



Why He Goes Away When You Need Him the Most

By Carista Lumiare and Lion Goodman

Why do men disappear when you really need to connect with them? This question has plagued women throughout history.

One of our clients, Maria, said it this way: “We love each other and he’s a good man, but whenever I tell him what I’m feeling, he can’t handle it. His eyes go distant like he has traveled to another planet. Sometimes he ends the discussion abruptly. He tells me he needs a break, or has to do something and he walks away, which makes me feel small and unimportant. It’s so frustrating! How can I get him to pay attention to me and actually listen? I just want to be heard!”

This behavior is baffling, yet there’s a simple explanation. This man (and some men and women like him) falls into a category called the “Insecure-Avoidant LoveStyle.”

LoveStyle describes the way you form and maintain attachments to the people you love. It began early in your childhood, when you needed love and care from your mother (or your primary caregiver). How she responded to your needs (or didn’t respond) began a pattern that continues to operate today in your adult relationships including your partner, family members and business colleagues. You have a particular LoveStyle and so does everyone else. There are five LoveStyles and understanding your attachment dynamics, will help gain new options for dealing with conflicts that happen between you.

Where Does His “Disappearing Act” Come From?

It’s likely that when your mate was a young boy, he learned that he couldn’t rely on anyone to meet his needs. His mother (or his primary caregiver), was not there for him consistently when he had needs. It’s possible that his parents didn’t know how to care for him properly, or they were busy, or preoccupied with their family or work duties. Somewhere along the way, he learned that the only way to survive was to suppress his own needs and not depend on anyone.

He probably became self-reliant, which is considered a very good quality in our society. But self-reliance doesn’t work well in intimate relationships. He may be a great provider, but he may not have access to his own emotions. He may not even recognize his own needs because he had to suppress them as a child, knowing they wouldn’t get fulfilled. He’s probably aware of his physical needs, such as love, sex, food and money, but at a deeper level, his emotional requirements are likely a mystery to him.

The big challenge for you is to understand that your “avoidant” man doesn’t have this basic awareness of emotions or needs. If he doesn’t know what he needs, how can you expect him to recognize your needs? When you communicate your needs and feelings in the “Venusian” way that other women easily understand, he may not have a clue about what you’re talking about. It’s not personal — it’s a byproduct of how he was raised. It’s your job to learn and understand the dynamics between you and learn ways to communicate through his particular LoveStyle and learn practical ways to gently re-connect when he disconnects.

The Qualities Of Insecure-Avoidant Men

Insecure-Avoidant LoveStyle men are self-oriented and appear to be self-absorbed. Avoidant types are not wired for emotional sensitivity — either in themselves or in other people. It may feel as if he's ignoring you and your needs, but this is all happening unconsciously. He doesn't know how to respond to your signal for help.

At the extreme, Avoidant types can be narcissistic, not caring whether they're having a negative impact on others. If you're in a relationship with an extreme type, you have more learning to do. We're focused here on well-meaning men who care and provide well, but are missing a few clues when it comes to relationships.

Caring for your needs, especially your emotional needs, is like a foreign language he doesn't speak, but can learn with practice. If you both dedicate yourselves to learning, you can heal the wounds of the past and re-program your old neural pathways to respond differently. This will bring both security and passion back into your relationship.

Make Your Relationship Work By Recognizing His Deeper Needs

Avoidant types have needs, too, even if they're not aware of them. They don't know it's possible to get their needs met by another person. Avoidant types are so focused on managing their own issues, they think everyone is busy taking care of themselves, too. They're frequently confused when someone comes to them with needs to be cared for.

To inspire him to care about your needs, care about his needs as equally important. Most Avoidant types are afraid of being flooded by the fire hose of your unmet needs. He's unsure how to help you, so the entire process of opening up to vulnerable feelings is overwhelming and he'd prefer to avoid it altogether. Make it safe for him to connect by not overloading him.

Here's how to create a safe, workable conversation with an Avoidant type:

1. Offer a time limit on your sharing, especially if it's emotional. He needs time to digest emotional information and to understand what you're asking of him. Make it a time period he can handle. For example, when you want to connect with him, say something like this: "Honey, I need to share something with you, and it will take about ten minutes. Is this a good time to get ten minutes of your full attention? Or would later be better?" (If he says "later", ask: "What time would work for you?")
2. Start slowly and take an incremental approach. Give him a positive experience of connecting and caring. Show him that his needs for space and alone time are valued and important — equal to your own. Over time, he will grow in his capacity to care.
3. When it's time to share your needs with him, do your best to do so in as calm and loving a way as possible. If he looks like he's flooding (eyes rolling around, glazing over, or looking elsewhere) back off, take a few breaths, and ask him how he's doing. He needs to hear that you care about his being overwhelmed or flooded.
4. If you need more than your agreed upon time commitment, ask for his agreement to extend no more than ten minutes. If you're able to keep to your original time, you're more likely to get more time later!

5. After expressing your feelings and needs, ask him if there's anything he would like to share, then listen carefully and compassionately, letting him know you care. As much as possible, avoid interrupting him or correcting him. He needs to know that he can express himself safely.

All men, as far as we know, want to be acknowledged when they do something right and they're more likely to repeat something if they've been successful. Be sure to praise him later for his ability to listen and care for your needs. **Men really want to make their women happy, even when they don't have a clue how to do so.**