



**Don't Just Do-  
Delight**

WHAT HORSES CAN TEACH US ABOUT  
SECURE ATTACHMENT

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***A Little  
About Me***

Alison Moon is a practicing Licensed Clinical Social Worker and owner and co-founder of Touchstone Therapy, LLC. Touchstone Therapy's mission since its establishment in 2021, has been to provide high quality holistic mental health care to southwestern Indiana by providing access to the most effective treatments available. Alison grew up in southern California and moved to Vincennes, Indiana in 2002, making her starkly aware of the contrast in service quality and availability between urban and rural areas of the country. She served in the Indiana National Guard prior to receiving a Bachelor Degree in Psychology in 2011 from Indiana State University and a Master Degree in Social Work in 2017. Alison worked in substance abuse treatment and school social work before establishing Touchstone in 2021. In 2023, Alison turned her love of horses into part of her mission to bring healing to her community by creating an Equine Therapy program within Touchstone Therapy. She and her horse Kay, along with lots of other equine helpers along the way, have helped countless warriors, veterans, children, and families build stronger relationships and communication through the gentle feedback and guidance horses have to offer. She believes that horses have the power to remind each of us of the very basics of how to calm ourselves, access our vulnerability, and exist in relationships to grow past the wounds which have challenged these skills. In 2024, she founded The Touchstone Foundation, a nonprofit organization created to make equine-assisted psychotherapy and learning and rural mental health care more accessible. Alison looks forward to continuing to grow Touchstone's reach and impact....



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***Meet Kay***



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**Basis of Secure Attachments**

- "Attachment, at it's core, is connection to the one who carries us."
- Attachment begins physically and emotionally in utero
- Movement facilitates development of the brain



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**Connection is the Combination of Attachment and Detachment**

- Attachment is closeness and togetherness
  - Infants require attachment to feel a felt sense of safety
  - Intimacy, vulnerability, and quality time together in relationship
- Detachment allows space for individuality
  - Toddlers require detachment to gain confidence in autonomy
  - Adolescence is a time spent learning to safely get comfortable in detachment



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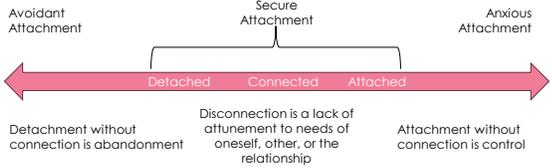
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**Connection = Secure Attachment**

Connection is the state of a relationship which safely allows both parties to move between attachment and detachment. You are **attuned** to one another's needs and able to take the best interest of the other into consideration while balancing them with your own.



Avoidant Attachment      Secure Attachment      Anxious Attachment

← Detached      Connected      Attached →

Detachment without connection is abandonment      Disconnection is a lack of attunement to needs of oneself, other, or the relationship      Attachment without connection is control

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***Attachment without Connection***

"Anxious Attachment"	Possessiveness
Seeking physical intimacy without emotional intimacy	Supervision over trust
Differences perceived as rejections	Fight or Fawn response



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***Detachment without Connection***

- "Avoidant Attachment"
- Avoidance of commitment
- Needing freedom/space- flight or freeze response
- Limited experience giving or receiving love
- Lack of understanding/awareness of emotions (own and others)

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***Attunement***

- The process of harmonizing or aligning your inner state (emotions, energy, consciousness) with another person
- Attention unspoken communication- tone, body language, intention
- Attention to **energy** requires attunement to self, which is learned through experiences of needs being met (secure attachment)- intuition, electromagnetic fields,

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### ***Attunement and Connection***

- Connection to self and others' is a necessary precursor to attunement
- Simply noticing another's emotional state is not the same as attunement
- Attunement of a parent to child's needs and emotional state is how they learn to attune to and identify their own and others'
- Barriers to attunement
  - Mental health
  - Drug use
  - Insecure attachment from childhood or limited attunement in childhood from caregiver



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### ***Evolution of Prey Animal Attunement***

- Internal Energy- heart rate, blood pressure, hormones all affect EM Fields
- External pressure- verbalization, body position and action, facial expressions all affect behavior
- Evaluate safety by congruence between internal and external energy



High external pressure + high internal pressure =  
Sensed Danger



Low external pressure + high internal pressure =  
Predator

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### ***Horses' Role in Teaching Attunement***

- Western culture primarily relies on use of external energy and can even shame use of internal energy
- Horses do not rely on verbal communication as it may attract predators, so they evolve to attune closely to minor shifts in both internal and external cues from herd members and environment
- Regardless of external pressure, if horses attune to whether you **delight** in requests based upon your internal pressure



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***Delight Builds Secure Connection***

- Felt sense of confidence and joy those attuned to you can sense
- Being *delighted* in is assurance that I am inherently good
- *Delighting* in a request for a need exudes its rightness and your deservedness
- Based on life experiences, it is normal to delight more in attachment or detachment
- Delighting in someone's needs is different than tolerating them
- We do not have to delight in an experience to delight in its purpose

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***The Importance of the Reunion***

- Reunion is the return to attachment after a period of detachment
- Delight in the return to attachment builds trust that a partner or caregiver will continue to return
- We are not programmed biologically to believe that others do things they do not delight in



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***The Horse's Role in Healing***



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### *How We “Use” Horses*

- Different modalities use different analogies- tool, mirror, psychoanalysis of choices, etc.
- Natural Lifemanship engages the horse as another sentient being with whom each participant in the session has an independent relationship
- We ask the horse for consent at each step- engagement in the session, participation in each activity
- Therapist is present for client, Equine Professional is present for the Horse

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### *Applications of Equine Therapy*

Mounted work can fill developmental gaps in attachment by fulfilling needs for certain kinds of movement or the need to be carried	Interaction between client and horse provides feedback to direct treatment • Biofeedback • Communication patterns	Builds capacity for connected relationships through honest and immediate feedback
Increasing window of tolerance for attachment or detachment	Increases awareness of one's own felt state, therefore increasing awareness of needs and how to meet them	Increase awareness of others' perceptions of one's communication and its effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes

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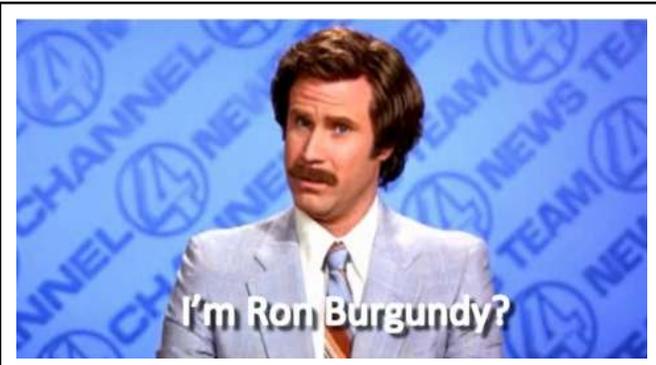
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I'm Ron Burgundy?

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***Therapists are Always Engaging in Attachment Work***

- The therapeutic relationship is the most impactful element of the process
  - You are delighting in the reunion at the beginning of sessions
  - You are delighting in their joy and the expression of their pain as a source of growth
- Potential Additions to Sessions
  - Show the client some way you remembered them between sessions
  - Work within your niche- Clients can sense when you are NOT delighted
  - Reconnect with intuition- attunement to self, others, and environment

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***Conceptualizing Disorders Differently***

<p><b>Separation Anxiety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for incongruence in energy- can the caregiver delight in the detachment?</li> <li>• Look for a lack of delight in the reunion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Depression</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Herd animals are programmed to derive joy from connection</li> <li>• Persistent disconnection can occur in attachment or detachment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Generalized Anxiety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incongruence in caregiver's internal and external energy- words don't match behavior/energy</li> <li>• Difficulty differentiating between felt sense of intuition and worries</li> </ul>	




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### ***Supporting Parents and Caregivers***

- Current culture of parenting and judgement around it creates insecure caregivers and interfering with delight
- Over-emphasis on doing what looks "right" thing as opposed to attuning to the need
- Incongruent energy will increase child's anxiety (High internal + Low external = Predatory)



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### ***Areas of Awareness in Caregiving***

- Societal Norms
  - Daycare
  - "Cry it out" is disconnection and leads to dissociation, not learned regulation
  - Expectations for regulation in public spaces are not realistic
- Coparenting
  - Do I delight in my child going to their other parent's home or am I uncomfortable in the detachment?
  - Do I delight in your relationship with your other parent or am I perceiving it as a rejection?
- Discipline
  - Do I delight in your opportunity to learn or do I feel guilty for making you uncomfortable?
  - Do I delight in your independent thinking or do I feel ashamed when they make a mistake?
- Behavior
  - Do I delight in your willingness to take risks or am I afraid of your injury being my fault?
  - Do I delight in your confidence to become more autonomous or do I perceive a rejection?

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### ***Practical Work with for Caregivers***

- Children's outcomes improve when caregiver goes to therapy, even when not enrolled themselves.
- Set the expectation for family involvement or separate individual therapy for parents early
- Help parents find requests which are within their window of tolerance to allow family unit to experience delight



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***Practical Work for Relational Issues***

- Identify behaviors/patterns reinforcing lack of connection
- Identify current sources of delight in relationships and ways to build upon them
- Do both partners delight in the idea of making the relationship work, even if they do not delight in the challenges associated with it?
- Sex is a common source of incongruence in energy due to societal expectations and norms.
- Ethical Question- How much can you feign delight for a client's unhealthy/unsafe situation?

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***Other Helpful Applications***

- Grief- finding connection in detachment
- Connection to self and reengagement of intuition
  - Intuition without trust in self feels like anxiety
  - You can only understand others to the extend you understand self
  - Increases self-esteem- the ability to delight in the self
- Helping authority figures access delight in challenging situations



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***Questions?***



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