationships end? YES | NO |
| 18. Do you leave people? | |
| 19. Do people leave you? | |
| 20.Do you stay in relationships even when they are no longer helpful and healthy? | |
| 21. How do you let others know something is bothering yo | u? |
| | |
| | |
| 22. When you feel overwhelmed emotionally, who do you t | tell? |
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Attachment Styles and What it Looks Like

ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT

You want to be in a relationship and crave feelings of closeness and intimacy with a significant other, but you struggle to feel that you can trust or fully rely on your partner.

Being in an intimate relationship tends to take over your life and you become overly fixated on the other person.

You may find it difficult to observe boundaries, viewing space between you as a threat, something that can provoke panic, anger, or fear that your partner no longer wants you.

You feel anxious or jealous when away from your partner and may use guilt, controlling behavior, or other manipulative tactics to keep them close.

AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

You're an independent person, content to care for yourself and don't feel you need others.

The more someone tries to get close to you or the needier a partner becomes, the more you tend to withdraw.

You're uncomfortable with your emotions and partners often accuse you of being distant and closed off, rigid and intolerant. In return, you accuse them of being too needy.

You're prone to minimize or disregard your partner's feelings, keep secrets from them, engage in affairs, and even end relationships in order to regain your sense of freedom.

DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT

You probably find intimate relationships confusing and unsettling, often swinging between emotional extremes of love and hate for a partner.

You may be insensitive towards your partner, selfish, controlling, and untrusting, which can lead to explosive or even abusive behavior. And you can be just as hard on yourself as you are on others.

You may exhibit antisocial or negative behavior patterns, abuse alcohol or drugs, or prone to aggression or violence.

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SECURE ATTACHMENT

You appreciate your own self-worth and you're able to be yourself in an intimate relationship.

You're comfortable expressing your feelings, hopes, and needs.

You find satisfaction in being with others, openly seek support and comfort from your partner, but don't get overly anxious when the two of you are apart.

You're similarly happy for your partner to rely on you for support.

When faced with disappointment, setbacks, and misfortune in your relationships as well as other parts of your life, you're resilient enough to bounce back.

Identifying Needs And Wants

While we may feel frustrated in a relationship about not getting our needs met, we must first begin by being transparent with ourselves that they are.

Use the following worksheet to explore a situation or issue where you feel your needs have not been met.

| Describe a situation where you feel your needs were not met. | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | |
| Describe each of the needs. | | | |
| | | | |
| What should have happened to meet those needs? | | | |
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ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS

- Fear of abandonment.
- Lack of reassurance.
- Inconsistent communication.
- Perceived threats to the relationship.
- Overanalyzing and catastrophizing.
- Dependence on external validation.
- Jealousy and comparisons.
- Expecting the worst.
- Past trauma and relationship history.
- · Mood swings and insecurity.

SAMPLES:

- A partner behaving inconsistently
- When a partner seems distant or distracted
- If a partner forgets important events, such as their birthday or anniversary
- Your partner coming home late
- · A partner not messaging back when anticipated
- A partner failing to notice something new (e.g. a new haircut)

HOW TO REGULATE ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT STYLE

Regulating anxious attachment styles involves managing and reducing the anxiety and insecurity that can arise in relationships. Here are some tips and sample strategies to help you regulate your anxious attachment:

1. Develop Self-Awareness

- Tip: Pay attention to your emotional responses and triggers in relationships.
- Keep a journal to track situations and feelings that trigger your anxiety.

2. Open Communication

- Tip: Share your feelings and needs with your partner.
- When you feel anxious, communicate with your partner about what you're experiencing and what you need from them.

Examples:

"I've been feeling a bit anxious about our recent arguments. Can we talk about it and find ways to work through conflicts together?"

"I've noticed that when you don't respond to my messages promptly, I start to worry. I know it might not be a big deal, but it would mean a lot to me if we could communicate more consistently."

"I often feel the need for reassurance that you care about me. Can we have a conversation about how we can provide that for each other in a way that makes both of us feel secure?"

HOW TO REGULATE ANXIOUS ATTACHMENT STYLE

3. Self-Soothing Techniques

- Tip: Learn to calm yourself during moments of anxiety.
- When anxious, take a few deep breaths and remind yourself that your partner's actions don't define your self-worth.

4. Practice Mindfulness:

- Tip: Stay present in the moment and avoid overthinking.
- Engage in daily mindfulness meditation or deep-breathing exercises.

5. Challenge Negative Thoughts

- Tip: Identify and challenge irrational thoughts that fuel your anxiety.
- Ask yourself if there's concrete evidence to support your fear that your partner is losing interest.

Examples:

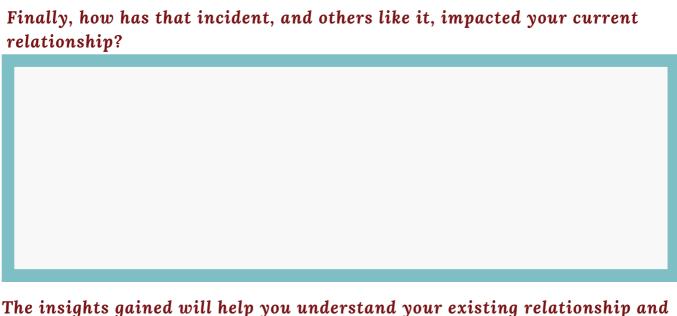
- Negative Thought: "If my partner doesn't text me back quickly, it means they're losing interest."
- Challenge: Ask yourself, "Is there concrete evidence that this thought is true, or am I assuming the worst?"
- Negative Thought: "Our argument means we're breaking up."
- Challenge: Consider, "Is it possible that this disagreement is a normal part of any relationship, and it doesn't have to lead to a breakup?"
- Negative Thought: "They're spending time with friends, so they must not want to be with me."
- Challenge: Try thinking, "Maybe they value their friendships, and it doesn't mean they care any less about our relationship."
- Negative Thought: "I'm not good enough for them."
- Challenge: Share your insecurities with your partner and ask for reassurance, such as, "Can you tell me what you love about our relationship and me?"
- Negative Thought: "They didn't say 'I love you' today; they must be falling out of love."
- Challenge: Remind yourself that people express love in various ways, and not saying it every day doesn't necessarily mean they care any less.

Anxious Attachment Patterns

The following exercise can be used to identify and understand anxious attachment patterns in a relationship, by digging deeper into an uncomfortable experience.

Spend a few minutes sitting comfortably while thinking of a time in this or a previous relationship when you felt bad.

| What was the trigger(s) that made you feel upset or emotional? | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | |
| Next, describe the worst part of the incident. | | | |
| | | | |
| Now, think back to why the incident had such a profound effect on you and describe it below. | | | |
| | | | |



The insights gained will help you understand your existing relationship and unhelpful triggers more clearly.



Tips to Rewire Your Brain to Have a Secure Attachment Style

- >>> Improve your nonverbal communication skills
- >>> Boost your emotional intelligence
- >>> Develop relationships with people who are securely attached
- Resolve any childhood trauma

AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS

- Clinginess or excessive neediness from a partner.
- Expressions of vulnerability and deep emotions.
- Expectations of long-term commitment.
- · Conflict or arguments.
- · Perceived criticism.
- Initiatives for open communication.
- Intimacy-related efforts.
- · High emotional demands.
- Disclosure of past trauma or insecurities.
- Future planning discussions.
- · Expressing jealousy or insecurity.
- Signs of excessive emotional need from a partner.

SAMPLES:

- · A partner wanting to get too close
- A partner wanting to open up emotionally
- Unpredictable situations or feeling out-of-control
- · Having to be dependent on others
- Feeling like the relationship is taking up too much of their time
- · Being criticized by their loved ones
- Feeling like they're going to be judged for being emotional
- Their partner being demanding of their attention

HOW TO REGULATE AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT STYLE

Regulating an avoidant attachment style involves learning to become more comfortable with emotional intimacy and connection. Here are some tips and sample strategies to help regulate avoidant attachment:

1. Open Communication

- Tip: Talk to your partner about your attachment style and your efforts to regulate it.
- Share with your partner how you sometimes need space to process emotions and that it's not a reflection of your feelings for them.

HOW TO REGULATE AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT STYLE

Examples:

"I want you to know that I have a tendency to be emotionally distant at times. It's not a reflection of my feelings for you, but something I'm working on."

"I know you need emotional closeness and connection. I'm trying to be more aware of that and work on being more available for you."

"Let's talk about our boundaries in this relationship. I need some space at times, but I want to ensure that you feel comfortable and secure."

2. Gradual Exposure to Vulnerability

- Tip: Challenge yourself to become more emotionally open over time.
- Share one small, personal detail or feeling with your partner each week to gradually build emotional intimacy

Examples:

Share something minor, like "I had a bad day at work today," to begin the process of opening up gradually.

Engage in conversations about non-emotional subjects, like hobbies or interests, to get comfortable with communication.

Talk about a past experience that is not highly emotional but still provides insight into your life, like "I used to live in another city."

3. Recognize Your Partner's Needs

- Tip: Be attuned to your partner's emotional needs and provide support.
- Ask your partner about their feelings and needs regularly to show that you care and are committed to their emotional well-being.

4. Self-Compassion

- Tip: Be kind and understanding to yourself, especially during setbacks.
- When you experience emotional distancing, tell yourself it's okay, and remind yourself of your intention to improve.

5. Seek Professional Help

- Tip: Consider therapy or counseling with a professional experienced in attachment styles.
- Discuss your attachment style with a therapist and work on strategies to become more comfortable with emotional intimacy.

Performing An Avoidance Stocktake

Avoidant strategies are most problematic when they stop you from being who you want to be or behaving in the way you wish to (Chen, 2019).

Use this worksheet to become more aware of the situations that cause stress and lead to avoidant behavior.

| What emotions are you experiencing when you are most stressed or likely to avoid |
|--|
| a situation? For example, anger, fear, shame, guilt, hurt, or sadness, etc. |
| |
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| |
| What are you looking for or need when you are most stressed or likely to avoid a |
| situation? For example, affection, warmth, love, intimacy, etc. |
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| What is happening when you are most stressed or likely to avoid a situation? For example, decisionmaking, losing autonomy, trying to be understood, etc. |
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DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS

- Fear of abandonment.
- Difficulty trusting their partner.
- Intense mood swings.
- A tendency to be controlling or avoidant.
- Past trauma resurfacing in the relationship.

SAMPLES:

- · Seeing relationships as threatening
- · Having difficulties with opening up to their loved ones
- · Reporting that they don't feel anything or have emotions
- Behaving unpredictably when faced with an emotional situation
- · Responding to emotional situations with angry outbursts
- Experiencing difficulties with trusting others with their feelings
- Deciding not to show outward expressions of emotions
- Pushing for closeness because deep down they want to feel loved and safe with their partners

HOW TO REGULATE DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT STYLE

Overcoming a disorganized or avoidant attachment style in a relationship can be challenging, but it's possible with the right strategies. Here are some tips and sample strategies:

1. Self-Awareness

- Tip: Recognize your disorganized attachment style and its impact on your behavior.
- Reflect on how your past experiences have contributed to your attachment style.

2. Open Communication

- Tip: Talk to your partner about your attachment style, fears, and struggles.
- Share your past experiences with your partner and discuss how they can support you in your healing journey.

Examples:

"I'm feeling really upset right now, and I want to talk to you about it."
"I don't want to blame you for how I'm feeling, but I need to express what's going on inside me."

HOW TO REGULATE DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT STYLE

Examples:

"I'm not sure exactly what triggered this anger, but I want to work through it together."

"I know I have a tendency to push people away when I'm upset, but I don't want to do that with you. I want to learn how to handle this together.

3. Set Healthy Boundaries

- Tip: Establish clear boundaries in your relationship to create a sense of safety.
- Discuss and agree with your partner on what is acceptable and what isn't in your relationship.

Examples:

"Let's agree that when we have conflicts, we'll take a break and come back to discuss things calmly once we've had some time to process."

"I value my alone time. Can we schedule specific moments when I can have that personal space without it causing concerns?"

"I'm willing to share my past trauma with you, but please understand that there might be times when I'm not ready to discuss it. I'll let you know when I am."

"I'm working on becoming more comfortable with physical intimacy. Can we go at a pace that respects my comfort level and boundaries?"

4. Work on Emotional Regulation

- Tip: Learn to manage intense mood swings and emotional reactions.
- Sample Strategy: Practice mindfulness and self-soothing techniques to help you stay calm in stressful situations.

5. Address Past Trauma

- Tip: Consider trauma therapy to work through past experiences that may be contributing to your disorganized attachment style.
- Sample Strategy: Share your trauma history with a therapist and engage in trauma-focused therapy to process and heal.

Recognizing Relationship Burnout

Relationships can be exhausting, especially when one of the partners is dismissive, avoidant, fearful or anxious (Chen, 2019).

Use this worksheet to assess whether a relationship is heading for burnout.

Rate the following behaviors (that may be influenced by the relationship), and provide an example for each one:

| Behavior | Rate (0 – never, 5 – all the time) | Provide an example |
|---|--|--------------------|
| Being overly critical of yourself or the other person | | |
| Obsess over the other person | | |
| Forget to eat properly | | |
| Forget to exercise | | |
| Experience poor sleep | | |
| Feel fearful | | |

Recognizing Relationship Burnout

| Behavior | Rate (0 – never, 5 – all the time) | Provide an example |
|--|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Feel depressed | | |
| Feel anxious | | |
| Feel you can't fully be who you are | | |
| Feel you always have to be on alert | | |

Review the above answers. Do you notice any patterns? Could they be a result of your own or your partner's attachment styles? For example, are you overly needy, distant, or fearful they will leave?

The Imago Dialogue Script

The Imago Dialogue Script is an active exchange between a Sender (the speaking partner) and a Receiver (the listening partner).

It's important to note that the Imago Dialogue is a structured process that consists of three key steps: mirroring, validation, and empathy.

MIRRORING

One partner speaks while the other listens and then mirrors back what they heard. This ensures that both partners truly understand what is being said.

VALIDATION

The listener acknowledges the speaker's feelings and perspective, validating their emotions and experiences.

EMPATHY:

The listener expresses empathy for the speaker's feelings, demonstrating understanding and emotional connection.

Step 1: Send and Mirror Imago Dialogue Script Sample Dialogue

I've been feeling really overwhelmed at work lately. There's just so much to do, and it feels like I can never catch up.

Yes, exactly! I'm drowning in tasks, and it's stressing me out. I don't even have time for a proper lunch break anymore.

I hear you're feeling overwhelmed at work and that there's a lot on your plate. It sounds like you're having a hard time keeping up with everything.

I can see that it's not only impacting your workload but also your overall well-being. It must be really difficult for you to have such a negative impact on your work and health.

The Imago Dialogue Script For Secure Attachment Style

- The partner with a secure attachment style can use the Imago Dialogue to express their feelings and needs openly and honestly.
- They can encourage their partner to share their thoughts and feelings, creating a safe space for open communication.
- The key is to maintain a non-defensive and empathetic attitude, promoting emotional safety and connection within the relationship.

Share a recent situation in which you felt particularly close and secure in our relationship. What made it feel that way?

Reflect on a time when you had a disagreement with me. How did you maintain a sense of security during that disagreement, and how can we continue to do so?

What are your most important emotional needs in our relationship? How can I help fulfill them, and what can we both do to enhance our emotional security?

Sample script to start conversation

Speaker: "I want to express how loved and secure I feel in our relationship. Last night, when we had that deep conversation, I felt so close to you. It made me realize how important our connection is to me."

The Imago Dialogue Script For Anxious Attachment Style

- Partners with an anxious attachment style can use the Imago Dialogue to express their fears and insecurities.
- They should focus on articulating their emotional needs and triggers in a non-blaming and vulnerable way.
- The other partner should actively listen and validate the anxious partner's feelings, providing reassurance and a sense of security.

Can you describe a moment when you felt particularly anxious or insecure in our relationship? What triggered those feelings, and how can I better support you during such times?

Share a past situation when your anxiety impacted our relationship. How can we work together to handle these situations differently in the future?

What actions or behaviors make you feel more secure in our relationship, especially when you're experiencing anxiety? How can we incorporate them into our interactions?

Sample script to start conversation

Speaker: "I've been feeling a bit insecure lately, and I think it's because of my past experiences. When you had to cancel our plans last minute, it triggered some of those feelings."

- Partners with an avoidant attachment style can use the Imago Dialogue to express their need for space and independence.
- They should communicate their need for autonomy in a way that doesn't shut down the conversation but allows for negotiation.
- The other partner should strive to be patient and understanding, creating a balance between intimacy and autonomy.

Reflect on a time when you needed space or autonomy in our relationship. How did you communicate your need, and how did I respond? What could we do differently to balance your need for space with our connection?

Share an experience when you felt overwhelmed by emotional closeness. How can we establish a healthy balance between intimacy and independence in our relationship?

What are some ways I can respect your need for autonomy and space while still maintaining our emotional connection? How can we work together to meet both of our needs?

Sample script to start conversation

Speaker: "There are times when I really need my space and independence. It's nothing personal, and I want to find a way for us to balance it with our closeness."

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Sample script to start conversation

Speaker: "There are times when I really need my space and independence. It's nothing personal, and I want to find a way for us to balance it with our closeness."

For the Partner with a Disorganized Attachment Style:

You can share your experiences and feelings about your early childhood relationships, highlighting how they may have contributed to your disorganized attachment style.

For example: "I want to talk about my experiences growing up and how they've influenced my attachment style. I recall feeling torn between seeking closeness and fearing it."

Discuss the conflicting emotions you experience in the relationship, acknowledging moments of both intense connection and the desire to withdraw.

For example: "There are times when I feel deeply connected to you, but there are also moments when I feel overwhelmed and distant. I want to explore these conflicting emotions."

Share specific triggers or situations that activate your disorganized attachment patterns and how they make you feel.

For example: "I've noticed that when we argue, I can become emotionally disoriented, and it brings up a lot of fear and anxiety."

For the Partner Supporting the Disorganized Attachment Style:

Create a safe and non-judgmental space for your partner to express their experiences and feelings.

For example: "I'm here to listen and understand what you've been through and how it impacts our relationship. Your feelings are valid."

Show empathy for your partner's inner conflict and emotional struggles.

For example: "I can see how difficult it must be to navigate these conflicting emotions, and I'm here to support you."

Reassure your partner of your commitment to working through these challenges together.

For example: "I want you to know that I'm committed to understanding and supporting you as we navigate these attachment issues."

For the Partner with a Disorganized Attachment Style

Prompts and scripts you to start conversation:

I'd like to delve into our early experiences and how they might have contributed to our attachment styles. Can you share some of your early memories or experiences that you think shaped your attachment style?

Speaker: "When I think about my childhood, I remember feeling torn between wanting to be close to my caregivers and fearing them. There were moments of warmth and safety, but also moments of unpredictability and instability."

Let's talk about the conflicting emotions you experience in our relationship. What are the moments when you feel intensely connected, and when do you find yourself wanting to withdraw or distance yourself

Speaker: "I notice that there are times when I feel a deep connection with you, like when we have meaningful conversations. But there are also moments when I become overwhelmed by my fear, and I find myself pulling away, not knowing how to handle it."

Can you pinpoint some specific triggers or situations in our relationship that tend to activate your disorganized attachment patterns? How do these triggers make you feel?

Speaker: "I've noticed that when we have arguments, especially if they become intense, it activates a lot of my fear and anxiety. I feel disoriented and unsure of how to react."

What emotional needs do you have in our relationship, given your attachment style? How can I support you better in meeting these needs?

Speaker: "I need your support and understanding, especially when I'm feeling triggered. At the same time, I need some space to regain my composure when things become overwhelming. Can we work on a way to balance these needs?"

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Speak to a Marriage Counselor at The Marriage Restoration Project







Book a time to talk

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