Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy
Transforming Relationships from Distress to Secure Bonds

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UNC Chapel Hill School of Social Work
Clinical Institute
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based on the work of Dr. Sue Johnson
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AGENDA
December 6, 2018
9:00 Romantic love as an attachment process - Laws of human bonding that define relationship distress and repair.
10:30 - 10:45 - Break
10:45 - Exercise
11:00 Key stages of change in Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFT).
12:00 – 1:00 – Lunch
1:00 Following and Reprocessing Emotion - Video and exercises
2:30 - 2:45 Break
2:45 – 4:30 EFT Interventions and The EFT Tango (a metaphor for the flow of EFT interventions)

December 7, 2018
9:00 Check-in
9:15 LIVE Session if available or further exploration of EFT interventions
10:30 - 10:45 - Break
10:45 Stage 1 of EFT Change Event: De-escalation
12:00 – 1:00 – Lunch
1:00 Stage 2 of EFT – Reshaping Attachment Bonds – 2nd and 3rd Change Events -video and role play.
2:30 - 2:45 Break
2:45 Optional: Forgiveness and Rebuilding Trust in the face of attachment injuries and betrayals in Stage 2 of EFT
3:45 Integration, Further Resources, Questions, and Wrap-up by 4:30
Key Objectives

Following this workshop, participants will

- Describe romantic love as an attachment process, outlining the laws of human love and bonding that define relationship distress and repair.
- Identify the key stages of change in Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT).
- Utilize EFT interventions – for tracking patterns of interaction and reprocessing emotion experience to shape bonding events.
- Recognize the value of the first change event of de-escalation as the pre-requisite for further change events.

Romantic Love as an Attachment Process
Emotionally Focused Therapy and Dr. Sue Johnson

Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy first formulated and tested in the early 1980's (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985) – expanded by Johnson to include a clear and empirically validated theory of adult love relationships: Attachment Theory. (1996; 2004)

Basics of the EFT Model: integration of experiential, systemic, attachment theory

Attachment

Experiential
  Rogers

Systemic
  Bowlby
  Minuchin
Is couple therapy like landing a helicopter in a tornado?

Do you know where you are going?
Do you know where you are? What your role is?
Do you have a map to follow to do couple therapy?

“I have a GPS device for each of you. The next time you drift apart, these will help you find your way back to each other.”
A New Era of Couple Therapy

- Power of relationships on physical & mental health and resilience. (e.g. Heart disease, immune functioning, depression). Lovers are regulators of each other’s physiology, emotional functioning.
- Nature of relationships (positive/negative – the problem in CT - John Gottman, Ted Huston)
- Powerful proven interventions such as EFT – Empirical validation.

“Love Sense: From Infant to Adult”

In 2016 Drs. Sue Johnson and Edward Tronick collaborated to make a YouTube video about the bonds of love from infancy to adulthood.

As Bowlby wrote, our needs for dependency extend “from the cradle to the grave.” Bowlby suggests that there is no such thing as over-dependency or true independence; there is only effective or ineffective dependence.

Shows how the same emotional dance or drama plays out between parent and infant as between adult lovers. The steps in the dance are illustrated as:

1. Reach (invite connection)
2. (No response?) – Protest and Push
3. Turn away (and shut down to protect self)
4. Melt down
5. Reconnect (in a secure relationship)
Proximity to an Attachment Figure
“tranquilizes the nervous system”
Schore, 1994

Safe Haven, Secure Base

The attachment paradox:
The more connected, the
more autonomous
We have cracked the code for love

A.R.E. you there?
Accessible?
Responsive?
Engaged?

Attachment Theory: A Map to the Landscape of Love

The basic laws of human love and bonding illustrate how attachment can serve as a reliable and active guide to keep an EFT clinician “on track”

Effective dependency
Attachment Strategies
(Emotion Regulation Strategies)

Reach and Receive

Push Hyperactivate

Turn Away Deactivate

Tracking the outside and inside experiences

Divide into four groups:

**Group 1 Her outside experience:** Identify the woman’s perceived attachment threat. Track her outside experience – linking perceived threat to her action tendency and displayed emotion. (She sees him do______, and she reacts by ________.)

**Group 2: His outside experience:** Identify the man’s perceived attachment threat. Track his outside experience – linking perceived threat to his action tendency and displayed emotion. (He sees her do______, and he reacts by ________.)

**Group 3: Her inside experience:** Identify the woman’s perceived attachment threat. Track her inside experience – how partner’s action was perceived as dangerous – her bodily arousal and meaning she made. How might you assemble this to access an underlying attachment fear of abandonment or rejection?

**Group 4: His inside experience:** Identify the man’s perceived danger cue. Track his inside experience - how partner’s action was perceived as dangerous – his bodily arousal and meaning he made. How might you assemble this to access an underlying attachment fear of abandonment or rejection?
A pursue/withdraw feedback loop

**ACTION (CUE):** The more Gary turns away or defends himself or counter-attacks

**EMOTIONAL RESPONSE:** The more Brooke criticizes Gary in a shrill voice with anger and despair.

The more Gary senses attachment panic, his body prepares for fight / flight and he interprets her shrill reaction to mean, “She’s not happy with me. I am a disappointment to her.”

**ACTION:** The more Brooke criticizes Gary in a shrill voice with anger and despair.

The more Brooke senses attachment panic, her body prepares to fight and the meaning she makes of Gary’s behavior is: “He doesn’t care. I’m not important to him.”

**EMOTIONAL RESPONSE:** The more Gary turns away or defends himself or counter-attacks

The more Brooke senses attachment panic, her body prepares to fight and the meaning she makes of Gary’s behavior is: “He doesn’t care. I’m not important to him.”
What are the attachment threats between partners?
pursuer’s worst fear - abandonment
withdrawer’s worst fear - rejection
are often perceived / expressed as:

- ____________________
- ____________________
- ____________________
- ____________________
- ____________________
- ____________________
- ____________________

[Views of self and other]

The problem in couple distress

“I get mean because I love you…”
Three Negative Cycles

- Kyle and Tara - Pursue / Withdraw
- Sophie and Ella - Attack / Attach sequences
- Phil and Julie - Withdraw / Withdraw

Key Stages of Change: The EFT Path to Repair

**Stages of Change**

**Stage 1:** De-escalating the Negative Interactive Cycle

**Stage 2:** Restructuring the Bond

**Stage 3:** Consolidating the Positive Cycle

3 Change events
Stage 1

Savour, linger, breathe
Every layer of the dance
Chaos becomes calm.

Stage 2

Deepen, taste, disclose
Raw spots that our dance evokes
Healed by your embrace
Stage 3

THEN we danced in fear

NOW to songs of needing you

And finding you near

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Empirically Validated Treatment meets APA’s “Gold Standard”

Research studies

✓ 22 Outcome Studies - rigorously conducted trials
✓ Follow up - lasting change, even improvement past therapy
✓ Diverse populations
✓ 9 Process of Change Studies — specific interventions; specific client processes

✓ specific model, with specific interventions and grounded in theoretical principles
✓ accessible – readily learned and transportable – to clinicians across diverse community settings
EFT Research Expanding

- Neuroscience supports the science of adult love and how lovers regulate each other’s physiology.
- Coan: When we are threatened, a feeling of connection to a person with whom we are securely attached is our *most efficient* way of regulating distress. 
  - Social emotion regulation.
- Recent study of EFT effects on attachment security with an fMRI component shows EFT changes attachment security and the way contact with one’s partner mediates the effect of threat on the brain (safe haven, secure base).
- Outcomes extend beyond relationship satisfaction 
  - shows that EFT changes attachment security and the way contact with a partner mediates the effect of threat on the brain

Reprocessing Emotion:
EFT Theory of Change

Emotion is the target and agent of change

“Research tells us that when therapists help clients deepen emotion, clients attain better outcomes in therapy. If we can become comfortable with the power of emotion, it becomes the therapist’s greatest ally, rather than a disruptive force to be contained.”
The Process of Emotion

The first core feature of emotion has to do with *when* it occurs. (What triggers it?) The second core feature of emotion is that it is a multi-faceted process - a cascade of rapidly unfolding elements.

- Gross (2014). *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*

perception > sensation > meaning making > action

What is the cue?
What does your body do?
What does it say to you?
What do you do?

Now own what's true

adapted from Bob Goettle, Seattle

The Feedback loop

The more…

The more…

…and underneath…

…and underneath…

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EFT Interventions

A tested set of interventions based on the attachment view of love and bonding that successfully lead to change / deepening connection

The Power of Words

EFT Interventions

to facilitate factors central to the success of EFT:

Task Alliance
Emotional Depth
Affiliative Interactions
EFT is an Experiential Approach

All knowledge is experience. Everything else is just information.

- Einstein

Change occurs in therapy though a “Corrective emotional experience”.

- Alexander and French

Empathic responsiveness is the essence of Emotionally Focused Therapy - Empathic Reflection is the most basic EFT intervention

- Sue Johnson

EFT Interventions

EXPERIENTIAL To create alliance and access, expand, reprocess emotional experience

1. Empathic Reflection - essence of EFT - co-regulates
2. Validation of client realities, emotional responses
3. Evocative responding - process enquiries & replays
4. Heighten, expand awareness - repeat, re-enact, refocus, use imagery RISSSC
5. Empathic conjectures, inferences in attachment frame

SYSTEMIC To track patterns & shape attachment security

6. Track and reflect processes, making positions and patterns explicit. (hyper-activating or de-activating / pushing or turning away)
7. Reframe the experience in attachment context.
8. Shape interactions (Enactments or clear disclosures to therapist).
R. I. S. S. S. C. - core nonverbal practices of an EFT therapist to engage in present moment process

R: **REPEAT** poignant emotion-laden words to deepen experience.
I: **IMAGES** evoke emotions more than abstract labels.
S: **SIMPLE**, words, succinct responses engage emotional experience.
S: **SLOW** pacing deepens client's emotional experiencing.
S: **SOFT**, low, soothing tone of voice creates safety and encourages.
C: **CLIENT’S** words and phrases - in a supportive and validating manner

Assembling & Deepening Emotion
The Flow of EFT Interventions - Five Moves of the EFT Tango

1) Reflect Present Process – within and between (interaction/dance steps/pattern, elements of emotion)
2) Assemble affect, deepen new emotions (order and deepen)
3) Set up Coherent Enactments (disclose distilled message to partner)
4) Process Enactment ("How did it feel to tell her?" "How does it feel to hear it?")
5) Integrate, Reflect process, Validate competence, Celebrate

- STAY - Slow, Simple, Soft, Specific, Vivid, Explicit - in the NOW
- Consider which interventions you can use in each move.
Key questions an EFT therapist asks:

- Am I doing the 5 basic moves?
- Am I reflecting enough?
- Do I stay with emotion long enough?

Escalated Couple

1. Be curious, retain emotional balance (Stay with process / not content especially if I get attacked).
2. Focus on triggers, to attune to the primal panic of separation distress in each one’s reactivity, including to attachment injury.
3. Reflect process
4. Validate surface emotions – Validate attachment meanings – only SLOWLY move into vulnerability.
5. Stop – take control - abuse – “I cannot allow” – refer to their goals for relationship repair.
6. Catch bullets - Use attachment reframes
7. Confront with process reflections.
8. Add attachment meanings.
9. Outline pain – show compassion - to evoke compassion in other partner.
Change Events in EFT

Change Event 1: Clarifying the Cycle - De-escalation

Reshaping the Bond -
Change Event 2: Withdrawer Re-engagement
and
Change Event 3: Blamer Softening

De-escalation –
the First Change Event

• The problem is reframed as the cycle triggered by underlying attachment fears and unmet needs. Each partner’s primary attachment fears are linked to the moves (action tendencies) in the cycle.
• Partners have a felt sense of how they unwittingly trigger and are triggered by each other’s moves.
• Begin to see other is a new way:
  • Withdrawers see partner as making a desperate response to his/her position of hiding — trying more to get a response than to destroy him/her.
  • Pursuers see partner as more fearful than indifferent or uncaring — as hiding to protect him/herself from the enormity of his/her actions.
Stage 2 Change Events
Restructuring the Bond

In the Restructuring the Bond there are two key change events: **Withdrawer Re-engagement** and **Blamer Softening**.

**Withdrawer Re-engagement**

the second Change Event

A previously distant, inhibited, defended, stonewalling partner emerges and engages in session with their emotions and attachment needs, and asks for what they need to remain engaged.

In processing attachment-related affect and needs with partner, a withdrawer is likely to access:

- fears of rejection / failure.
- exhaustion at placating and hiding and sense of entitlement to be in the relationship.
- a need for acceptance.
Withdrawer Re-engagement
In attachment terms…

- The withdrawer is now accessible and able to stay emotionally engaged with self and other.
- He/she can coherently express his/her hurts, fears, models of self and other cued by these emotions.
- She/he can reach for - ask for the response s/he needs from his/her partner and begin to actively shape the relationship.

Blamer Softening
the third Change Event

A previously hostile, critical spouse accesses “softer” emotions and risks reaching out to his/her partner who now accessible and responsive. In this vulnerable state, the previously hostile partner asks for what s/he needs to feel safe and secure.

A new form of emotional engagement is possible. - Both partners are attuned, engaged and responsive.

Bonding events of reciprocal confiding, connection, and comforting occur, redefining the relationship as a safe haven and a secure base.
Stage Three: Consolidation

Partners find new solutions to pragmatic issues: Integrating the new cycle with old problems, they can safely solve problems together - no longer a fight about attachment.

Partners are helped to consolidate new, more responsive positions and cycles, and to enact new stories of problems and repair. (Create a "resiliency story.")

Overwhelmed with Steps and Stages?

With a bounce in her step Emily from Stepping into EFT remembers Dr. Johnson saying something about the steps of EFT being less like rigid rungs on a ladder, and more like steps in a tango, where you keep adding one more element and repeat, repeat, repeat. …

Humming a little tune, she echoed the words from the retired colonel in The Scent of Woman. "There’re no mistake in the tango Emily. That’s what makes the EFT tango so great. If you get all tangled up, you just tango on.”
Thank you for exploring Emotionaly Focused Therapy
based on the work of Dr. Sue Johnson
www.drsuejohnson • www.iceeft.com

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hidden link for you:

Check out recent interview: "Deepening your connection: The basics of emotionally focused couples therapy" — with Dr. Sue Johnson with Signe Simon and Simone Humphrey at:
https://www.lovelink.co/podcast/ # 14

Chapters made available to you:


NEW! Online Program

Discover how the Hold Me Tight® online program can teach you how to stop conflicts and bring your partner close in a lasting relationship.

Purchase at: carolinaeft.com
FEEL...
Closer to your partner,
Confident about your relationship
Clear on how to turn conflict into connection

the Revolutionary Relationship Enhancement Program
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Hold Me Tight®
CONVERSATIONS for CONNECTION
by Dr. Sue Johnson

- Based on 30 years of positive research results on relationship repair and hundreds of studies on love and adult bonding.
- Built on the bestselling book Hold Me Tight and the hugely successful Hold Me Tight® workshops attended by thousands of couples around the world.

This program is easy and fun, and personally crafted with quizzes, reminders, cartoons and clips of real couples as they fall in love again & again & again.

You can do this! And Dr. Sue will show you how!

Dr. Sue Johnson is a visionary leader in the field of relationships and often called “the best couple therapist in the world.”

www.carolinaeft.com
Many therapists are in a quandary as to which EFT training materials to purchase. The following is an attempt to show the variety of options available. Choose which is best for you at that time based on your level of EFT experience and the area of EFT you want to focus on developing first. Most training videos are available as digital downloads or as physical DVDs.

ICEEFT also offers lists of EFT Publications, including EFT Books and non-English publications. All lists contain links to publisher websites to purchase.

You are certain to benefit from any of the valuable training materials available from ICEEFT. Please visit www.iceeft.com for more information.

EFT BOOKS

There are a variety of books about EFT available, such as:

- NEW! Attachment Theory in Practice — Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) with Individuals, Couples and Families by Sue Johnson
- The Practice of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy: Creating Connection, 2nd Ed., by Sue Johnson
- The Emotionally Focused Casebook: New Directions in Treating Couples, edited by James Furrow, Sue Johnson & Brent Bradley
- Becoming an Emotionally Focused Therapist: The Workbook by Sue Johnson, Brent Bradley, James Furrow, Alison Lee, Gail Palmer, Doug Tilley & Scott Woolley
- Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy with Trauma Survivors: Strengthening Attachment Bonds by Sue Johnson
- Hold Me Tight by Sue Johnson
- Love Sense by Sue Johnson
- Created for Connection by Sue Johnson with Kenneth Sanderfer
- Attachment Processes in Couple and Family Therapy, edited by Sue Johnson & Valerie Whiffen
- An Emotionally Focused Workbook for Couples by Veronica Kallos-Lilly & Jennifer Fitzgerald
- Stepping Into Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy: Key ingredients of change by Lorrie Brubacher

Many EFT books have been translated into a variety of languages. For a complete list, to order and for other information, please visit www.iceeft.com.
EFT VIDEOS
— DVDs & Digital Downloads

- On Target Couple Interventions in the Age of Attachment (with Dr. Sue Johnson)
- Training DVD #1: Healing Broken Bonds (with Dr. Sue Johnson)
- Training DVD #4: Interventions in EFT (with Dr. Sue Johnson)
- Training DVD #5: Re-engaging Withdrawers (with Dr. Sue Johnson)
- EFT: Building Bonding Conversations to Shape Attachment — An Externship in EFT (with Drs. Sue Johnson & Scott Woolley; 24 hour, 8 disc set)
- Shaping Secure Connection: Stages One and Two of EFT (with Drs. Sue Johnson & Marlene Best)
- Emotionally Focused Therapy in Action (with Dr. Sue Johnson)
- Emotionally Focused Therapy with Same Sex Couples (with Dr. Sue Johnson)
- Working Successfully with Same Sex Couples: The Path to Secure Connection (with Dr. Sue Johnson)

- Caught in the Struggle: Emotional Dysregulation in the EFT Therapist (various EFT Therapists & Supervisors, LACEFT)
- Attachment Cradle to Grave (with Drs. Sue Johnson & Dan Hughes)
- Hold Me Tight®: Conversations for Connection (with Dr. Sue Johnson)
- Finding the Connection (with Dr. Scott Woolley & Yolanda von Hockauf)
- In EFT: Promoting Key Change Events in EFT (with Drs. Leanne Campbell & David Fairweather)
- Risking, Reaching and Responding: Transforming Relationships in Stage Two of EFT (with Dr. Sue Johnson & Gail Palmer)
- Facing the Dragon Together: EFT with Traumatized Couples (with Dr. Sue Johnson)
- EFT Stage 1 — Chinese (with Dr. Ting Liu)
Three Couple Cases - Three Negative Cycles

The attachment view that all forms of clinging, protesting, blaming and turning away are normal, universal, survival responses when a significant other is unavailable and emotionally nonresponsive brings clarity and non-judgment to the negative cycles between partners.

Kyle and Tara: Pursue / Withdraw
(A cycle that would be called “Protest Polka” in Hold me tight (Johnson, 2008)

Much of the time Tara is exasperated with Kyle’s apparent nonchalance, and seeming unwillingness to move “even an inch to show he cares.” Except for the constant shaking of his left foot crossed over his right, Kyle does look rather motionless and blank. Every now and then he turns and gently protests that Tara is being far too hard on him or expects more than anyone could accomplish, but mostly he shrugs his shoulders, and sighs, “What can you do?”

This routinely triggers either an outpouring of criticism from Tara or silent sobs where she buries her face in her hands, her shiny dark hair falling in layers, revealing nothing but her whimpers. Tara’s complaints range from despair over Kyle’s lack of willingness to help with household chores to being marginally involved with their 3 children, 2 pre-teens and one 13 year old son, to “never taking time to talk with me or even notice me!” Tara is a publicist for the one of the city’s largest arts organizations while Kyle runs his own computer business with a home office, and tends immaculately manicured gardens on their acreage just outside the city.

A clear pattern of interaction emerges from the first session: The louder and more dramatic efforts Tara makes to get Kyle’s attention and response, the more stoic, nonchalant and disengaged he becomes. The quieter, more distant and utterly nonresponsive Kyle becomes, the louder, more frantic and exasperated Tara gets until Kyle finally throws up his hands, sighing in a tone of exclamation, “How can anyone be expected to measure up here!”

There is a very tattered, attachment bond between Kyle and Tara. Powerful attachment panic is driving the escalating behavioral pattern: Beneath Tara’s desperate anger at failing to get an engaged response from Kyle, is a panic of abandonment. Beneath Kyle’s surface nonchalance and dismissal is his panic at Tammy’s rejection and seeming determination to get him to change as well as his pain at hearing how many ways he has disappointed her.
Sophie and Ella: Attack/Attack Sequences (A cycle that would be called “Find the Bad Guy” in Hold me tight (Johnson, 2008)

Sophie and Ella, a same sex couple, both academics, begin their first therapy session in a highly escalated state. “The problem is her family”, shrieks Sophie, “everyone is more important than me!” “The problem is her impossible, unending, ridiculous demands,” sighs Ella, I just can’t do it anymore. I am getting ill from the stress – nothing is ever enough for her!” Before long Ella too is raising her voice!

Clearly, this is an attack/attack cycle of attachment, but confusing for the therapist, about who is fighting for connection (protesting about the distance and lack of safety between them) and who is fighting back in defense (to protect herself from hearing blame and rejection.

In volatile attack/attack cycles mixed-sex couples therapists sometimes assume too quickly and sometimes wrongly, that the female is protesting disconnection and fighting for connection, while the male is then fighting back in defense and then disappearing to avoid more criticism and conflict. With this same-sex couple, this faulty assumption doesn’t happen, and it can be very confusing who is pushing for closeness and who is defending and counter-attacking?

Attuning closely to each partner’s experience of the cycle, positions of withdrawal and pursuit begin to emerge. Sophie is an anxious, lonely partner demanding to be loved, triggering exhaustion and failure in Ella, a more avoidant partner who is longing to please and to feel accepted and loved. Sophie's demands are directed at “fighting to matter to Ella” and Ella’s fighting back is a defense against annihilation or rejection of who she is and fearing she will be remade into the person Sophie would prefer her to be.
Two highly intellectualizing partners, Phil and Julie back away from most simple reflections that the therapist makes. They gloss over any hints of distress, or become suddenly flooded and speechless when the therapist refers to their distress.

Phil is ready to talk endlessly, about how good things are between them. He is very involved in his 12 Step groups and speaks with pride about the great progress he has made. Julie, appearing very timid, admits to finding it difficult to talk, but agrees she is very proud of him for being willing to join his sex addiction group and is extremely grateful to him for how hard he is working at his sobriety. Phil constantly jumps in to explain how he and Julie both feel that in some ways her discovery of his porn addiction was the best thing that has happened for them. The therapist expresses curiosity about what prompted them to seek therapy, since they seem to have a unified story of having come back together after several episodes of Phil’s disappearances from the marriage into a series of addictive processes – involving alcohol and pornography.

“We are just here to strengthen our marriage,” Phil states, “and to improve the intimacy.” Julie admits she cannot tolerate any physical contact with Phil at this time, and needs help to decide if they can repair their distance or whether they need to part ways.

Julie and Phil protect each other from having to discuss what they refer to as “horrific childhoods.” In spite of their shared celebration of how they have weathered this shattering discovery of his secretive life, the therapist detects subtle hints that Julie is shaken to the core, but that she prefers not to touch that at the moment.

Phil withdraws from Julie, rather than reaching to her for support. Historically he withdrew, first to his alcohol and pornography habits, and now he turns to his 12 Step groups, his movies and novels and his protective intellectualizing. Julie, openly admits she is holding back. She finds it hard to get words to pass her lips. She wrings her hands, expresses fears, and uncertainties about the future of this relationship, although every now and then when Phil is open in the slightest way, such as saying – “I get how hard it is for her to talk. We both feel that way,” she bursts into a warm and tender smile and says – “That is why I married you! You get me!” Julie longs for Phil to share more openly with her, even as she admits she also finds it hard to share.
Exercises for Self-Reflection

Stage 1

Identify a negative cycle, a dance of disconnection in which you partipate

Step 2

When_______________________________ I do not feel safely connected to you

[Fill in the behavioral cue that starts the dance of disconnection -- what your partner (or sibling, boss, parent, child, friend) or the two of you DO that triggers your lack of ease or safety and fear in the relationship]

I tend to ____________________________ [Choose an action word; what you do].

What I say to myself at this time is

_______________________________.

[Insert your worst fears /attributions about yourself or the other].

The more I__________, the more s/he_____________ and we are both trapped in
__________________________ [Choose emotions that capture your experience - e.g. pain or isolation etc].

Step 3

Identify the “raw spot,” (the attachment fear or the music underlying the dance). When I get stuck in a cycle, I ___________________(action word: e.g. push, chase, retreat, turn away), I feel __________ (surface emotion). The emotional trigger for my sense of disconnection is when I see/hear/sense____________________(the attachment cue). On a deeper level I am feeling_______________.

Adapted from Hold Me Tight pp. 95 – 97, 120.
Stage 2  Personal Reflection and Resonance

Step 5  (from Becoming an Emotionally Focused therapist: The Workbook, p.185)

Goal: To access a personal “felt sense” of the goal of step five - to get a poignant, “felt sense” of underlying primary emotions – usually sadness, shame, or fear – and create a congruent expression of how this is connected to your problematic ways of relating to your attachment figure.

Begin with reflecting on a time in your life when you were finally able to formulate your painful attachment emotions to an attachment figure in a way that distilled your experience of this relationship. Or if you were not able to, think of what you might like to have said. Write down a simple, congruently expressed statement of underlying attachment emotions/needs and connect them to the problematic way of relating. (E.g. “I am so afraid of ever being able to meet your needs and I am so afraid of you getting upset with me, that I hide and shut down and never, ever let you really see me.”)

Step 7
The “Hold Me Tight” Conversation (Conversation 4 from Hold Me Tight) -- is the positive bonding event or the antidote to negative cycles that happens in the change events of Step 7: – Withdrawer Re-engagement and Blamer Softening.

Goal: To access a personal “felt sense” of Step 7, ask yourself, with regards to an attachment figure, return to your deepest fear you accessed in the exercise above (likely some nuance of fearing abandonment, rejection or suffocation). Listen to that fear to discover:

“What is my deepest attachment need?”
“What do I most need to feel secure and loved?”

Examples from p 163 of Hold Me Tight:

- “I need to know that I am special to you and that you really value our relationship. I need reassurance that I am number one with you and that nothing is more important to you than us.”
- “I need to know I am wanted by you, as a partner and a lover, that making me happy is important to you.”
- “I need to know that I am loved and accepted, with my feelings and imperfections, even though I can’t be perfect for you.
- “I need to know I am needed – that you want me close.”

Write your own deepest need(s): ___________________
EFTs  Attachment Injury Resolution Model (AIMR)  
Process for Forgiveness and Rebuilding Trust  
Therapist Focus and Most Frequently Used Interventions*  

**Cycle De-escalation Related to the Injury**

1. Process injured partner’s account of the incident of injury – (repainting scene and articulating the “never again” impact / expressing secondary emotions (to therapist.)
   - Empathically reflect secondary emotions
   - Validate emotional realities,
   - Track and Reflect

2. Process offending partner’s response and account. (May be minimizing, denying, defending, discounting).
   - Empathically reflect secondary emotions
   - Validate emotional realities
   - Track and Reflect

3. Support injured partner to stay in touch with the injury – unpack secondary emotional reactions and access the core pain of the experience.
   - Reframe in the context of the cycle and/or underlying attachment emotion and needs
   - Empathic conjecture
   - Evocative Responding
   - Heighten
   - Validate
   - Empathic Reflection of secondary emotion reactions

4. Support offending partner to unpack secondary emotion reactions, and to become accessible to the attachment significance of the incident for the partner, and to elaborate on how the incident evolved.
   - Reframe in the context of the cycle and/or underlying attachment emotion and needs
   - Empathic conjecture
   - Evocative Responding
   - Heighten
   - Validate
   - Empathic Reflection of underlying attachment-related emotions

**New Cycles of Emotional Engagement Re the Injury - Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

5. Process injured partner’s primary emotional experience of the injury and expression to partner, letting partner witness his/her vulnerability.
   - Empathic Reflection of underlying attachment-related emotions
   - Evocative Responding, Heightening, Shaping enactments
6. Process offending partner’s primary emotional responses (sadness, remorse, regret, empathy for injured partner) - to access a “felt sense” of partner’s pain and to be moved by partner’s pain. Promote owning responsibility, expressing empathy and regret/remorse – while staying attuned / engaged. *I feel your hurt. Your pain impacts me.*

   Empathic Reflection of underlying attachment-related emotions  
   Evocative Responding  
   Heightening  
   Restructuring and shaping enactments

**Consolidation of the Bond**

7. Process injured partner’s accessibility and responsiveness to partner’s emotional expressions (acceptance of apology and empathy for offending partner’s experience) and support expression of attachment needs related to injury.  
   Empathic Reflection of underlying attachment-related emotions  
   Restructuring and shaping enactments  
   Validating client emotional realities

8. Process offending partner’s responsiveness to injured partner’s expressed needs.  
   Empathic Reflection of underlying attachment-related emotions  
   Restructuring and shaping enactments  
   Validating client emotional realities  
   Heighten the antidote bonding event. (Relationship is redefined as potential safe haven.)  
   Support partners to create new narrative of event:  
   Evocative Responding  
   Empathic Reflection


The first four steps of the AIRM de-escalate the cycle related to the injury, preparing the terrain for reprocessing the emotional injury. Steps 5 and 6 of the AIRM are the core of the interpersonal forgiveness and resolution process, wherein new cycles of emotional engagement related to the injury are created. Finally, in AIRM Steps 7 and 8 the newly restored bond is consolidated

**The AIRM is a Stage 2 process.**

For an article by L Brubacher on working with attachment injuries in Stage 1 see:  
http://carolinaeft.com/pdf/Attachment_Injury_in_Stage_One.pdf

For EFT's interactive training program on the AIRM, go to www.attachmentinjuryrepair.com

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Guide to Early EFT Sessions

An Overview

1. Connect with both partners – build a safe-haven/secure base alliance.
2. Help couple unfold their story – perceptions of problems and strengths, pivotal events.
3. Assess the nature of the problem and the relationship. Is it suitable for couple therapy? Are there contraindications? Compatible goals?
4. Begin to enter the experience of each partner. Discover how each partner constructs his/her experience of this relationship.
5. Identify the typical position each partner takes in the interactive cycle. Who is more pursuing? Who tends to react more with defense and distancing?
6. Listen for vulnerabilities and attachment issues underlying each partner’s position of pursuit or withdrawal in the relationship. Look for blocks to secure attachment and emotional engagement between partners. Assess for anxious or avoidant attachment strategies.
7. Track cycle as it happens in the room – noting the triggers, moves and experience of each partner.
8. Note relationship strengths, signs of connection, caring and mattering to each other. (Instill hope by reflecting indications of their bond.)
10. Create a therapeutic agreement re therapeutic goals, tasks and how therapy will be conducted.

Goals

• To build an alliance with each partner, to get a sense that each partner feels the therapist understands his/her position and experience in this relationship and is getting an experiential sense of the cycle in which they are caught.
• To find opportunities to reflect and track interactions between partners that represent both positive and negative interaction cycles.
• To assess: whether partners have compatible goals, whether there is sufficient safety to do EFT couple therapy and whether an *alliance* – with respect to the tasks of EFT therapy – is developing.

For more detail on early sessions and individual sessions in couple therapy, go to http://steppingintoeft.com - summary and downloads related to chapter 4: https://steppingintoeft.com/chapter-summaries/chapter-4/
Role-play Exercise: Empathic Reflections

Goal: To enter the world of each partner’s experience of the relationship and respond with empathic reflections - without asking any questions.

Focus on attuning and entering the world of each partner. Respond with empathic reflections, validations, and tracking interventions. Do not use questions.

Debriefing Role-play Exercises

“Partners”: When did you feel most understood? When/did you experience some new emotional awareness?

Therapist: When did you feel most closely attuned with the “client”? When/did you slow down to engage with the “client’s” present moment emotional experience?

Observer: With whom did you resonate most closely? With whom was it most difficult for you to resonate?
Role-play Exercise: Assembling and Deepening Emotion

Goal: To follow one partner’s emotional experience

Assemble the cue, the meaning, the action tendency - validating the reactive surface emotion - and possibly evoking the bodily response and lingering with the underlying attachment threat or fear.

Use reflections and evocative questions, and a slow manner to highlight and repeat key attachment elements.

Role-play Exercise: Shaping Enactments

Goal: To follow the process of shaping, directing and processing an enactment.

Help one partner focus on sharing a newly named element with the other. Help him / her to anticipate making contact (“Imagine turning to your partner and sharing this….”)

Repeat key message. Direct the sharing. Maintain focus, block exits.

Process (“How was it to share…?" "How was it to hear…?") Summarize and celebrate what they just did!