

## What is Emotionally Focused Therapy (or EFT)-

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Hi, I'm Sue Johnson. And I'm going to talk to you for a few minutes about emotionally focused couples therapy or EFT. EFT is a leading edge couples therapy that is taught all over the world and is based on the last 50 years of research into bonding, both bonding between mother and child and romantic bonds between partners. The fact that it's based on this bonding research and science means that the EFT therapist has a map, a map to what matters in intimate relationships, how they work a map to how they go wrong and a map to what is needed to put them right at the moment. EFT has substantial empirical validation. We have 16 outcome studies and nine studies of the process of change and how it occurs. We've also done studies with many different kinds of couples with depressed couples, with couples facing trauma, with couples who have chronically ill children.

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We also use EFT with families, of course, but most of our research and work has been on couples. So what does the Ft look like? EFT is really like a conversation between Carl Rogers, the father of experiential therapy, Salvador Minutian, who's the father of systemic therapies and including John Bowlby, who really founded the whole science of attachment and bonding. So if you can imagine these three men coming together and teaching us how to do couples therapy, you've kind of got an image of VFT it's experiential. It focuses on how people experience their relationship, how they put together their emotional experience, express those emotions, the emotions, or the music of the dots between lovers and it's systemic in that it looks at the whole relationship and the patterns in the relationship and how couples get stuck in very negative patterns and how we can help them shift their emotional signals, change the music and create more positive bonding patterns.

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The goal of EFT is not just to change the way people fight, make them more able to negotiate about issues like chores, or even feel a little more satisfied with each other. The goal of EFT is to create a more secure emotional bond. And our research says that we can do that. We can also create satisfaction, intimacy, trust, all these good things that come from feeling more secure with your partner. Our latest research has focused on exactly how you create that increased security in your bond with your partner. And we, if you're very interested in the research, you can go to plus one, which is a neuroscience journal. It is online. And if you look in November, 2013, you will see a brain scan study that we just did that showed that often EFT holding your partner's hand. Once you've had these bonding conversations changes the way your brain perceives threat and how your brain deals with it.

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This is very fascinating and it links EFT and clinical practice into all the Syrian science about the nature of attachment and adult bonding. EFT focuses on the present change happens in the present in the relationship. We sometimes give homework, but mostly it's all about what happens in the session. Change happens in the process of interaction between the couple and in the process where the therapist guides the client to go deeper into their emotional experience, make sense of that experience, find aspects of the experience that they don't usually pay attention to and put that experience together in a new way so that they can send new signals to their partner that help their partner move with them in the dots in a different way. The EFT therapist constantly tries to create safety in the session for both partners and the country indication for EFT. The main contraindication is that you cannot create that safety.

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You cannot create the safety because one partner is literally threatening or is putting out so many danger cues by always announcing they're going to leave by commenting on the fact that they are having an affair with someone else, or literally by being threatening and threatening violence or harm to their partner. You cannot then in these circumstances, create the emotional safety to work on creating more secure bond, and you cannot help the other person to become vulnerable. This is not ethical. In fact, so this is the main contraindication, but an EFT therapist is constantly and supporting and creating safety in the session and helping people make sense of what's going on right here. And now, right in the session, if you watch an experienced EFT therapist, you kind of see

them doing five moves all the time in any of the sessions. EFT usually takes between eight and 20 sessions, but you will see the EFT therapist constantly doing these five minute moves.

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The therapist goes into what is happening right now in the session present process, either inside the partners or between the partners, the therapist will say, what is happening right now? Could you help me? I'd like to stop here for a minute. You turned to him and you said in an angry voice, you didn't do what you said you were going to do. You didn't fix the cabinets and you turned to her and you started to cry. And you said, I can never get it right with you. It doesn't matter what I do. And you turn back to him and said, yes, but you didn't fix the cabinets. So the EFT therapist will stay here. And we'll say, is this what happens at home? You're angry at your partner. You point out the ways he's disappointed you and you hear how angry she is. And right here right now, you actually tried to reach for her.

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Although at home you say that you do distance, but right here, right now, you're trying to reach for her. But somehow it didn't work. You stayed back and said to him, yes, but I don't believe that you really care. I think you're going to disappoint me again. And you guys kind of get stuck here all the time. Is this what happens? You're focusing on the process between the couple and you also focus on the person's emotional process. So you might talk to her and say, even when your partner now shows you his tears, you remember that for a long, long time, he was very distant and very cold. And some part of you doesn't respond to those tears. It's like, you go back to your anger and to your list of demands. That's what you do. And she says, yes, that's right. I can't get past my anger.

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So you focus on the present process, the process of putting the emotions together and the process of interaction. Then the EFT therapist in the second step deepens the emotion EFT therapist will say, so could you help me? What happens to you when you see his tears? She says, I see them. I see them. I see them, but I don't it. And the EFT therapist might use simple questions by saying, how are you feeling right now? She says, I feel tense. I feel tense. I can see the tears, but I just feel this tension in my throat. And the therapist might say, could you help me? If that tension had a voice, what would it say? She says, it would say, don't believe him. Don't believe him. You're only going to get disappointed again. So then we stay with that and we help her talk about the fact that she's been so hurt in the relationship.

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We go deeper into her more primary core emotions, her soft emotions. And we help her start to talk about how she's been so hurt that she's got a wall around her. And all she really does is stand behind that wall and kind of yell directions for change over the wall. But deep inside, she's so scared of being hurt and let down again. It's so hard for her to trust. Then the EFT therapist will clarify that message for her and create an enactment, create a new interaction based on the new signals that they've put together in the session. So the therapist might say, could you turn to him please and say, you're right. I am coating my anger all the time. It's so hard for me to let down my God and begin to trust and believe that you want to be there for me. I'm so scared of being hurt again.

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Could you tell him that? So you set up an interaction. So what have we done so far? We focused on process, slowed it down, focused on what's happening in the session. We've gone deeper into the emotion. We've distilled the emotion and deepened it. And now we've created a new message. Based on that new experience, she was, she's not going to turn to him and tell him that she does that. The fourth step is that the EFT therapists processes that new step in the dots. What was it like for you to tell him that that was amazing, that you had the courage to do that? What was it like for you to tell him that? And she says it was scary, but it felt good. And that is true underneath all this anger, I'm afraid. And I say to him, and what was it like for you to hear your partner talk about this?

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And he says, it makes me feel better. At least now I know I'm not the only person who's afraid in this relationship. And I can hear her. I can hear her. There's been years of hurt and distance in this relationship. So now we have a new step in the dance, a new interaction, the kind of interaction that's going to really create corrective emotional of connection with the couple. This is a real antidote to the negative pattern of demand and withdrawal that the couple walked in the door with. Then the EFT therapist, step five of the regular EFT pattern of therapist intervention. Then the Ft therapist ties a bow on the whole thing and goes Metta and says, look at what you guys just did. And we do this in a way that builds their sense of competence that they can shape their relationship. Look at what you guys just did.

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That's amazing. You've been so angry for so long and here you are actually talking to him about the hurt underneath, and it's amazing that you can stay and listen to your partner and recognize that she has good reasons for being so angry at you. And look at what you guys just did. You shared something new and you, you both stayed here and worked on this. That's incredible that you can do that. The EFT therapist does these steps again and again and again, but with different levels of intensity, there are three basic stages of change in EFT. Of course, we create safety all the time, but the first stage is deescalating. The negative cycle. A couple come in with, which is usually some form of critical demanding, followed by withdrawal or sometimes mutual withdrawal. When a relationship is really starting to unravel. So first of all, we help the couples see the pattern they're coating.

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We help them understand what's happening from an attachment and bonding point of view, how they are both really scaring the hell out of each other and trying to protect themselves as well as they can and still dance together. And we frame the negative pattern and the insecurity and distance between them as the problem at the end of deescalation, the couple can come together and see the dots they're caught in and help each other step out of it. They can say things like, yes, we got caught in that dreadful pattern this weekend. But I said to him, I said, we're caught in that pattern. Is this one of these times when you get to feel scared, once they've deescalated, they have a secure base to really go deeper into their relationship and create a corrective experience of bonding and emotional connection, safe, emotional connection. So the second stage of EFT is restructuring the bond here, we create very powerful conversations that we call withdrawal, reengagement and blame a softening.

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If you want an easier way to think about it, we also call them, hold me tight conversations in hold me tight conversations. The therapist helps both partners in the couple talk about their fears. We all have built in fears in our love relationships, fears of rejection, fears of being deserted and abandoned and turned away from. So the EFT therapist in these homie type conversations helps people talk about their fears in a way that pulls that partner towards them and helps their partner learn to offer reassurance and calming and safety for those fears. Then we help people talk about their needs in a way that their partner can hear and respond. We're really trying to create deeper levels of emotional responsiveness between the couple, when both partners can turn and share their vulnerabilities and ask for what they need on an emotional level, I need you.

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I need to be able to tell you when I get scared, I need you to come close and hold me and reassure me that I'm your special one. When they can do that, the bond between them really shifts and they start to have a whole new ability to be open and responsive to each other. In the third stage of EFT consolidation, we help the couple look at all the changes they've made and create their own love story about how they got stuck and how they fix their relationship and put it right. We also help them dream about the future and where they're going to go. If you watch an EFT therapist, they're constantly reflecting people's reality as it comes up in the session, as they create it, slowing the process down so that people can move into deeper places within themselves and look at what's happening between them and their partner.

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They're constantly asking simple questions. What's that like for you? How are you feeling right now? What happens to you inside? As you say this, what is the trigger for this? Where does this anger start? How do you feel it in your body? What do you say to yourself when you see this expression on her face? They're asking

simple questions. They're validating and normalizing people. Of course you feel sad when this happens. They're doing Nyltel interpretations. Like, yes, I understand. I think you do feel scared. It's not just uncomfortable. I think this is scary. They're also showing people the patterns they're coating and reframing them, reframing the problem in the relationship as the pattern of interactions, the dance that the couple get caught in. And of course they're constantly setting up new enact moments, new interactions, interactions that lead to these powerful bonding conversations that can make a relationship into a more secure bond.

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Couple therapy is in the middle of a revolution. We have never ever before had a science of relationships to base. Couple therapy on EFT is part of this new revolutionary science of relationships. If you were interested in the Ft, I suggest that you go to the website, [www.iceft.com](http://www.iceft.com) on there. You will find many resources training tapes, lists of chapters and articles on EFT lists of all the research on the Ft and notifications about where we're doing four day externships, which is the basic training on EFT. So I invite you to go to that website. The basic text for EFT for couples is the practice of emotionally focused couples therapy, creating connection that came out in 2004. And there's a workbook and a casebook that go along with that. Thank you for listening. It was fun to talk to you.