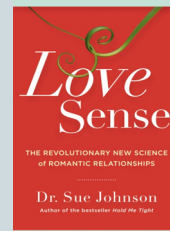
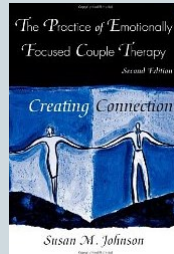
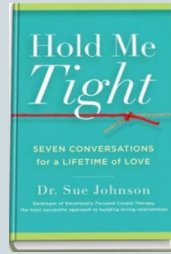


Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples

Dr. Sue Johnson



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Couples Therapy – New Era

New Knowledge :

- Power of relationships on mental & physical health (eg. Heart disease, immune functioning, depression), on resilience. Lovers are regulators of each other's physiology, emotional functioning.
- Nature of relationships (positive/negative – the problem in CT-John Gottman and Ted Huston).
- Powerful proven interventions such as EFT –Empirical validation.
- In session change process (in EFT heightened emotion & alliance crucial).
- New science of love (offers a focus/goal for CT-adult attachment).
- New targets for CT-people in context of key relationships. CT used for individual problems (depression, anxiety).

For the first time there is convergence. A potent integration of theory/research/practice is possible.

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LOVE

Most used word - Rated most important goal

It is:

A mysterious mixture of sex and sentiment?
If so: cannot understand it, cannot make or keep it
A science of love is impossible.

Or is it:

- An exquisitely logic survival system?
- Our foremost and most basic need – from the cradle to the grave?
- Our only defense against “emotional starvation”
- A haven of safety and strength. Effective Dependency

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Love: A Huge Diversity of Ideas

All agree romantic love involves a “hurricane of emotion”

After that:

- Sexual desire dressed up – infatuation – a “fever”
- Immature idealization – “perceptual anesthesia”
- Evolutionary reproduction strategy - 4 years
- Brief infatuation - Then a friendship
- An addiction (dopamine)
- Illusion - Invention of medieval troubadours
- A rational deal – negotiated exchange
- A moral – mystical force

A Mystery - Disastrous idea!

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A 'neural duet'

We need a special kind of connection with others to be well / survive –
Lovers are *hidden regulators* of our body processes - emotional lives.

Negatives

- Isolation is dangerous (heart attack / stroke risk doubles)
- Relationship distress elevates cortisol. Strength of heart // strength of love relationship
- Conflict depresses immune system – slows healing – nastiness matters
- Hostile criticism is depressing !
- Rejection / exclusion trigger same circuits as physical pain

Positives

- Holding a loved hand calms “jittery neurons”
- “Nurturing solace” protects from disease – shapes resilience
- Confiding in others helps heart – lessens adverse effects of aging
- Those who feel securely connected deal with trauma better – 9/11, prisoners of war, missile attacks

“Secure bond is best protection against helplessness and meaninglessness”.

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EFT – Couples Therapy

For The First Time:

The couple therapist is in territory of the:

- Understandable
- Predictable
- Explainable
- Changeable

We Know:

- The Territory – The Problem
- The Destination – Goal
- The Map – Key Moves/Moments

New Science - based on observation of distress, satisfaction,
bonding in action, change in therapy.

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EFT is an Experiential Approach

“ALL KNOWLEDGE IS EXPERIENCE.
EVERYTHING ELSE IS JUST INFORMATION”.
- EINSTEIN

“CHANGE OCCURS IN THERAPY THROUGH A
‘CORRECTIVE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE’”.
- FRANK

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Empathic Responsiveness is the essence of Emotionally Focused Therapy

The empathic responsiveness of the therapist creates safety. The goal is to guide partners into this responsiveness with each other.

Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant with the weak and the wrong.

Sometime in your life you will have been all of these.

(Lloyd Shearer)

Most Basic EFT Intervention: Empathic Reflection

- Validates – creates alliance – safety
 - Focuses a session – Repetition is key
 - Slows processing – encourages engagement
 - Better organizes – distills – creates coherence
- “Grasp the moment as it flies.”

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The Problem:

W: Do you love me? (accusing tone)

H: Of course I do. How many times have I told you?

W: Well it doesn't feel like it (tears, looks down, turns away)

H: (Sighs-exasperated) Well, maybe you have a problem then. I can't help it if you don't feel loved. (Set mouth, lecturing tone.)

W: Right. So it's my problem is it? Nothing to do with you, right? Nothing to do with your ten feet thick walls. You're an emotional cripple. You've never felt a real emotion in your life.

H: I refuse to talk to you when you get like this. So irrational. There is no point.

W: Right. This is what always happens. You put up your wall. You go icy. Till I get tired and give up. Then, after a while, when you want sex you decide that I am not quite so bad after all.

H: There is no point in talking to you. This is a shooting gallery. You're so aggressive.

Rigid pattern- blame/withdraw and absorbing states of negative emotion form feedback loop. No safe emotional connection-escalating danger and isolation.

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Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy

Looks within at how partners construct their emotional experience of relatedness.

- (Using Rogerian Interventions)

Looks between at how partners engage each other

- (using Systemic Interventions and tasks)

In Order To:

- Reprocess / expand emotional responses
- Create new kinds of interactions / change the dance
- Foster secure bonding between partners

website: WWW.ICEEFT.COM

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Emotionally Focused Therapy

- 70-75% recovery rate.
- Significant improvement rate- 86-90%
- Results are stable – even under high stress
- Depression significantly reduced
- Variety of populations and settings
- Best predictor of success: female faith in partner's caring – not initial distress level. Alliance accounts for 20% of variance in outcome-the task relevance aspect of this alliance.

Research on EFT is listed and summarized on
www.iceeft.com

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The Focus of EFT (The 4 P's)

EXPERIENTIAL

- PRESENT MOMENT (Emotion brings past alive. Past used to validate present blocks, styles, fears).
- PRIMARY AFFECT – Focus on / Validate

SYSTEMIC

- PROCESS (across time) – PIVOTAL MOMENTS
- POSITIONS / PATTERNS of interaction – self sustaining feedback loops

THE THERAPIST IS A PROCESS CONSULTANT !

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EMOTION

Cue- Rapid appraisal of environment – Body arousal

Meaning/Reappraisal – Action Tendency (Arnold)

- Source of information – fit between environment cues and needs / goals
- Vital element in meaning
- Primes action response
- Communicates – organizes social interactions

Six core emotions (facial expressions) and adaptive actions.

ANGER	Assert, defend self
SADNESS	Seek support, withdraw
SURPRISE / EXCITEMENT	Attend, explore
DISGUST / SHAME	Hide, expel, avoid
FEAR	Flee, freeze, give up goal
JOY	Contact, engaging

Panksepp's attachment "panic"

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Science 2003 – Study by Eisenberger (University of California)

- The shock and distress of rejection and exclusion register in the same part of the brain as physical pain – the anterior cingulate.
- "This part of the brain is active any time we are separated from our close companions."
- BROKEN HEART is a reality.
- "This is a defensive mechanism – to make sure we stay close – don't stray too far – if we do – we are not going to survive. It hurts to be separated from other people."

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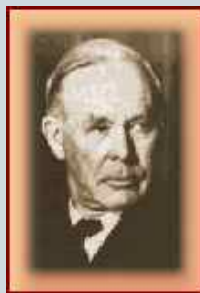
EFT Core Assumptions

1. Rigid interactions reflect / create emotional states and absorbing emotional states reflect/create rigid interactions (loop).
2. Partners are not sick / developmentally delayed/unskilled ... they are stuck in habitual ways of dealing with emotions/engaging with others at key moments.
3. Emotion is seen as target and agent of change.
4. Change involves new experience and new relationship events.
5. Effective couple therapy addresses the security of the bond, mutual accessibility and responsiveness.

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Attachment Theory



John Bowlby
1907-1990

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An attachment bond...

Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.
"Pooh," he whispered.
"Yes, Piglet?"
"Nothing," said Piglet, taking Pooh's paw.
"I just wanted to be sure of you."



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Code of attachment tells us:

Primary need is "felt security" with other
A safe haven - to go to
A secure base - to go out from

"ARE you there for me?"

Are you Accessible - Do I matter ?
Are you Responsive to my need - Can I depend ?
Are you Engaged with me ?

Emotional presence is "solution"

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Attachment Theory: A Map to the Landscape of Love

1. Seeking and maintaining contact is a prime motivation.
 - Isolation is traumatizing
2. A secure connection offers a safe haven to go to and a secure base to out from the world.
 - Needs for connection, comfort and caring are key. The more connected you are, the more separate, autonomous you can be.
3. Accessibility and Responsiveness builds bonds.
 - (parallel Huston's findings re: emotional engagement)

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Attachment Theory: A Map To The Landscape of Love

4. Disconnection cues Separation Distress – A predictable process.
 - Protest
 - Cling and Seek
 - Depression and Despair
 - Detachment
6. Emotion is the music of attachment dance.
 - Gives salience
 - Colors events
 - Cues organizes the dance
 - Has control precedence

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Key Features of Secure Attachment in Strange Situations

- Child can regulate distress – trusts relationship with mother.
- When attachment figure returns, child gives clear unambiguous cues about needs. Ask without defensiveness.
- When attachment figure responds child trusts and takes in comfort – reassurance – is calmed and soothed.
- Child then turns attention to environment, climbs down from mother’s lap – plays with toys – takes risks – engages in tasks/ activities with confidence.

Same process occurs in adult couple.

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Attachment Theory: A Map To the Landscape of Love

6. Finite set of predictable attachment strategies in drama of distress.
 - Anxious – up the anti – “I’ll make you respond to me”
 - Avoidant – Cool your jets – “I will care less”
 - Fearful – Chaos – “Come here – don’t touch”
7. Working Models of self and other linked to strategies
8. Adult attachment is reciprocal – representational – sexual

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Sex and Attachment

- Feedback loop – nature of sex shapes love and visa versa. Sex is bonding behavior.
- A secure attachment facilitates “relaxed and confident engagement” in sex (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).
- Secures report more and better sex - more satisfaction (men and women)..
- Motive
 - Secures identify closeness as motive
 - Anxious report having sex to please, avoid rejection, gain reassurance
 - Avoidant use sex for self-enhancement – fit in, brag re performance, sensation
- Efficacy– insecurity linked to :
 - Lower sexual self-esteem – physical attractiveness of self
 - More perceptions that sex is controlled by other, situation
 - More problems in sexual communication (so less co-ordination of responses.
 - Stronger concerns about sexual performance
 - Less willingness to experiment sexually within a relationship

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What is healthy sex ?

- Both partners accessible, responsive and engaged emotionally and physically ?
- INTEGRATED attachment, sex and caregiving
- Best aphrodisiac / technique is secure attachment between partners.- sex as intimate play
 - A safe adventure – tension/excitement plus comfort, surrender to sensation.
 - Touch arouses and comforts, oxytocin – cuddle hormone released in orgasm.
 - Synchrony sex – resonance
 - Are passion and attachment antithetical ? Predictability kills thrill?
- “*Passionate love provides a high, like drugs, and you can’t stay high forever*” Hatfield
 - But “Practice and emotional presence makes perfect” ((Tango?))
 - Discovery of moment to moment presence – ever new?
 - Spiral of exquisitely coordinated signals = synchrony ? resonance?
- Safety/openness > Emotional attunement and responsiveness > physical attunement and tender touch/ erotic exploration > physical pleasure and satisfaction > safe connection

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A sense of “Felt Security” in a relationship is linked to:

1. Better Affect Regulation
 - Less reactivity
 - Less hyper-arousal
 - Less under-arousal
 - More acknowledgement or support seeking
2. Better Information Processing
 - More flexibility, curiosity, openness
 - Toleration of ambiguity and uncertainty

A sense of “Felt Security” in a relationship is linked to:

3. Better Communication
 - More ability to collaborate, to meta-communicate, to be disclosing, assertive and empathic.
4. Sense of Self is More:
 - Coherent
 - Elaborated
 - Articulated
 - Positive

Couples Therapy Based on Attachment Theory:

1. Focuses on attachment needs and forms of engagement and disengagement.
2. Privileges emotion – The music of the attachment dance.
3. Creates the therapy session as a secure base.
4. Shapes new bonding responses – events.
5. Addresses impasses – attachment injuries.

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Attachment Theory and Couples Therapy

This perspective offers:

A map to the territory of distress and relationship.

A focus – A compass in internal emotional moments and interpersonal dramas.

A picture of transforming moves and moments in the process of the shaping of a secure bond.

A goal for therapy- an end point. Not just conflict containment.

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EFT: Stages and Steps

STAGE ONE: DE-ESCALATION

1. Assessment
2. Identify negative cycle / Attachment issues
3. Access underlying attachment emotions
4. Frame problem – cycle, attachment needs/fears

(Steps 1-4)

EFT: Stages and Steps

STAGE TWO – RESTRUCTURING THE BOND

5. Access implicit needs, fears, models of self
6. Promote acceptance by other – expand dance
7. Structure emotional engagement – express attachment needs.

(Steps 5-7)

Antidote/Bonding Events

EFT: Stages and Steps

STAGE THREE: CONSOLIDATION

8. New positions / cycles – enact new stories – of problems and repair
9. New Solutions to pragmatic issues

(Steps 8-9)

EFT ASSESSMENT

Therapist Tasks

- Create a collaborative therapeutic alliance
- Explore agenda for:
 - 1) the relationship
 - 2) therapy - Are they compatible and appropriate ?
- Present therapy contract e.g. number of sessions
- Assess relationship status:
 - 1) Perceptions of problems and strengths,
 - 2) Cycles – negative and positive,
 - 3) Relationship history/key events,
 - 4) Brief attachment history,
 - 5) Observe interaction,
 - 6) check for violence/abuse.
- Assess prognostic indicators:
 - 1) Degree of reactivity
 - 2) Strength of attachment
 - 3) Openness – response to therapist – engagement
- Contraindication for EFT – cannot create safety in session – cannot foster openness in good faith

Interventions in EFT

TASKS

Access, expand, reprocess emotional experience

1. Empathic Reflection
2. Validation of client realities and emotional responses
3. Evocative responding – process enquiries and replays
4. Heighten, expand awareness – repeat, re-enact, refocus and use imagery.
5. Empathic interpretation and inferences, disquisition

Create/choreograph new interaction patterns

1. Track and reflect process of interaction, make positions and cycles explicit.
2. Reframe the experience/interaction in terms of attachment context and cycles.
3. Restructuring and shaping interactions.

R I S S S C

Repeat

Images - use

Simple words

Slow pace

Soft voice

Client's words

The Problem with Enactments

1. They make clients anxious
Various ways out: Already did it. No point. Do but in very different manner.
(So validate difficulty and slice it thinner. So insist)
2. They make therapists anxious
Lose control of session. (The run away train)
Exacerbate negativity (Catching bullets)
3. Therapists are unsure how to USE them.
Integrate into the therapy process – set up - follow up

ENACTMENTS ARE USED TO:

- Crystallize present positions – so they can be seen, owned
- Turn new emotional experience into a new response to the partner
- Heighten new responses – to solidify or to reach/challenge
- Choreograph specific change events in Stage 2 of EFT

In Stage 2: Reconstructing of Attachment Interactions

There are two key change event:

1. Withdrawer Re-engagement
2. Blamer Softening

Withdrawer Re-engagement is when a previous distant, inhibited, defended, stonewalling partner emerges and engages with their enactments in session.

In Attachment Terms:

- The withdrawer now becomes accessible and able to stay emotionally engaged with self and the other.
- He can coherently express his hurts, fears, the models of self and other cued by these emotions.
- He can reach for – ask for the response he needs from his partner and begin to actively shape the relationship.
- *Example:* “I have been so afraid, So afraid of not meeting your standards. I have shut you out. I have numbed you out. I didn’t know what else to do. So I got paralyzed. But I do want us to be close and I don’t want you to hurt – to be lonely. I am not going to walk on eggshells anymore. I want to dance with you – but not with you keeping score. I think we can do this now. I want us to try.

A Key Change Event in EFT: A SOFTENING

Prerequisites:

De-escalation of negative cycle (Stage 1)
Withdrawer re-engagement

- A previous hostile, critical spouse accesses “softer” emotions and risks reaching out to his/her partner who is engaged and responsive. In this vulnerable state, the previously hostile partner asks for attachment needs to be met.
- At this point, both spouses are attuned, engaged and responsive. A bonding event then occurs which redefines the relationship as a safe haven and a secure base.

Statements in a Softening - Steps 5 and 7

- I guess it's still so much easier for me to get mad. I don't like to deal with the upset piece. The piece that is afraid (“Afraid” set out in Step 3)
- When I think of telling you about that, I feel like I can't breathe. I don't think I can do it. Surely you know that it's happening?
- If I tell you, you will turn away and I will turn into this sniveling kid-pathetic. So I don't do it. Can't's do it.
- I survived by not going to this place, I don't know how to reach for you-to even begin. Some part of me says to suck it up.
- I will hurt even more if I ask. It's so hard to ask. It's terrifying for me. I need to know you will respond. That you wont let me crash and burn.
- Can you hold me, I am so afraid.

Levels of Change in a Softening in EFT

1. She expands her experience and accesses attachment fears, shame and the longing for contact and comfort. Emotion tells us what we need.
2. She engages her partner in a different way. Fear organizes a less angry more affiliative stance. She puts words to her emotional needs and changes her part of the dance. New emotions prime new responses/actions.
3. He sees her differently, as afraid rather than dangerous, and is pulled towards her by her expressions of vulnerability.
4. She reaches and he comforts. A new compelling cycle is initiated. This new connection offers an antidote to negative interactions and redefines the relationship in a secure bond.
5. This bond then allows for open communication, flexible problem solving and resilient coping with everyday issues. The couple resolve pragmatic problems and consolidate changes. (Stage 3)
6. There are shifts in both partners sense of self. Both can comfort and be comforted. Both are lovable rather than “unlovable, worthless and inadequate”.

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ATTACHMENT INJURY

- A betrayal of trust / abandonment at crucial moment of need.
- A form of relationship trauma – defines relationship as insecure.
- An impasse in repair process – blocks trust.

Attachment significance is key – not content.
Indelible imprint – only way out is through

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RESOLUTION OF ATTACHMENT INJURIES

- Articulate injury and impact. “NEVER AGAIN!”
- The other acknowledges hurt partner’s pain and elaborates on the evolution of the event.
- The hurt partner integrates narrative and emotion. He/She accesses attachment fears and longings.
- The other owns responsibility – expresses regret – while staying attuned / engaged. (*I feel your hurt – your pain impacts me*)
- The hurt partner asks for comfort / reassurance.
- The other responds – antidote bonding event.
- Relationship is redefined as potential safe haven.
- New narrative is constructed.

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Forgiveness and Reconciliation...

Resolver Couples (63%) showed:

- More disclosing re needs, affirming, less blaming withdrawing and significantly deeper levels of experiencing. (Parallels softening research).
- Significant improvement on DAS (Both partners in non-distressed range). Significant improvement for Forgiveness ($t=9.92$, $p=.000$)
- Both groups reported less Pain (no significant differences)
- Results stable at 3 years follow up.

Non Resolvers showed:

- No significant changes on DAS, forgiveness.
- Lower trust at outset.
- Compound injuries (Power of Faith – Johnson & Talitman, 1997)

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Forgiveness and Reconciliation...

Conclusions

- The general EFT model for resolving these impasses is valid.
- EFT can impact distress for these couples caught in forgiveness dilemmas.
- Change is stable.
- Compound injuries in less trusting couples – need more sessions.

Minuchin & Nichols in Family Healing (1993)
suggest that there is now :

*“Hope for new ways of being together.
This is the song our society needs to hear:
the song of me-and-you,
the song of the person in context,
responsible to and for others.
To hear it, we need the courage to renounce
the illusion of the autonomous self and to accept
the limitations of belonging.”*

Limitations ?? Infinite Possibilities ??